One second, and you can start [INAUDIBLE]. OK.

Today is April 8, 1992, and what you're doing part two of the interview with Lore Gilbert. I'm Sandra Bendaya, and again, we have second Emily Rosenberg. And when we left off, Lore, was that you had, your family had received information that the Dominican Republic was inviting Jews to come and settle there. And you were all still located in the camp at Gurs, but you had received this information.

That's right. We had received a letter from my father's brother. His son, my cousin Walter, was the secretary of the DORSA, which was Dominican Republic, Dominican Republic, let me see. Yeah, Dominican Republic Settlement Association. Sorry about that. The directors, the people who organized it were associated with HIAS, the Jewish-- and Joint. And my cousin was secretary of Mr. Schweitzer, who was the big honcho at the time.

Anyway, my uncle sent us a letter, and that came in December. And we had to go through a number of things to get our papers. And every time that happened, we were called to the Kommandantur in the camp as a family, and there were a number of delays. Now if I look back and I see, December to February doesn't seem all that long, but it seemed like an eternity. It was then.

What year was that?

In 1940. At one time, we were sitting in the commandant's office. And while we were there, he received a notice that the laws had changed, and everything that had been done for us before was not acceptable anymore, and everything had to be redone. So all of these delays were emotionally very difficult to take, naturally.

And at the same time, there was a notice that older people were being sent to a different camp, and both my grandfather and my grandmother were on that list. And at one point, we got a notice, or they got a notice that in two days, they were being-- that they were leaving. And we thought that we were not going to be leaving for a while yet. We thought there was a delay.

As it turns out, just as we were saying goodbye to my grandmother, there was a call that Sondheimers at the Kommandantur. And we said-- oh, my sister ran to the other part of the camp to notify my father. And he said, well, we will have to go, all of us, right away. And my sister said, well, we can't. Mother and Lore and I can't, because we're just in the middle of preparing our grandmother for leaving. And of course, we had no idea if we were ever going to see each other again. So my father was very angry, and he went by himself, and we just stayed behind with our grandmother.

Your father went to--

He went to the Kommandantur. And just as we were saying goodbye to our grandmother, and she was ready to go into the car, my father arrived. And he was furious, because he said he had gotten his papers, and the commandant wouldn't give our papers to him. We had to show up personally.

And he thought that just because we weren't there immediately when the commandant ordered us to, that we would forfeit the whole thing. He was just getting really panicky about it, and he was angry. So we had to just run off, and it was a very, very dramatic experience. But we, as it turned out, we did receive our papers, and we were told that we were leaving the next day on the Saturday.

What does that mean with your grandmother, then?

My grandparents were in a truck or a car-- I don't remember which-- and were being sent to a different camp.

Do you know which camp?

It was called Camp NoÃ©. I am not entirely sure exactly where the camp was located.

In France?

Yes, in France. And a lot of the young-- what they did at the time is separate out the old people from the young people, so that it would be-- I mean, in retrospect, we realize what they were doing. They were telling the old people that they would be better taken care of there. And the younger people were told that they were going to a much nicer camp later on, where they would be able to live in stone houses, and as a family.

Actually, I'm not too sure of the conditions in the other camp, Rivesaltes, what it was like. But some of my friends, the children, were then separated from the parents by the French underground. And some of them were saved, some of the really younger people. But then the older people, the parents and the older teenagers, 19, 20-year-old siblings of my friends, they all didn't make it.

What happened to them?

They were eventually, when the Germans occupied the rest of France in 1941, '42, they were all sent to Auschwitz. They were all sent to Poland.

And your grandparents?

My grandparents, from NoÃ©, were taken by the French Catholic Church. They had a hospice for poor older people, and they were fortunate to end up in this hospice in [? Romain, ?] where the conditions were not good, as far as hardship was concerned. They didn't have any food, but they could be together. My grandparents were both together.

And my grandfather eventually died. He had a stroke. But my grandmother was able to take care of him and be with him to the very end, and he had a regular Jewish funeral. And we even have the eulogy that one of his friends, that he made, did at the funeral. So they were very fortunate. My grandfather was, I think, close to 80 at the time. And my grandmother survived and came to New York. She survived the war and came to New York.

So your grandfather was buried in France?

Yes, yes. And my sister was in Europe last year, and before she went, she wrote to that little town, [? Romain, ?] several times and tried to contact the-- what is it called-- the mayor of the town, and she never got a response. Because she really wanted to go there. She wanted to find my grandfather's grave, and she also wanted to thank the convent and the people who saved them for doing that. And she wasn't able to, because she never had gotten a response at all. She tried several times, which is too bad. But she then planned to go to the town anyway and do the research on her own, but she was too exhausted and she was never able to make it.

So originally, your grandparents were not invited or included in this idea to go to [INAUDIBLE].

They were not included. That's another part of the story. It was, unfortunately, only for very young people. They wanted, as far as the Jewish organization was concerned, it was to be an experiment whether-- you have to remember, in 1940, when people were going to concentration camps, Joint and HIAS decided they will try an experiment in the Dominican Republic to see if young people could work as farmers in tropical conditions, and not having, not knowing anything about farming.

I mean, this is-- it's so weird. And so my parents were-- [LAUGHING]

[INAUDIBLE] a second, and I [INAUDIBLE]. OK.

I think I'll get back to that later. So the next day, we left the camp by train with 12 other people. And we left Saturday around noon and didn't arrive in Marseilles until Sunday late at night. And we had two French guards with us, but they were friendly. We had to spend the night on a bench in a little town in France, at the waiting room, but we were able to go to a real restaurant and eat real food off tables, you know, sit at a table and have real china and silverware. That was a big experience at the time.

And when we arrived in Marseilles, we had distant relatives who had emigrated to France, but then had to leave Paris and were living in Marseilles, in a hotel. And my dad had written to them and told them that we were coming, so they actually were at the train station to welcome us. And that was a very wonderful feeling, to have someone there.

It turned out that our destination was supposed to be the Hotel Terminus, which was a form of a camp. But the guards had no idea where that was. And my relative's son, who was about the same age as my sister, about 18, went with the guard into town to find it. And in the meantime, when they came back two hours later, they came back and we were told that there was only one room available. So we were allowed to spend the night with our relatives at their place in the hotel, and then we had to check in to the other place the next morning.

Do you remember that Terminus hotel at all?

Yes, I remember that very well. We got a room. We were very crowded. We were my mother, my sister, and myself, and one other woman the first few days, one room, two beds, four people. And then eventually we got a fifth person coming into the room. So I guess I must have slept with two other people, since I was the smallest one.

Was it well-furnished, or shabbily?

Well, it was shabbily furnished. But to us, it was luxurious, because we had a real wardrobe. We had a sink in the room with running water. We had real beds, and we had a mirror, which I just saw in my sister's diary that we considered that an immense luxury. Because in the camp, we were never able to look into a mirror. There was no such thing.

Did you have washing and toilet facilities?

We had a sink, so I think we just washed at the sink in the room. And that, too, was a luxury. My father had to stay in a different place. The men were not-- they were outside in a camp that was called Les Milles, which is a little town not too far from Provence, Aix en Provence, so it was a really pretty area. And we could walk around and take care of our business during the day in Marseilles, but we had a curfew. We had to be back by 7 o'clock, I believe.

And the food situation was terrible. We were we were hungry all the time. What the hotel provided was just a soup, and just a little bit better than what we had gotten in the camp. But apparently, once in a while, we were able to buy some things on the black market or get some ration, buy some bread ration cards. And the mood in Marseilles, in May-- see, we were there from February to May-- was very, very panicky and frightening, and there were all kinds of rumors.

And every day seemed like an eternity, because you knew that you were sitting on a powder keg. You knew that the Germans were going to come and occupy the rest of the country. It seemed like-- we were just able to slip out. And even that, we didn't know for sure. It seems my mother and my sister were really afraid that we would be turned back again at the border, once we got onto the train from Marseilles to Lisbon because we did not have a ship passage booked yet, boat passage. Apparently that was one of the requirements, and we were not able to get it.

Do you know why?

Probably just because everything had been taken, or all the delays. I don't remember why.

Did your family have to have a certain amount of money to be able to complete these arrangements?

Well, the DORSA, the organization, I think, covered all of that, as far as the passage was concerned. And I think eventually, we were supposed to-- I know eventually, we had to repay it. My relatives just helped us with that.

Do you know if other people in this camp at Gurs were invited to do the same thing?

No. Well, yes and no. My dad had gotten a letter from the DORSA organization to ask if there were other people interested in going to the Dominican Republic. And he said it should be mostly young people who would be able to work physically. And there was another reason why the Dominican Republic wanted, they wanted mainly young, white males, because they wanted to lighten their population.

That was one of the reasons why the dictator, Trujillo, had extended the invitation to us. One reason was that he wanted to be in favor with President Roosevelt, because he wanted loans of money, and the other was to lighten the population. He was a terrible racist, even though his mother was, I believe, a Haitian, and very dark. And he was very light. I don't remember exactly what his background was. But it's a status symbol.

And there had been a very-- there had been a war in the early '30s, I believe, or in the '20s, between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. And the Dominican slaughtered about 12,000 Haitians, and they were out of favor with Washington because of that. So that was one of the reasons why he did that. And he was willing to take 100,000 Jews.

And no other country, no other country made that kind of an offer. But unfortunately, the people from our Jewish organizations, they went to England to enlist people, and they went to Switzerland, and they went to Luxembourg, and they never went into France, and never went into where it was dangerous for them personally. And it's just unforgivable.

You mean as in Germany or Poland?

Yeah. Well, Germany, I guess, they wouldn't have been able to get to. My dad had a long list of people that had wanted to come. And when we were in Portugal, I remember very clearly that almost daily, we went to the Dominican consulate and asked, when did they leave to go to France? And every day, we were told, no, not yet, tomorrow, tomorrow. And one day, we were finally told, yes, Mr. [PERSONAL NAME] left yesterday. Where did he go? He went back to the United States. And that was just maybe a week or so before we left.

And I was not able to talk about that story without really getting-- for years, I couldn't even talk about it, because I just, it's unforgivable. But to get back to our trip, it took a few days from Marseilles to Lisbon. And it was a very interesting experience, going through Spain. Spain had been totally devastated by the Civil War, and there was lots of evidence of the war all around, and the poverty.

And the war ravaged, was worse, much worse than in France, even. And I remember little children on the train, little four-year-old Spanish boys on the train begging for food and for money. And then there was this contrast, when we got off in Barcelona-- we stayed overnight one night in Barcelona-- and it was this gorgeous, gorgeous city that we all fell in love with. And the people were, they were like robots, really. They looked so devastated.

And then when we got to the Portuguese border, we had to go through customs, and we were bodily searched. Or maybe that was before, several times on the train. But we had no problem getting through the border. And that was a big relief, as I mentioned why we had been afraid that maybe they would turn us back. And it was like black and white, going across the border. Because Portugal was so clean and well taken care of that you can't believe, when you're on the train, and you're going from here to there, what a change that was.

And we realized finally that we made it. It was incredible. And then we spent about three, three and a half weeks in Lisbon and were able to get passage on the Nyassa. And I have that on my notes, what the date was. Yeah, we arrived in Lisbon on May 10th. Oh, June, on June 3rd, we left Portugal.

And on the boat, we met some of the other people that were destined to go to the Dominican Republic. There was one group that had been-- I think it was the Luxembourg group-- that had been selected in Luxembourg. And those groups were no more than maybe 30 people, 35 people, and all young, single men, and a few young, single women and young couples. They were all in their early 20s.

Did you, either in France or Spain or Portugal, find any reaction towards the Jews amongst the people?

Well, in France, the people that were guarding us, they were collaborators. So although they were not openly terrible, sometimes they were in the camp also. And I remember that the woman who ran the-- it was so-called hotel. I mean, it was a hotel that wasn't making it, and obviously, the owners were collaborators. So they were given this, they were paid something by the government.

So she-- I remember the woman-- she was very tough, very tough. You always had the sense that she didn't like you, and she was not your-- she certainly was not your friend. And other than that, we didn't have all that much contact with the French people. And we didn't speak all that much French, either.

But there was one Armenian, an old man who was an Armenian who was a helper at the hotel. He was kind of a kitchen helper. And he seemed to be just a lonely, you know, unhappy old man. I don't know. He was looking for just human contact. I don't know exactly what his political leanings were, but since he was an Armenian, he certainly, I think he sympathized with our predicament. I think we all had that feeling.

In Spain, we didn't really have any contact. And in Portugal, whatever contact we did have with the population, they were neutral. There were lots of Nazis in uniform all over Portugal, and we were really paranoid. I remember that very well, that we sometimes were afraid that they were going to follow us in the street and do something to us. But the Portuguese population was friendly. They were not unfriendly.

And on our arrival in New York, when we arrived, we were looking down, you know, at the people. And my father kept saying he thought that he saw his brother in the crowd. And as it turned out, I don't think that anybody was allowed to make contact with us. But we found out later, when our other relatives visited us, we were not allowed to go and be with our relatives. Even though we had a transit visa, we were on Ellis Island for three weeks.

And when our relatives finally were able to visit us on Ellis Island, we found out that my uncle had just died two weeks before we arrived. He had had a heart attack and died. So that was a big disappointment, certainly, for my father. I had no recollection of that uncle at all. And I did not really know the American relatives. My sister did, because they had lived in Germany for some time, and they came to visit us. But I was just a baby, and I didn't remember them.

So that was then very exciting, to meet my aunt and my cousin. And in Ellis Island, everybody came to visit us, well, all the relatives and lots and lots of friends from Germany came to visit us, and they brought us clothes and food. And it seemed like heaven, in a way. But on the other hand, there were the guards, too, the American guards, and they were constantly clicking, counting us. They had those little machines in their hand, counting everybody. And the reason we were not-- we arrived in June, 1941, and we were considered German citizens, aliens. And so they were afraid that we might be Nazis, and they wouldn't let us go into New York.

The guards in Ellis Island were not all that friendly. And at one point, it must have been about a week before we left, I got sick. I had a tummy ache. I was 11 years old, and I hadn't been used to eating real food anymore. And I had a wonderful time eating pears, and you know, fresh fruit, and I remember corn flakes. That was our first experience with cold cereal, plus all the chocolate and things that our relatives brought us.

So there was a-- we had a medical, every morning, I think someone came, a doctor or nurse, to check us out, if we had any problems. And I mentioned that I had a tummy ache, and so I was given a laxative. And I was also told that maybe I had appendicitis, which is just exactly what you do. And then they told me that I had to go to the hospital for tests, and my mother couldn't come along. And I didn't speak any English.

And on Ellis Island, the buildings, the hospital was in a different building. And you don't go above ground. There are tunnels underground. And there would be one woman taking me to one room, maybe a few paces to here, and they would say, you sit here, and somebody else will come and take you further.

And I was sitting there for maybe an hour or more, and nobody came, and I had to go to the bathroom. They had given me a laxative. Nobody came. I didn't know how to find the bathroom. And finally, I was looking for somebody, and they said, do you need anything? I said, yes, I have to go to the closet, because in German, it's the Klosett. And I finally, finally was able to find a bathroom. And I don't remember how many hours it took them to get me from one building to the next.

And then I arrived at the hospital, and I was supposed to get an examination. That examination didn't materialize for about three or four days. My parents were not allowed to visit me. And I was given a nightshirt, which was a shirt that came from here to here on me, and it had lots of big holes in the front. And the buttons were missing, and they gave me a safety pin to hold it together. I don't remember what I had on my feet.

And most of the other patients in the hospital where I was where women of staff members, either staff themselves, or family of staff at Ellis Island. And I was the only little child, and not one of the American ladies kind of befriended me, and, you know, mothered me. I was just totally ignored. And that was my hospital experience on Ellis Island.

What was the diagnosis?

I never got one. They did take me in one time, and they put me on an examination table. And I was so excited and frightened that I broke out on a rash on my chest. So they looked at that, and they thought that might be something really strange, and that was the end of it. I don't remember them ever giving me a blood test, or even feeling my stomach or anything. Fortunately, there was nothing wrong with me.

But I kept wondering, what's going to happen? I knew that we were supposed to leave to go to the Dominican Republic any day, and I had no contact. And I kept thinking, well, maybe they're going to forget about me, and then eventually I'll be able to live with the Kehrs, which were my relatives in New York. And I had this, I kept thinking, maybe I won't go to the Dominican Republic. There had been rumors on the boat, it seems, that things on the Dominican Republic were terrible, and at Ellis Island.

But my cousin Walter, who was my idol-- I adored him. He was, he is four years older than I. And when we were little children, we played together, and I just, I was going to marry Walter when I grow up. And I thought, I'll have to-- I'm going to stay in New York, and I'll live with the Kehrs, and I'll have a big brother, Walter. Never mind the rest of the family. They can go to the Dominican Republic, and I'll stay in New York.

As it turned out, the call came. There was also delays with which boat we were going to go on. And the call came that the group was leaving. I think we met another group on Ellis Island that was also going. And they were getting into, they were piling into cars to get to the pier, to New York. Well, from, I guess they had to take a car to the ferry first, to get to the pier in New York. And I wasn't there.

Still in the hospital?

I was still in the hospital. And I found out later that my mother refused to get into the car until they brought me. So then they made this, you know, somebody came to me in the hospital and brought me over directly from the hospital to the pier to be with my family. That was New York. It was fun.

What was the living conditions on Ellis Island?

On Ellis Island, well, they were clean. We had good beds. Everybody had their own beds. We had a big dormitory with maybe 10. I don't remember exactly, but there were quite a few women in one room. But for me, that was heaven. I really didn't care.

Of course, we were very unhappy that we couldn't be with our family. We had wanted to be with our family. And it was very difficult from them to come from Manhattan, to come to Ellis Island maybe two, three times a week to see us. But aside from that, if we couldn't be with them, Ellis Island, as far as I was concerned, it was so much better than what we had left behind. And we knew that there was going to be an end to it. It was a temporary thing.

So we were fed, and we had beds. What more did we need? And we were going away. We were out of hell. My sister's diary said when she-- actually, she typed it all up, and she had parts of it published. And she titled it Liebe Gottes Danke Dir, which means dear Lord, I thank you. And that's what she had written in her diary when we left France, when we get to Portugal. She said that we got out of this witch's brew. That's exactly the way she had thought, and it's how we all felt.

And then the next comes a completely different chapter with the tropics, which was very exciting, very exciting to-- it was fun on the boat, on the Algonquin. At night, most of the young people in the group were in their, as I said before, in their early 20s. And a lot of them came from Austria, from Vienna. And there was a few young men who were very good on the mandolin, and at night, we had concerts. We had singalongs with the mandolin. And there we are, floating on the Atlantic Ocean and singing, and having a wonderful time, and, I imagine, feeling very guilty at the same time.

There was one experience, one of the matrons on the boat told my father he should shave his little mustache, because it made him look too much like Hitler, which he did. And I remember stopping. It was a banana boat, and we had about three stops in Puerto Rico, where the bananas were unloaded. I mean loaded, and I don't remember what they delivered in Puerto Rico. But it was a fairy land, all of a sudden.

And little boys came onto the boat. They had us drop pennies in the ocean, and they dived for the pennies. And they also came on board and they sold these big bananas, and you know, we said, oh, my goodness. We had never seen such big bananas. Aren't they wonderful? So we bought some, and when we started eating them, they didn't taste like bananas. They were plantains. But we didn't know that, and we ate them raw. What strange tasting bananas they were. They became one of my favorite foods, cooked, baked, eventually.

And it took about a week to get to the Dominican Republic, and we arrived in Puerto Plata, which is about 10 miles from Sosua, which is the name of the little village. We were given-- actually, Trujillo gave our organization a huge piece of land for us to settle. And it's a beautiful, absolutely beautiful piece of land, right on the ocean, and there's always a breeze. And it's on the Atlantic side of the island, which is a little bit cooler and breezier.

The capital is Santo Domingo, which was then called Ciudad Trujillo. That is on the Caribbean, and it's always very humid, and no breeze at all. And the Caribbean is not all that great for swimming, and there are lots of sharks. But we had the most wonderful beach, one of the finest beaches in the country.

And the land had belonged to the United Fruit Company, and they realized that the soil was not conducive for them to have a plantation, a fruit plantation there. So they abandoned it and gave it up, and Trujillo gave it to us. And over the years, we also found out that farming, which is what we were supposed to be there for, did not work out.

People were supposed to go form little groups. And they did form little groups and have established small settlements. There was a main area for those who chose not to be on settlements. That was right along the shore, which is now the wonderful tourist area. And those who chose to go on settlements were given-- they were able to build little houses, wooden houses, and they were given a mule, and a horse, and a certain amount of land to cultivate.

And I don't remember if they started out with-- yes, they did have maybe one or two cows, because we immediately had our own dairy products. I mean our own milk. Dairy products came much later. But I think one or two more groups arrived after we did. And by the end of '41, the door closed. No one came anymore.

Was that because of--

Because of the war.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No, no, no. Because once the United States entered the war, in December, that it wasn't possible anymore. We had wanted to bring our other relatives, but it never happened.

Why was the entry of the United States a critical thing?

I don't think there was any direct-- how were people going to come from Europe to the Dominican--

They wouldn't be able to stop at the port in New York or in Puerto Rico? Is that what you mean?

Right, although my brother-in-law came from Austria. He found out about it in Vienna, and he went on his own. He traveled by himself. And I think he was one of the few people who did not come in a group. And he went by train all the way through Russia and China, and I think then took a boat from Japan to San Francisco, and then, I mean, he went all the way around the world.

How he got the money and how he managed to do it, I really don't know. I don't know how. And I don't think there were too many people who came that way. There was a group of like 18, 19-year-olds, to between 17 and 20, that came from England. Those, I think, because they were afraid that their permits in England were going to run out, and that they would have had to return to Austria.

There was one young man who was from Hungary who had been studying. Actually, he came from New York. He was Hungarian, and he had been studying in the United States. And his student visa ran out, and somehow he found out. And we were only a little bit over 600 people.

Out of [INAUDIBLE].

Out of 100,000, yes. There were about 2,000 people that came on their own, living in the capital, who chose never to go to the settlement. They were just refugees that went to the Dominican Republic on their own, had nothing to do with the Joint organization. But Sosua was, at the time, most of the people, they couldn't wait to leave and go back to, go to their final destination, which was the United States, for most everybody, and just did not want to commit themselves to do any kind of farming and have a settlement. There were some people like that.

Others did commit themselves and tried, and saw that it didn't work out, that it was difficult. Eventually, they realized that only cattle-- they could just be dairy farmers, which is what they still are today, to this day. They have, there are maybe, I don't know, maybe 50 people left. I don't know how many remained, maybe 100, maybe 150, originally. Most of them died by now.

It really was a paradise. We didn't know it at the time, but it was a paradise. We didn't know. We were worried about our family in Europe, but we had no idea how bad things were.

Had you heard anything from your grandparents?

We were getting some letters through our relatives through-- they were able to correspond with our relatives in New York, and we had contact with the New York family all the time. News from Europe was very sparse.

Did you hear from your grandparents directly, or news from the relatives?

I think it was-- it all came through our relatives. I don't remember now. Maybe we did get some letters. I have some letters. They may have been sent directly to us. I think maybe they were, as a matter of fact. I don't know whether, once France was totally occupied, whether any mail would go out. But then the Dominican Republic was a neutral country. So I think we did. We must have gotten some mail there, directly ourselves. I have the letters, but not the envelopes. So I don't know exactly where they went.

When you arrived, did they make provision for housing and food [INAUDIBLE].

At first, we lived in barracks. They had some barracks that were just for single people, and there were several barracks for families. Essentially, there was no difference, because it was two people to a room. And it was just a long barrack with separate rooms, and then in the center was an area with sinks and showers. So that was like a community area. And we had latrines. We had to go outside for latrines.

But after about six months, we were given a little cottage. Or rather we had two rooms in a little cottage. There were other people who had rooms there too, but we were able-- we had our own kitchen, so we were able to cook for ourselves. Up until then, we ate in the community kitchen, and our own people. It was a little bit like a kibbutz, in a way.

What I need to say is about the Dominican people themselves and the country. They are just wonderful people. They don't know what anti-Semitism is. It just doesn't exist. And as a matter of fact, many of the upper classes, Dominicans, are very proud when they say-- some of them are very proud of Jewish heritage, that there were quite a few morenos that ended up in the Caribbean, and some people trace their heritage to Jewish heritage, and they're very proud of it.

That was the upper classes. But the native people, who were just dirt poor, just who walked barefoot and just had one cotton dress on their backs, and those are the people that we were dealing with. The poverty was incredible. But they have an inner charm and a wonderful hospitality. And I can't tell you what it felt like to be out of Germany and to be fully accepted and equal.

I found out in 1990, when I went back with my son for our 50th anniversary celebration, that we were actually given a bill of rights by Trujillo just for us. And our bill of rights was-- we had more rights than the Dominican people, because he had a monopoly on practically all business. Anything that was lucrative was his monopoly. His family owned practically the entire country. The rum production and the sugar cane production, all of that was in Trujillo hands, just a couple of families.

We had no restrictions. Our people could go into any kind of business. We had religious freedom, of course. I was trying to get a copy of the bill of rights that were given to us when I was there in 1990, but I wasn't able to. But we now have a museum with all of that, and your niece should try to see it. In 1990, when I was there with my son, we had the opening, the ceremonies of a museum that was built by some of the settlers that remained there.

I went to school. The schools were-- we were short on teachers, but we were long on educated people who just gave us whatever they were able to. But after I was 14 or 15, I think by the time I was in seventh grade, they stopped. They no longer went along with the upper grades, and I never did end up with-- whatever else education I have, I did on my own. But I really had very, almost no formal training, because my training was interrupted in Germany.

From my first day in school-- it was a Jewish school-- and our teachers constantly left the country. So you know, those conditions kept getting smaller and smaller, and more and more difficult. And then in the Dominican Republic, it was not a formal training. But eventually, they those settlers that remained had a private school and better schools than anywhere else in the country.

In fact, when I talk to some of the people who were born there, who were there at our meeting who said that-- and whose parents remained and who went to school there, and eventually went to college in the United States, and were better prepared for college in the United States than the students that came from schools, United States schools. But those were the schools that-- and still are provided for the children there.

Now, I saw the school when I was there in 1990, and they have something like 400 children. And most of them are native Dominicans that are working in the area. It's now a Dominican town. It is no longer a settlement.

Were you given a kind of citizenship when you first arrived?

No. We could have asked for it, but we didn't want it. Most of us didn't intend to stay.

Your parents also?

My parents, there was really nothing there for them. Unfortunately, my parents, my dad had a little bit of a problem there doing what he wanted to do. Because our cousin, since he was part of the administration, he was always afraid of allowing us to do anything that would look like he's favoring his uncle, and by doing that, actually restricted my dad in doing things that would have been very helpful for him. And I remember my dad wanted to buy cattle, and he needed a loan to get the cattle. And those people who started doing that eventually had their own cattle farms, and still have them, and became very wealthy. But my dad wasn't allowed to take out the loan.

And my dad was one of the few people who actually had some background in soil, because he was a grain and feed dealer in Germany and had grown up in a little village, and his business was related to-- with farmers. But he wasn't listened to, and he was very hurt. His feelings were very hurt. On the other hand, I have a wonderful report that he wrote in German, unfortunately hasn't been translated yet, with his impressions about the country and about the settlement, which is really great.

What kind of work did he do?

As a matter of fact, yes, my sister did translate it, and my son. Yeah, he did it on the plane on the way down. He ran the colmado. Now, this is the other thing that I need to, wanted to talk about, is that within that little group of 600 people, we had so many gifted people that there wasn't a thing that we could not provide on our own. We had a bakery with wonderful breads and cakes. We had a restaurant. We had three or four doctors, naturally, amongst 600 Jews. We had three or four doctors and a dentist.

We provided free medical-- when I say we, it's the organization, DORSA-- provided free medical care to any native who was able to come to the hospital. And there were long lines every day. My sister worked as a nurse. We had lots and lots of babies, and they were absolutely beautiful, absolutely wonderful children.

When I was there in 1990, a son from, actually, one of our teachers who then was the principal of the school, he came with his three sons and his wife. And one of the sons was looking at the pictures of the children that were born there, and he said, the terrible irony of here in Europe, the babies were killed, and went to the gas chambers, and we had this wonderful crop of children. I have some pictures in that thing.

We had people that-- wonderful craftspeople. We had carpenters that made wonderful furniture. We had a garage. We had the metal and machine shop. We had a goldsmith. We had people that were making jewelry. I myself, once I left school, I was always interested in arts and crafts, and I wanted to be an artist, worked in a-- well, we were trying to make some kind of crafts that we could produce with native products.

So we had what was called a straw shop, from the palm leaves, the dried straw. We were dying and weaving placemats and handbags. And I don't remember all of the different products that we tried to produce. My dad, at one point, tried to produce jams and jellies and chocolate-covered candied fruit through the kitchen, with the women in the kitchen. He was also involved in working with a couple of chemists. They produced mosquito repellent.

We had the dairy with the, at that point, just heavy cream. We had someone who produced sausages. We had dressmakers. We couldn't buy clothes, but we made, we had people who made our own clothes. We had everything.

And your father was mostly involved in this jam and--

No, actually, my father then became-- he managed the general store. And he wanted to have as many of our own native-grown products to sell, like tomatoes and corn, and those things, what they were able to grow. But he also ordered whatever other products we needed in the store. And he had his staff there. He supervised it.

No one got any money. Every settler received $3 pocket money a month, and that was it. But everything we needed was provided for us. So the $3 we had to go to the movies, which was like $0.15. And we had a maid, which I think we paid $3 a month to her. And she did all of our heavy work, and we cooked from an open, a cold stove. But we had, someone had made aluminum, like an aluminum box to put on top of the open fire so that my mother was able to bake a cake. And so we always kept a fire going.

Was there a barter system? Or how were the products distributed?

For us, we would go to the colmado to buy things with whatever money we had, but everything was very inexpensive. It cost pennies. Once a week, or maybe twice a week, they were showing a movie in one of the barracks. We had one barrack that was strictly for entertainment. We had a library.

And we had a truck going two or three times a week from Sosua across the country to the capital for whatever, you know. There was always business there. And it was run like a democracy, in a way. We had s settler meeting, which was like the old American ways of town meeting, and tempers ran very high. People were under a lot of tension, naturally, so tempers did run very high. And there was a terrible shortage of women, so there was a lot of changing around of partners going on, also.

What about the plan of intermarrying with the local people?

Well, since they weren't an awful lot of people that came, it didn't succeed to the extent that Trujillo wanted it to. But those people that are still there today are mostly people who intermarried and decided to stay there, and their children are raised as Jews. And in that film that I showed you, it's just wonderful to see these Dominican-looking, Spanish-speaking children, and preparing for the seder, and it's great.

The children were all beautiful. And the children, when we had our reunion in June of 1990, quite a few of the young people that were born there came to the reunion. And they're now in their late 40s, early 50s, and they're no longer children. And they are just wonderful people. The daughter of a good friend of mine said to me, she just had celebrated her 25th anniversary, and her sons are in college. So it was difficult to comprehend.

But it was-- I meant to bring you on my album. It was great to see. There were two young women who, their parents had been good friends, and they had lived in the same cottage together. And they had been best friends as three-year-olds, but they came to the United States, and they were not in touch with each other, did not know each other anymore at all. One was in New York, and the other one was in Los Angeles. And they met in Sosua two years ago, and they became such good friends again that they've been visiting with each other, and they talk on the phone every week. And it's incredible. It's really incredible.

We had this reunion, this 50th anniversary party, and it was totally arranged by the people that remained and paid for by the people that remained, other than our passage and hotel. But now Sosua is a well-known tourist area, and some of the hotels are owned by family of our people. And there are others there too that were-- settlers had bought the land and then sold it. There's one big, big German hotel, which actually, the German hotel has the prize spot in the area, and has the nicest, the most expensive rooms, and so on. And they're not all that friendly to the Jews, and they're very sorry now that they sold that land to the Germans.

How long did the community go on as a viable community?

It started to fall apart right after the end of the war. My sister and I left in 1946, in March. So that was 10 months after the end of the war. And by around that time, people just, within a year or two, most people left.

Your parents went with you?

No. My parents, we really couldn't afford it. My sister and I came first, and we worked, and we then were able to send an affidavit for our parents. So we came in March, and they arrived in October, and we stayed with our relatives.

In New York?

Yeah.

So most of the community had been waiting for the war to end

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

To end, exactly. But there were a few people who realized that they had something there, and they wanted to stay, and maybe had no one in the United States. And then there were also those mixed marriages who stayed. Mostly the young people, the children that were born there, worked really hard to arrange our reunion, our anniversary party. They picked us up at the airport and drove us in, and dropped us off at our hotels.

And I like to tell one story that happened to my sister, who came with her son. Her son lives in California, but they met there. My sister and her son went, and I went with my son. My husband wasn't able to. But my sister and her son met in Miami and took the flight from Miami to Puerto Plata together.

She said when they were about 20 minutes, half an hour out of Puerto Plata, the captain on the plane announced, he said, ladies and gentlemen, we have a very special group of people on our plane today. They're a group of refugees from the war who are going back to the Dominican Republic for a reunion. We would like to welcome them, and welcome home. I can't say it without choking up myself. It wasn't on our plane, but it's really an incredible story.

And that's how the people were. And every one of the people that I met while I was there had that attitude. They're just such hospitable, friendly people. The Germans are so self-centered, and they cannot tolerate anyone not knowing their language, foreignness, as we even know today how they treat foreigners. And that's what we were used to. And we didn't know Spanish.

Well, in Germany, if a foreigner couldn't speak the language, it was open season on making fun of them. No one ever made fun of-- I remember my mother saying one time that she found out afterwards that she told our maid to clean the floor with chicken broth. Because you know, that's just how you-- the word for it. And she looked it up in the dictionary, the German word, and it turned out to be chicken broth. And they didn't laugh. They didn't make fun of you. They just accepted you and were kind and considerate. So I went back with, really, with this feeling of gratitude.

Did you miss Dominica when you left?

No, no. I was 16 years old. And when I got my visa, I jumped as high with joy. But there is a connection between our group of people, because we experienced so much together, and that it's like one big family. And I asked myself many times in later years, what is it that makes me feel so strong about this country and these people? And I was only there for five years, which is, when you're 62, a very small part of your life.

And I realized it's because it was the first experience I had in my life of being accepted and feeling free. And that gave me that very, very strong hold. I never knew what it felt like to be free. Even in the United States, you always-- there's that little bit of a barrier that it took me a lifetime here to feel that I'm not an outsider, and that I can be proud of being Jewish.

I always had that fear of, what are people going to think of me? What are they going to-- are they going to accept me? I kept that with me in one form or another. If it wasn't Jewish, I transferred it to something else, because I'm not with this group. I'm new in this group. I'm new in this city. I'm new in San Francisco. I'm new in New York. I'm new in Connecticut. I'm always an outsider. And I only realized that very recently.

But in the Dominican Republic, that was the first experience I had what it felt like, since I was only four years old in 1933. It wasn't the same for older people who had experienced some sort of decent life in Germany, who had some equality, our parents. And even my sister, with the seven years that she's older, she had gone to the public school and had had some Gentile friends, but I never did.

Did you ever regret leaving the Dominican Republic for those reasons?

Not really, because there really was nothing there for me, other than that, I mean culturally and economically. And I knew that I would never find anyone to have a family with. But in other ways, yes, I have regretted it. Because it's peaceful. There's no stress, and very secure now. The people that are there, they're are very well-off. They can travel and go wherever they want to and just come back whenever they want to.

How did you fare in the United States? You got a job, I gather, when you first got here?

Yeah. I started to work right away. I had no training in anything. I was doing piece work and doing little, painting little toys, and eventually met my husband that way. We were painting neckties, both of us. But until I took some courses in accounting, that's what I did just. At first I was painting dolls' dishes, and I was getting the huge amount of money half a penny a piece, in 1946, half a penny a piece.

Incredible.

Yeah. If I made $10 a day, I did very well. And I made less money than the other women, because I had to take time to go to the bathroom more often than the rest of them.

Did you say you met your husband doing the same work?

Yes. My husband is an artist, and he had come-- he had been a veteran in the war. And in 1946, it was difficult to find work. And we met in a place where we were hand painting neckties, silk ties. And he showed me how. He helped me.

Yes, to get back to our reunion, the people had arranged for us, we had one or two free days. I think we arrived on a Wednesday, and by Friday morning we checked in. We registered. And then after we registered, they took us on a tour to show us all the old homesteads on buses. And there were other people there that we did not know.

There was a small group of people that came to Sosua after the war-- I forgot about that-- from Shanghai. There was a group of people that came from Shanghai, but they either had no relatives in the United States, or whatever, and they decided they wanted to go. They heard about the Dominican Republic and about Sosua, and they arrived, and they became Settlers.

What they have done is they have a corporation. Most of the-- all of the people that stayed have cattle farms. And they pool their dairy, their milk, and they have a dairy which produces most, probably maybe 75% of all the dairy products for the island, butter, cheese, yogurt. Some of the people that stayed, they went to Europe, and they studied cheese making in the factories there. We were there. And they also produce meats, sausages, meat products. So it's those two things that form the core of what they have now.

And then the tourists, the airport in Puerto Plata was opened up about 10 or 12 years ago. And once the airport opened up, that brought in a huge influx of tourists from England and Germany and from all over Europe. It's considered one of the less-expensive places for tourism now. So then the hotel building started. And you can walk down the street in Sosua now, and you can have French food, and Italian food, and German food, anything but Dominican food, almost. You can find Dominican food, but--

You said you went with your son. Is he your only child?

No. I have a daughter, and I actually had wanted to go-- wanted both children to come. And my daughter wanted to come very badly, but she had a one-year-old baby, and she couldn't leave her behind, and she couldn't-- it wouldn't have been the right place to take her along, so she couldn't make it. But I had been there with my daughter and my husband in 1974. We had made a quick, just the three of us for a week.

So my son was the only one that had not been there, and it was just wonderful. It was the most exciting experience that I had in my life, to go back. And to go with my son made it really extra special, because he really got an understanding for-- he said, well, I always heard you talk about Sosua, but I couldn't picture anything. I didn't know what it was really like. He had met some of the people that I'm very friendly with, but he said now it really--

And the young people made a connection, a very strong connection, so that they formed their own organization, because they want to keep the spirit up. The idea, one of the strongest ideas behind the reunion was that because of the intermarriage and the lack of being able to continue the Jewish heritage, the people that are there now don't want to-- they don't want the area to forget what happened here, and they don't want their families to forget what happened here. They want to have, especially with the tourist business going on all around them, and since it's now a Dominican town, they want to make sure that the heritage is known in the future.

And that's why they renovated the synagogue, and they built the museum. I went back to the synagogue with a very good friend that I was-- he was my first boyfriend. And he was a carpenter and had made the menorah, a life-sized mahogany menorah. And we went together to see it. And he's in his 70s now, and he said that was really-- it was a very emotional experience for him. He came with his wife to look back at the menorah that he had carved 50 years ago, and it's standing there in the synagogue, lots of pictures.

On Friday night, we had a banquet for 500 people. And on Saturday night, we had a banquet and a ball for 1,000 people. Because what they did was invite everybody, all of the native, all of the Dominicans that had ever worked for them, for the cooperative-- the CILCA is the name-- were invited to come. And on Saturday morning, we had a-- Friday night and Saturday morning, we had a religious service in the courtyard of the dairy factory outdoors.

I almost forgot about that, the most exciting thing, or one of the most exciting things. It was just-- my adrenaline was pumping for a whole week. When I arrived in Sosua, someone said to me, there was a rabbi here once who said he knows you. And I couldn't understand who that could be. And then later on, someone else came and said, there is a rabbi here who said he knows you. And again, like, what rabbi could that be?

And right after we registered on Friday morning, this man with a sombrero and shorts and, you know, we were all soaking hot. It was at the end of June. It's terribly hot. It's probably 92 and very humid. He stops me and he says, Lore, I know you don't recognize me in this outfit, but I'm Alan Levins. Of course, I recognized him right away. That was my rabbi in Connecticut, in New Haven, Connecticut.

And I said, Alan, what are you doing here? I can't understand this. We had been very good friends. And he said, don't you remember? You always talked about Sosua. You told us all about it in 1974, when you came back from your trip, and I always wanted to go and see it. And about six years ago, I came, and I became very friendly with a Cohen, Hans Cohen, and I've been coming here with my wife several times. And Hans asked me, would I officiate at the service, at the Friday night and Saturday morning service?

And I said-- he's not a rabbi anymore. He's a clinical psychologist now. So I said, for Sosua, of course, I'll come. And he didn't have my address. We had moved in 1980 from Connecticut to California. He didn't know me, and he had no way of knowing if I was coming or not. But he had been telling people there that the way he knew about Sosua is from Lore Sondheimer.

And I said, Alan, how did you know my maiden name? Because he only knew me as Laura Gilbert. So he said, don't you remember when your mother was ill with cancer and stayed with you in Connecticut? You asked me to come and visit her, and I did. And this is how it came about, and that's how he remembered my name. And he performed the services. We also had a service at the cemetery on Sunday morning, before we left.

And I can't describe what that meant to me, that I had my old rabbi in Sosua. And the service was wonderful. And he identified with us so much, and he actually cried at the service. And also it was familiar to me, because the way he sang everything was the way I had been used to it from Connecticut.

And you were the instrument to bring him.

Yeah, right. And he mentioned that in his talk. And by the way, they were, the representatives from the President of the Republic were there at the service. And I think the Israeli consul was there. It was really wonderful.

Do you think you'll go again?

I doubt it. I don't think so. We all said, well, we'll come back for the 60th. It's a difficult trip, physically a very strenuous trip from here to there, and it's also very expensive. And it's changed so much. It's no longer the way we remember it. It's now a little town with paved streets and mopeds going constantly, day and night, and that wonderful fresh air is full of carbon monoxide from the mopeds.

So it doesn't, I mean, without this group of people there-- it was very exciting. Most of the people, they would say hello, and I said, who are you? I didn't recognize them. There was one man in his 80s. He was a young man in his early 30s or late 20s when I was there. And here I am 61 years old then, all sweated up with a straw hat, and I'm walking with my son.

And this man is in a group with other people talking, and he looks, and he's, [GASPS] oh, there's Lore. How did he recognize me? And I was only a little girl. How did he remember me as-- I didn't even know he ever saw me. I used to come talk to my parents, but it was really incredible, yeah, to see all those people.

So had you spoken to your children all along about all your--

Yes, and we had Sosua meetings. They have been going on for the last 50 years, once or twice a year. They were in New York. They're in Miami. They're in LA. And we've had people coming together. And then we had very good friends that we saw on a regular basis, also, that my children knew.

People who had lived in Sosua also?

Right, that we kept in touch with over the years, that my children saw over the years that they were growing up and knew. So Dan knew some of those people, and then others, he was introduced to them. And as I said before, the young people, I had thought, well, how is he going to feel there when we get there? I'll be talking with my old friends, and is he going to be feeling left out?

They formed such an immediate, strong connection, all of them, and they formed this organization where they would like to keep up, do something to keep up the spirit. And they were talking about meeting back there in Sosua on a regular basis, you know, whenever they can, and things like that. So they had their own meetings, and the young people got together in the evenings and talked together and had fun together.

And at the same time, Dan did not miss out on his snorkeling. I had no idea that you could snorkel in Sosua, because there was no such thing when we were there. But he said, yeah, it's got to be snorkeling there. And he went out on the boat and went snorkeling.

And I'm going to finish this up right away. But before I do, there was on Sunday afternoon-- we left Monday morning-- Dan and I went shopping for some souvenirs, gifts that we were bringing back, and we were walking down the street together. And we heard coming from the other direction a group of Germans marching, linking arms, and singing Deutschland, Deutschland, Uber Alles.

Now, this was like July 1st, 1990. And Dan and I, I can't tell you the feeling that we had. I thought it has to be anti-Semitism, because all over town, there were these big banners. L'chaim was our symbol. Sosua L'Chaim 50th was the banner, and everybody, all the tourists knew what was going on in town. So we thought they were coming to meet us, you know, and with anti-Semitism.

And we went into a little shop where we were looking at amber jewelry, and one of the Germans came into the shop. And I had my hat on the counter, and he picked up my hat, and he was drunk. And he was starting to say some things about, do you want to buy a hat, he said to his friends, and started to fool around in a drunken way. And I wanted to tell him off, and I couldn't. I kind of froze. There was nothing that I could say to him.

It turned out later that they were celebrating because the Germans had won a football game in Germany, or in Europe, and it had nothing to do with an anti-Semitic expression. But even my son thought that that's what it was. So just to--

[INAUDIBLE]

To show you, yeah. And to have this, it was almost like being in a time warp. I just didn't know what to do with that thing.

So as you said, 50 years hasn't erased it all.

Yeah, right. Yeah, it was weird. Hey, don't you forget us, we are still here, is what it felt like to me, in a way.

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, right. That's apparently what they-- that's what they were singing.

I want to go back with you to tell about how your grandparents fared, that the last you heard of them when you set out was that they had gone to this other camp and under these very sad and trying conditions, where you were just ripped from each other.

Yeah.

And then what happened, as far as your knowledge of them?

We did correspond with them from Marseilles. We knew where they were, and we did get some postcards from them. And as I said earlier, we did also, we received some mail from them from in the camp. I don't know-- from the camp when we were in the Dominican Republic. I don't know exactly when we found out about my grandfather's death, how much later. I don't remember that, and I don't know if there's any record of it. But we did know by the end of the war that he was no longer alive.

Was there ever a worry that they would be sent off to--

Well, we didn't know about any of those camps that they would be sent off to. We only found out about that later. We thought that our relatives in Germany might still be there in Germany.

So only after the war did you learn of these camps.

Yeah, sure.

It must have been an enormous shock.

Yeah. My uncle, as I mentioned earlier, the last time that he wasn't-- he could have been in the Dominican Republic, he and his wife, with us, if he hadn't gone back to-- if she had been with him that day.

Well, I'm thinking maybe I'll stop now to let Emily or anyone ask questions. And also I know you've brought some documents or pictures that you'd like to have included. So do you have anything you want to repeat?

OK.

How was Jewish consciousness and tradition kept alive in Sosua?

In Sosua, the tradition probably took a little bit of a back seat. There was not very much attention paid to religious customs, although there were some people who were religious. We had a synagogue, a small barrack, which was, as I said before, was renovated then. It was not very well-attended. There were probably only a handful of orthodox people there.

As a matter of fact, we had, in the early years, we ate mostly pork because. We didn't have the-- there wasn't enough cattle to slaughter yet, so we ate pork, and especially in the community kitchen. There were some people who refused to eat it, and we had a lot of chicken, so they could always eat chicken.

But culturally, absolutely. And I don't think that we even celebrated any Seders. I don't remember us, other than having a service for the high holy days, I don't remember ever having any kind of religious ceremonies at all, even when children were born. Obviously, the boys were circumcised, but I don't remember any kind of religious ceremony for the circumcision.

But culturally, we had so many talented people that-- oh, wonderful. We had a wonderful artist, a wonderful painter who did very, very nice decorative watercolor sketches of life in the Dominican Republic, and with a wonderful sense of humor. I may bring one of those along. And his skill was also used for-- he designed some of his figures, and they were traced onto cloth, and women embroidered tablecloths. That also became one of the things that was done.

And we had entertainment. We put on shows, wonderful, wonderful shows, with just a wonderful sense of humor, making fun of our situation. I'm reminded of one story in particular, where there was so much red tape, you know, and this guy did a skit on trying to get a roll of toilet paper, where he had an urgency, and he had to run everywhere for this piece of paper and this, OK, and that, OK, to get a roll of toilet paper. And then finally in the end says, I don't need it anymore now, never mind.

And those were really precious evenings. And I have, fortunately the words for many of those kids. I have them at home and. Every once in a while, I read through them. As a matter of fact, they're on my night table. And I'm laughing and laughing, you know, I'm going to my husband, and he can't get the humor. So in that sense, yeah, it was wonderful.

And now the settlers who have stayed, have they gone back to a more traditional Jewish style?

Yes. Yes, now they do celebrate the holidays. And there's just a wonderful scene on that video where one of the Dominican young women was helping to make matzah balls in the kitchen for a big community Seder, and the interviewer of the tape asks her what this is all about. And the way she explains it, oh, it's just a holiday that the Jews have, just like Easter, and we do this every year. And they enjoy it, and it's really a lovely exchange on that tape.

What was the common language used?

Spanish.

Among you?

Oh, the common? No, German.

So were most of the settlers Germans?

Yes, most of them were Germans. They were some people from Czechoslovakia, and they all speak German, the Czechs. Austrians, there were more Austrians than Germans, and that was an issue. Because there's a lot of friction, was a lot of friction during those days. The Austrians didn't like the Germans. They made fun of them. And the majority were Austrians.

So was there more Australian tradition in your music, or the food that was chosen, and so on?

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I took to it like a fish in water. I loved all the Australian music and the dialect, the speech, I liked very much. And the Germans were considered too straitlaced, which they are. The Austrians are much more laid back, and I enjoyed that a lot.

Well, how and when did people in Sosua start learning English and otherwise preparing for the transition to the United States? And how was it for you?

I guess it was on an individual basis. I had already had some English lessons in Germany. And we had English in school. We had in English lessons and Spanish lessons, but we spoke German. I had a Hungarian-French boyfriend, and I spoke a lot with him in English when I was 14, 15. As I mentioned, there was very poor pickings, so an 18, 20-year-old wouldn't mind dating a 14-year-old, which is, under normal circumstances, not acceptable, but it was there.

But yes, and I started-- well, actually, I think I picked up most of my English in the movies. As I said, we had films shown once or twice a week. So they were all in English. And yeah, my boyfriend spoke a lot of-- he spoke English fairly well, so we spoke some English.

Did the films and the $3 a month and other things come from the DORSA organization?

Yes, yes.

And how did they raise money for this?

I'm glad you mentioned that. They had money from-- the money came from the Jewish organizations in the United States. But there is a very interesting story. My sister, up until she retired just now, this past December, she had been working for the Leo Baeck Institute, which is the German, the Jewish cultural organization in New York-- not cultural, historical organization-- and they deal mainly with, I mean, anything connected with the Holocaust and with what she was from, from Germany. Incidentally, they get most of their money from the magazine Der Stern in Germany.

Her boss, just before we went for our reunion in 1990, her boss who was in his 80s said to her, by the way, do you know where the money came from for Sosua? And she had no idea. Why would he know? So she said, well, I thought the money comes from the Jewish organizations.

So he said yes, it does, but there is also some money that came-- there was a collective farm in Russia during the early days of the Bolsheviks, run by Jews. It was an experiment that was maybe started by Baron Rothschild or one of these people. I'm not sure. And it was in good working order, and when the Bolsheviks took over, they had to vacate it. Jews had to vacate it. I'm not sure whether it was taken over by them, or whether it was disbanded altogether.

And they gave the Jews a mortgage. And the mortgage was actually paid off. The Russians actually paid the money to the Jews, and it went to New York, to the Jewish organizations. And this is something that no one has known until my sister found out from her boss that the core of that money was used for the Sosua project. That's great.

Yeah. And they don't even have that on record. Because when my sister talked about it, when we were in Sosua two years ago, she talked to some of the people who organized all the stuff for the museum. And she said, are you aware of that? And they said no. So that's another thing that needs to go on record, which is really fascinating.

It would be interesting if you could meet the people, or the families.

Of those? I doubt that they're still with us.

But who was the oldest person at the Sosua reunion, and how was that--