

A week from today, my daughter, Cynthia.

A week from today? Yes, a week from today. The 5th, I think, of February.

The 5th is Tuesday. You remember, we can stop any time you want to get up and stretch or get a glass of water.

I hope it won't take too long.

Any time.

[INAUDIBLE] everybody.

Yeah. We're rolling.

Today is Monday, January 29, 1996. I am Gene Ayers, an interview with the Holocaust Oral History Project of San Francisco, California. Today we're talking with Mrs. Elizabeth Polt. Camera operator is George Draper. John Grant is video producer. Good afternoon, Mrs. Polt.

Good afternoon.

Would you tell us, please, your date of birth and where you were born?

I was born on April 2, 1902 in Aussig-- that was Austria-- now called Usti nad Labem. That's the Czech word for it.

And your parents' names?

My father's name was Richard Lederer. My mother's name was Josefina Lederer.

And your father was Jewish, I believe.

My father was Jewish. My mother was not.

And your parents were of German extraction?

Of German extraction, both of them.

And you, as a child, grew up speaking German, did you not?

Yes, I spoke German all the time.

Tell us where your city is located in the present-day map.

Aussig is located in Bohemia-- it was the province of Austria-- between Prague and Dresden, very close to the border and on the River Elbe. This is Usti nad Labem. Labem is the Elbe.

And tell us a little bit about the circumstances of your family. Were your parents professional people?

My father was director of a big enterprise mostly connected with coal and other industrial enterprises, and he was in a high position. And we were, let's say, upper-middle class.

Go ahead and tell us more about the circumstances of your family when you were just a small child.

As I mentioned, we were upper-middle class. There was never any question if we could afford this and that. We just

afforded as much as we could, I guess. And when I was about 10 years old-- we lived in an apartment house, and when I was about 10 years old, my parents had their own home built where we lived. And they lived there until I got married. It was a villa in a residential neighborhood, and garden, and so on.

Were you-- did you have brothers and sisters?

I had one brother, one brother who was one year older than I. I had many relatives in this same town because my mother was from this town, and she had many sisters and brothers. Most of them lived also in this town, and they married and had again children. So we were a very large family. Only the immediate family-- it had only one brother.

Was your family a religious--

No

--family?

Family was not religious. Religion they didn't take one way or the other, I must say.

How about your neighbors. Were they mostly of German extraction?

They were mostly German people living in this part of Czechoslovakia or Austria at that time, and only then after the First World War-- then more Czechs came in. The Czech population was definitely in the minority in my part. I didn't know anybody who spoke Czech when I was a child.

This is part of what is known as Sudeten.

This is Sudetenland, yes, and it became then very popular under Hitler.

As a little girl, you and your brother went to school right there.

We went to school. First years, I had private tutoring at home because it was considered too far to walk to school-- there were no cars yet-- and so I had private tutoring. Then we went to a private school, Lutheran parochial school which was founded by a relative, a great uncle of mine. And we went to primary school.

Afterwards, my brother went to so-called gymnasium. That is high school. And I went to a girls school.

And all the instruction, I gather, was in German?

Everything was German.

You were not getting instruction in Czech.

No, it didn't exist, only after the First World War. Then came one Czech primary school, and then, as long as I lived still there, there was another Czech high school. And long after the First World War, then also street names came in Czech, and the theater was German. And then for part of the year was a Czech theater there. So slowly it became Czech, but I never spoke Czech. You didn't need it in the country.

You could get along nicely in German.

Absolutely. Everything was still more or less German in our town, and none of us-- the children, my son, was a schoolboy, a little schoolboy. He had to start to learn Czech but not in school.

Do you recall as a little girl-- did you have a greater loyalty, if you want to call it that-- loyalty toward Germany or toward Austria?

Austria, only Austria. We had absolute loyalty to Austria, not Germany.

And in Austria, did you go to Vienna often as a little girl?

We went to Vienna for vacation or just visiting. I had those relatives there and visited them. And we went to Prague also then, and we traveled around some.

Your father was Jewish, and he had many-- a great extended family, many relatives?

He had some brothers and sisters, but only one brother had children, two children. And this was a younger brother, and these were my cousins. They were much younger than I, and they lived in Prague.

So his relatives were not in the same town as you.

No, they were not in the same town. My grandparents and the aunts-- and they came off visiting, and we visited them. But they are not living in the same town. Some of them lived in the Czech part of the country.

What's the first-- well, what are your memories, if you have any, of the conditions in World War I?

I only remember that there was shortage of many things at that time, but we never were hungry. You got always enough to eat, maybe not exactly what you wanted, so on. And there were certain restrictions which really didn't affect me personally.

You were a teenager.

I was a teenager. I was 12 years when the war started, and we were-- we hoped for Austria everything, but--

Did many of the young men whom you know of the town have to go to the war?

Many of my cousins. My brother was much too young, too. He never went, actually. But many of my cousins-- and one cousin, I think, lost his life in the war, one cousin only. One was in the Russian-- was prisoner of war in Russia for many years, but he came back, too. So we lost only one cousin.

Do you recall if any of your father's relatives had to go?

There were none. The brothers were too old, and there were no--

No young men.

--young people there. Maybe distant relatives but not immediate families. After World War I, the country was rearranged, was it not? That is, Czechoslovakia was formed.

Yes.

How did your family feel about that? It was no longer part of Austria.

Yeah, so we were not very happy, but we thought maybe everything will go smoothly. And we realized, naturally, that the Czech language will become now more important, and everybody has to learn Czech. But my age group-- nobody really thought about it. In town, all the street names were German until I don't know when, until long after 1918, naturally.

And the theater was German, and only in the last years we were there-- I think two months a year the theaters was in Czech, but otherwise everything was German. But slowly they moved to the Czech language, naturally, which was

understandable.

And do you recall that life changed very much for you because you were no longer an Austrian citizen?

No, really not, no. It was the Sudetenland.

And most of the people, of course, were German.

That's it.

Did you go to Prague more often?

Yeah, we went frequently to Prague, drove by car mostly or-- we had very good train connections with Prague, and we went shopping to Prague. And we went to the theater in Prague and so on.

Do you recall-- because now Prague is the capital of Czechoslovakia, do you recall whether the German population, of which you were one-- whether you were treated any differently by the new government, by the new Prague government?

I can't say. I didn't-- personally, I didn't notice anything. We didn't notice anything about it because we were too far removed from them, and naturally, they brought very many Czech-speaking people in our part of the country because they wanted to get everything Czech, which was understandable.

But stores and-- there was one or two Czech stores, but if you came in there, they spoke with you German, too. But there was not so much change yet. This world was done too slow to move over, and that's why the German population then had to Hitler-- they want out.

When the Czech government was established under President Benes, I believe, were Germans displaced or made to move away or leave their homes?

I don't know if they were forced to do this, but many did move away because many moved to Austria. I remember some families-- the moved to Vienna and Austria. They didn't want to live there anymore. But most of the people, naturally, had their business or their jobs in this part of the country, and it was not easy just to pack up and go.

Those people who moved to Austria did so for what reason? They still wanted to be Austrians?

They wanted to be Austrians. They wanted to be Austrians.

Their loyalty was stronger?

Yes.

And your own family--

But they were mostly older people. But otherwise, people who had their jobs or their business there-- they stayed there because everybody was hoping that these two-- not countries. They could do-- how can you say? The Czech-speaking people and the German-speaking people can get along together and it can be a life for both of them.

Do you recall that they did get along all right?

Yes and no. Sometimes there were, naturally, some disturbances between them. And the Germans resented the Czechs, and the Czechs resented the Germans. And they were sometimes disturbances. And in 1918, there were much revolts also and damage being done to different enterprises.

Damage down against whom?

Against the Germans.

The Germans?

At the end of the war?

Yes. Did you notice that-- perhaps your husband's family would have indicated. Were Jewish people treated any differently by the new Czech government?

Not that I know of. Not that I know of.

No reports from your husband's family or your father's family--

No, no, no.

--about anything like that?

No, no. Part of the family lived anyhow in the Czech part of the country, but my husband's family, part of my family, lived in the Czech part, always used to live there, and they spoke Czech, German like anything. And for them it was not so important maybe.

As a young school child, you learned other languages, did you not?

When I went to high school, we learned French and English in my school. In my brother's school, this was a gymnasium. There they learned Latin and Greek, and there are different kinds of schools over there where they learn different kinds of languages and so on, and you choose then the high school you wanted to go to.

And I went to a girls school, girls high school. There we learned languages, English and French.

Your parents were-- you say your family was upper-middle class.

I guess so.

Your parents were educated, well-educated.

Yes, yes.

And did you your family, your parents, when you were a child-- did you travel to other countries and--

We traveled mostly in our country or Germany, and it was usually in summer to go to a spa. Czechoslovakia, Bohemia had very beautiful spas, and my parents went every year to the same spa. And the children just went along.

Which spa was that?

Marienbad, Mariánské Lázně. And then my father started after we were already a little bit older, so let's say 10 years-- and he started to travel with us, but not far. Only as far in Germany we went to Berlin, and to Munich, and Nuremberg, and these places. Naturally, we frequently went to Dresden, which was very close.

You would read or your parents would read German newspapers or listen to--

German newspapers.

--German broadcasts?

Yeah. And my mother didn't speak-- I mean German-Austrian. My mother didn't speak Czech either, naturally, and my father-- I think he spoke some. I don't know how good he was in Czech.

I wondered if you listened to or knew what was going on in Germany. You were reading newspapers from Germany.

I think my father read also German newspapers for business reasons also, and we knew what was going on in Germany. And it frightened us, naturally, then.

That's a little bit later.

Yeah. But we didn't believe that it will somehow happen in our country.

How old were you when you-- when did you get married?

I got-- I was married twice. I got married when I was 20, but the marriage didn't take. I got a divorce, and I married my husband in '25. I was 23 years old. Just a minute. No, I married in '27. I married in '27. I was 25 years old. And my son was born in '29 and my daughter in '32.

The first marriage was not a Jewish man?

No, it was also-- he was also part Jewish and part Czech, yeah.

And in your second marriage, your husband was--

Was Jewish.

Completely Jewish?

Yes.

Did that seem unusual or strange at the time to be married to somebody who was partly Jewish, or it was completely--

No, no.

Were there many Jews in the neighborhood where you--

Yes, yes, very many, intermarriages, many intermarriages, too.

And many of these Jews like yourself or your family were German-speaking.

Yes.

I suppose almost all of them were probably--

Yes, all of them, all German-speaking.

Not so many Czechs.

No.

So you had loyalty, however, to Austria?

Yes.

And then, as you were married at age 27, that would have been about 1930 or so.

No, I was 25 when I married. In '27 I married.

The conditions in Germany at that time-- there were terrible inflation, and riots, and stuff.

Yes.

Did that happen in your part of the--

No, no.

It was peaceful where you--

Yes.

But you knew about those things didn't you?

Yeah, we knew about it.

Do you ever recall what your parents were saying about those events in Germany?

Well, they didn't talk much about it. They didn't like it, but they were not afraid that anything can happen with us.

They felt that you were part of a different country now.

It was Czechoslovakia already, and it won't happen. And then still they said, if it happens in Czechoslovakia or in Bohemia, then Prague will always exist. And nothing will happen there. And so it turned out differently.

Even as a young, young girl and young woman who was married and living there, were you aware of the fortifications that the Czechs built in the--

Partly, yes.

Was that something that any citizen would know about, could see?

I don't know if everybody knew it, but somebody who was really interested in what is going on-- they knew it.

Your husband certainly--

Yes.

And your father probably.

Yes. My father didn't live then anymore. He died in '36.

Do you recall the first time you ever heard of Hitler?

Of what?

Adolf Hitler.

No, I don't remember. I don't remember this.

When he was, of course, elected and became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, then you were-- were you aware of that personally?

I really can't remember this. I don't remember this.

And you don't recall your husband or your parents talking about that?

In a way, they were worried about it. But it was just-- it was just Germany, and that didn't affect us, what we thought.

Do you know-- do you recall whether you were aware that before he became elected he was a politician--

Yes.

--and was very outspokenly antisemitic and all that?

Yes.

Do you recall--

Yeah, but you didn't take him so serious. He wasn't really-- they said, oh, you can't take him serious and so on. Unfortunately, people were wrong about it.

Did they think he had a chance to be elected, to be chosen?

No. They said, no, he just had some people who believed in him, but the majority-- he won't get it.

He was Austrian, of course. Do you know if some of the people in your neighborhood were proud of him because he was an Austrian at first.

I don't think so.

Because he wanted to be German?

Yes.

Do you do you remember the attitude of your friends and neighbors at that time, in the early '30s, about Germany's progress?

Some people naturally liked it very much, and they were hoping that we will be annexed to Germany. But it was a minority of people I came together with.

Did you ever know of the Nazi party in the Sudetenland?

Oh, yes, there were Nazi parties, and unfortunately some of my relatives, cousins, and so on-- they belonged to it.

And what effect did that have on you and your family?

It didn't have much effect, only that one cousin didn't go with me on the street anymore. She didn't want to be seen with me.

Why not?



Because I was Jewish and I was not the right--

Partly Jewish. And the Nazi party in the Sudetenland was strongly antisemitic?

Oh, yes.

Just like in Germany?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

And so some families were divided because of this, I gather.

Yes.

Do you recall what your husband and-- what were your discussions in these days? You had young children by then.

Young children, and we know, really, what to do about it. Naturally, it was also very hard to decide to leave. My husband at the very well-going law firm, and to leave everything behind-- and my mother-in-law didn't believe in it, and she would never leave, she said. And nobody-- many people didn't believe in it.

And I know once the doctor came to see the children, and he said, my wife is crazy. She thinks we should leave, and how can you leave, and so on. People didn't believe in it. We thought about it, but we didn't do anything at first about it.

But then my husband decided, no, we have seriously to consider what to do. And then one day my brother was on business in Germany, and he came back. And on the border there he saw all the soldiers and everything prepared already, and he came directly to us and said, if you consider leaving, now you have to go.

Do you recall the year of that?

It was when we left, the year we left. We left in '38.

About September?

Yes, and it was-- I think we left two weeks later, a short time later, we just packed up and left for Switzerland.

Now, you say your family-- you had your husband, and you have discussed the possibility of leaving, what had caused you to even consider leaving? You must have been aware of things that were happening in Germany.

If they have so many soldiers massed at the borders, my husband and my brother thought they will move in, and what will happen then? Then you can't get out anymore.

Were you aware of what had happened to the Jews in Germany?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we knew it. And so my husband said, we just will leave and look in from the outside. We didn't seriously think we would never come back. We thought we will go to Prague.

We arranged already to have our furniture and everything shipped to Prague and rented an apartment there. This we had already done. But we left before we moved, and we left and went to Switzerland. And my mother-in-law stayed still, and she moved to Prague then. But it didn't help her either.

Do you recall the Anschluss?

Yes.

How did-- what was your family's reaction, your friends' reaction to that?

This was also part. Some of them were for it. Some were against it. The whole large family was just not one big family anymore.

But your beloved Austria had become a part of Germany. And also, it meant that Germany had further surrounded Czechoslovakia. I'm sure you--

Yes, yes.

You're aware--

It was all closed in.

Do you recall it caused a greater sense of danger?

I can't remember this really, no, but probably it did. I don't know.

Do you remember when Britain and France were meeting with Hitler to discuss--

Oh, yes.

The Sudetenland, what to do about that?

Yes. Yeah, we read about this.

What did your husband have to say? I'm sure you must have been--

So he wanted to leave, and he didn't want to leave. But eventually we did leave because he said, I want to have you secure, and we won't wait it here. We go to Switzerland and look from outside what will happen, what will happen there.

Do you recall whether he ever mentioned, because of his Jewish blood, whether he felt he would be in particular danger?

Yeah, naturally, but I, too. I was not so much in danger as he, but our children were. And so we had some relatives on my side. It was the same situation. She was half-Jewish. He was Jewish, and they had children. He left and went to Prague, not far away, to save her and the children.

It didn't save her because the children were considered Jewish and had to go to the concentration camp. She could have stayed in Aussig or go with the children. She chose to go with the children and never came back. So either the whole family had to go away or it didn't help them.

So you and your husband decided rather suddenly to leave and go to Switzerland--

Yes.

--even though you had rented an apartment in Prague?

Yes.

But what could you-- what could you take with you?

What do you mean? What take?

What could you take along to Switzerland?

Suitcases, suitcases with clothing, suitcases with clothing and this [INAUDIBLE] which hangs back there. I don't know why.

Did you have your own home?

In Aussig?

Yes.

Yes.

We had a house. It was my parents-in-law house, and my father-in-law was dead then already. And it was then partitioned in two parts. One part my mother-in-law lived in, and the other part we lived in.

So you--

We left everything.

Any property that you owned or anything like that?

Pardon?

If you owned property or real--

Yes, we had still two houses, apartment houses.

So you just left those?

Left those.

Did you have anybody there to look out for them?

No.

No?

It was gone then, part of it gone, and part of it we got restitution from Germany but after the war, long after the war then.

Do you know how many members of your family did not get out and were sent to the camps?

No, I don't know how many but many.

You were saying earlier that some of your husband's family, close members of his family, did not survive?

Members of my husband's family didn't survive, his mother-in-law, his sister-in-law, his brother-in-law, and cousins, and aunts, and uncles and also on my side one aunt, and two uncles, and two cousins, and then still more distant relatives. And they didn't survive.

So perhaps several dozen.

Oh, yes.

That many?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

You were saying you do not recall to which camps they were sent.

No. No, from some of them we didn't hear it all, and from some of them I think there came once a notice. From my mother-in-law, there are letters here, but they are mostly from Prague. Renata will tell you more about it.

So you decided-- and you had two young children at this time.

Yes. We wanted to bring them in the safety and not--

Do you recall the day that you--

Pardon?

Do you recall the day that you left?

I have the calendar where the date is on it, but I can't show you the calendar, somewhere-- I can't get to it now. I think it was middle of September or something.

1938?

Yes. It was a Sunday. We left.

On a Sunday?

We packed up, left everything standing in the house, didn't take anything with us. And my mother-in-law afterwards moved part of the furniture to Prague, to this apartment that she had rented. And part stayed there, and I don't know what happened. Somebody took her.

Had you or your husband made any attempts or tried to make any arrangements to leave before that? Had you ascertained whether you could go to America or England?

No, we knew to America that would take a long time, and we didn't quite know how. And we knew we couldn't just go off to America. We just went first to a-- wanted to go to a neutral country and from there then see what we can do. And so we went to Switzerland.

And my husband went there to a lawyer, and with him he arranged to apply for American visa and to arrange to get passage to Cuba, entrance visas. So we had to wait half a year in Switzerland because we could leave. We couldn't rent an apartment in Switzerland. Swiss didn't let you-- didn't rent apartments to foreigners.

And we stayed in a hotel, and this hotel closed for the winter. And the owner of the hotel was a very nice woman. She said, I can arrange an apartment for you here in the hotel. I had my mother living here once, and this can be arranged. You can stay here. And if the police comes, she said, I will tell them you're hotel guests. So we did this at a very primitive apartment. But we could stay.

Could you take money out of Czechoslovakia?

We had all the time something outside, and when we lived in Cuba, we got some small transfers still. But we had always-- my husband was always prepared.

You had money in Switzerland perhaps?

All over.

All over?

Switzerland and North America.

Explain why, why he--

It was not allowed, I think, but many did it.

Why did he feel it necessary to do that?

To be on the safe side if something happens, that we don't come out without anything to support us, which happened to many people.

So he felt all along that there might be--

And also always unrest, naturally, and little skirmishes between the Czechs and the Germans and then especially when Hitler came up and we heard from what is going on in Germany.

So he wanted to be prepared.

He wanted to be prepared, and he was prepared. He took us out, and we fared always very well.

And once in Switzerland and you had your children with you, were they in school?

They went to private school because, in Switzerland, the school year starts at Easter, and we came in September. And we didn't want that they lose time. Especially my son was already in school. My daughter just started school. So we enrolled them in a private school.

You were staying in what city?

Lucerne. And they did very well in school and finished this year with the other kids then.

Were you in touch with relatives back in Czechoslovakia?

Oh, yes, my mother-in-law and my mother both came once to visit us in Switzerland. My mother-in-law got permission-- she lived in Prague then. She got permission. I don't know-- I forgot how. And my mother-- she lived in Aussig, and she came and visited us there. And we wanted that my mother-in-law stays with us, goes with us, but she refused.

So you were aware of what was happening back in Czechoslovakia?

Oh, yes, oh, yes.

And you were aware when the Germans took not only Sudetenland but moved into the rest of--

Yeah, sure.

And you were in Switzerland for six months?

Yeah, about half a year, about half a year.

So in early 1939, you left there for Cuba?

For Cuba.

So that was before the war broke out--

Yes.

--in September of 1939.

Yes. We lived one and a half years in Cuba.

You went by boat.

By boat.

By ship, by boat.

I think there were no airplanes yet. I don't know.

And in Cuba, what was the situation there? How did you-- what did your family do?

Nothing, just wait and see. There were very many refugees there, and you banded together a little bit.

Explain why you chose Cuba.

It was, as far as my husband could find out, one of the few countries which gave you entrance visas, not visitor visa, and he wanted only to go to a country where you get an entrance visa, not that it happens to us that after three months, six months you have to leave again. Where do you go then? So that's why we chose Cuba.

With an entrance visa you could live there.

Yeah, we could live there. Nothing could happen to us. We could stay there if we wanted to.

You had a passport. What was your passport at this time?

Well, I guess it was a Czech passport. I really don't remember it. It must have been a Czech passport.

It must've been a Czech passport.

There was a Czech password, Alzbeta, sure. Alzbeta is Elizabeth.

So did you-- where did you live in Cuba?

In Cuba? In Havana, outside of Havana, in a residential part of Havana.

You say there were a number of other refugees there.

Yeah, yeah, quite the number of refugees there.

Enough for a large community of--

We were not much together, but still, there was some of them-- we got together. So otherwise we just waited our time

until we get a American visa. But it took long.

What did you-- how did you set your family up? Did you have an apartment there?

No, we rented a house. We rented a house. We lived very nice there, everything very comfortable. I had a live-in maid, and children went to school there, also to a private school, to an American school. We didn't want them to send it to the public school because it was Spanish-taught, and we thought not always mix them up with languages. So we sent them to a private American school, and they went there.

And, well, none of us liked it, I guess, but it was a nervous time. And you waited just until you get your visa.

You were in Cuba when Germany invaded Poland.

Yes, I think so. That was at the time.

You don't recall your feelings at that?

No, no.

And do you recall what you were hearing from your relatives back in Czechoslovakia?

They couldn't write much, really, either. They couldn't write much. You got letters, but it didn't say much as a rule. And then after the war broke out-- it was then already here in this country-- only through the Red Cross. They couldn't say anything either, just, we are fine, or-- I don't know-- had the flu or one of the children had-- I don't know.

Were you aware-- did when some of the members of you and your husband's families were sent off to concentration camp?

Yes.

How did you find out about that?

I think my mother-in-law wrote something before she left and that they expected and so on. She lived with her daughter, my sister-in-law, in Prague then. And I think she wrote or something. I forgot this. Many things I forgot.

But you did know?

We knew, yes.

And you knew that other members of the family were going?

Yes, yes. We heard.

Did you have any idea at all what it meant to be sent to a concentration camp in those days?

Yes and no. You knew about what it is but maybe not everything in detail. But I know that my sister-in-law-- she was sent-- I don't now-- to one concentration camp. I don't know. And she had to build a dam, and carry heavy boulders, and so on. And naturally, she was not used to this kind of work. That the only thing I really know.

And I know that another aunt-- she died of typhoid fever in a camp and also a cousin, as we found out. But when we found this out I can't tell you exactly.

Was it your impression that these people were sent to the camp to work?

No. My impression was that the very few, like my sister-in-law-- they needed some help there, and they couldn't make it and probably died. But they were not to work, no. No, they had to work something, sure, but mainly they were suffering. That was all. And I don't know.

Were you ever aware during those days that there were places where-- the camps designed to simply eliminate?

Yes, yes.

Did you know about that?

Yes.

Were you interested in the progress of the war, you and your husband?

Oh, yeah, sure. We were.

And were you aware of events in Czechoslovakia?

Of what?

Events in Czechoslovakia.

Events? Partly, yes.

Partly?

Yes.

Were you-- did you know about when the Protector Heydrich was killed?

Yes. But you read it in the papers. You read these things in the papers. So we kept, naturally, track of all these events, whatever we could learn about it, not that we liked to hear it.

And were you able to communicate with your relatives there through the Red Cross, did you say?

Only through the Red Cross. They wrote us through the Red Cross, and I wrote them, with my mother, my mother and sister, my mother-in-law not, but with my mother was the Red Cross the only connection we had.

How long did it take a letter to get--

I don't know anymore.

Do you have any idea?

I don't know. There were really no letters, really. It was just a little note.

And you were in Cuba for--

One and a half years.

And your children were in school learning, speaking American English?

English, yes. Yes.



Then explain how you came to this country.

How we came? We came to Miami. We entered Miami and from there came up to New York by train and settled down in New York, the outside of New York. Forrest Hills it was called. It's a suburb of New York City.

And there is stayed first in a hotel, and then we rented an apartment. And the children went there, then to public school. And we stayed there for two years. It was a very unhappy time for all of us. First, my husband got very sick, and then I got still sicker. And we considered we can't stay there anymore.

The war was still on.

Yes, and the children didn't like it in school either. And one summer, friends of us-- the children were in a summer camp, and friends of us took us with their car-- we didn't have a car yet-- took us with their car to Lake Placid, upstate New York. And frankly, I fell in love with Lake Placid, and so we decided, why not move to Lake Placid, get out of New York City and go in a quiet neighborhood, away from war, which was then already?

So we packed up in New York, which was not much packing up. We had some furniture we put in storage. Eventually we sold everything then, and we moved into Lake Placid and stayed there for four years.

And your husband was not able to practice law.

No, he didn't practice law.

Did either of you work?

No, really not. In New York-- as long as we were in New York, he had kind of an office because many of the refugees wanted some information, some help in different things, which he could do, but it was nothing where he wanted to stay.

And so we moved to Lake Placid. The children went there to public school, and my husband couldn't stand the climate. It was too cold for him. He got sick. And the doctor said he can't stay the winter there.

And we didn't know what to do, so we decided he will go away in winter and I will stay with the children. The children liked it very much there, and they had it very good there. It was nice for them. They had their freedom and could come and go, and skiing, and swimming, and all these things. And so I stayed with the children there, and he went away in winter.

Where did he go?

He went one year to Florida and one year to California. And then my son was ready for college, and he went into college. He went to Princeton, and we decided, we are four people. What, we want to live in three different locations? So my husband, and I, and my daughter-- we packed up and went for the winter to Florida, spent the winter in Florida and decided then, all right, let's go down to Florida.

And then we moved to Florida, stayed one year there, but my daughter and I-- we revolted. We said, we don't want to stay here.

Near where in Florida?

We didn't like it. It was too hot and flat and didn't care for it.

Where was that?

That was outside of St. Petersburg. And so my husband suggested, let's try California, so we came to California.

Where did you go?

Pardon?

Where in California?

Well, we went to Los Angeles first, and before we came, my mother came from Europe and wanted to make a home with us.

The war is over at this point. Is that correct?

Was over. And we didn't want to stay in the Los Angeles neighborhood. My husband knew Santa Barbara, and we looked at Santa Barbara. And we liked it there and decided to settle down there.

It was after the war. There were really no accommodations available, neither apartments nor house to rent. So we decided to have a house built, and we had the house built. And my mother couldn't settle down with us. Everything was strange for her.

She spoke English but still not fluently, and she used to live with my brother and his family. And she adored them, and she missed them. And she had two sisters living over there. She couldn't get adjusted.

After two years, she went back again, but we stayed in Santa Barbara until I came here in '66.

And here is where? Oakland?

Oakland.

Oakland, Oakland, St. Paul's Towers.

And your children were out of college.

Yeah. So my son was not at home anymore. He came only for vacations. My daughter went to college, went to high school first in Santa Barbara and then college but transferred also up to Berkeley, to the university. And they were not home then anymore.

And then my husband suffered a massive stroke, and I had to make some changes and decided to leave Santa Barbara and go to a retirement home close to the children. And so I moved with my husband up here. He died during the first year, and I'm still here.

Which was 19--

--67.

The year he died?

Pardon?

He died in 1967?

Yeah.

And what sort of communication, what have you since learned about the family members that remained in Czechoslovakia?

Some of them survived, and some of them didn't. Of the one who didn't, we didn't hear much, and some survived. Also, my brother and his family with my mother-- they had to leave then-- this was in Germany already. They left then for Germany, and at first they had to move around a little bit. Finally, they settled in Hamburg, and my brother did very well there and retired. And then we moved towards Munich.

Your brother is half-Jewish?

Yes, half-Jewish.

The same as you?

Yes. And then a nephew of my husband's-- he was in the Czech army. I don't know how do they call it, Czech army abroad in England. He was in England and joined there a part of the army. And he survived, and he lived then in France. And he died already. He's not alive now. There are some family members living of his.

And then some of the family members-- they lived in Germany, and some of them went to Austria. And they lived in Austria. And with some of them-- I was in contact with some of them, never in contact anymore. I have my sister-in-law still living in Germany and her family, and we are very close.

Have you ever returned to Europe?

Yes, I returned to Germany as long as my mother was alive to see her always, and afterwards I returned also as long as my brother was alive. And also after he was gone and my sister-in-law was already in a retirement home, too, I visited her, too. And she visited me here.

And one of her sons has frequently business in this country and comes always to visit us, too. And with the daughter and her family of my husband's nephew we are also in contact. They live now in England. They used to live in Germany, and then now they live in England. And we are in contact, too.

Your family is scattered.

Yes. And the father family-- I'm only in contact with my family, with my sister-in-law. Besides, I'm the oldest of many, many cousins which there were, and none of them lives anymore.

Do you have any opinion about how things are going back there now in Germany and Czechoslovakia?

I don't know, supposedly very good. In Germany, I think it was very good. It did very well after the war. They got many of the bombed-out factories built up again, and they did very well. And I still think they still do very well. And Czechoslovakia's supposedly all right, too, but I don't know much. I don't have anybody there.

Had heard that many Germans after the war, Sudeten Germans-- you knew they were moved out of there by the Allies and that many of them sued for loss of their property?

Oh, yeah, sure. But mostly you sued the Germans, and so did my husband. And they paid restitution, and most of the German people, really, not former Austrian-German people, who are living here in this country-- they get a very big restitution from Germany. And my husband got a small restitution because he was not German, only Austrian and so on. But he got us a small restitution.

And I, as his widow, still get something from Germany every month, but I couldn't live by on it.

But Austrians got a smaller restitution. If they were more German, they would get a larger one?

The Germans got the larger, the Germans, but the Austrians also, if they spoke German, they didn't get this big restitution. But we lost very much money there, very much.

You said you had at least two houses, I think you said.

One apartment house belonged to us alone. One apartment house belonged to my husband and his sister, and the house we lived in belonged also to my husband and his sister.

Have you heard about the new Nazis, as they are called?

Yeah, only what I read in the papers.

Do you have an opinion about that?

No. They insist that the Holocaust never existed and this is all fabrications, but I think they can't convince people this. I don't know. I have an un-good feeling. I had an un-good feeling when I went to Germany. I went there because I wanted to see my family, and my mother was 93 when she died. And I went as long as I could.

And my brother died, too, many years ago, but I wanted to see him still and so on. So I went, but I had sometimes an un-good feeling if you meet the really Germans, wondered how were they at that time.

When was this you were visiting your mother? What year? Do you recall?

Well, my mother died also 29 years ago.

So that would be in the '60s?

Yeah. And my brother died 20 years ago, and I was the last time over there 14 years ago.

Do you have anything else that you can recall that you would like to say about your life?

No, no. I'm glad to be here. I'm taken care of. I have my children nearby, so I guess I have to be satisfied. Sometimes I am. Sometimes I'm not.

Have you ever thought of what it might have been like if you had not left?

No, I try not to think about these things, try to put it out of my mind, and I wonder sometimes how it would have been if Hitler wouldn't have come and we would have stayed there. I can't imagine how it would have been.

Can you imagine if Hitler were there and you had stayed there? Have you ever thought about what might have happened to you?

It would have happened the same as this cousin of mine, happened the same.

Which was?

She lost her life in a concentration camp.

But you were only half-Jewish.

Yeah, and she, too.

She, too?

But her husband was Jewish. And as I said, the husband left to save them, but it didn't save the children. The children were considered Jewish and had to go to the concentration camp. And she had a choice. She could have stayed at home

or go to the concentration camp with the children. She chose to go with the children. I would have done the same, so in other words, lost their lives. Losing their life is not so bad, only how you lose it.

Do you have anything else you remember?

I don't think so.

No? Thank you very much.

Thank you. OK. Terrible if I have to listen to this, hear what I said here.

I think he did very well. Well, your daughter will-- your daughter will play it for you.

Pardon?

Your daughter will play it for you. I'm sure. You'll have to come-- you're off, are you, George?

No.