

About 10 seconds. OK, tell us about this photo, please-- who it is, the year it was taken, and the city it was taken in.

It is my mother-in-law, and it was taken in Furth. And I would say it was taken in, maybe, 1923.

Her name?

Her name is Senta Seligsberger.

Do you know how old she was at the time it was taken?

She would have been maybe 65.

--second this time. I'll let you know. Tell us about this photo, please.

That is my husband's father, Leon Seligsberger. And that was taken in Furth. Also, and probably in, also, 1923.

Why is it a different name?

Because when we came to this country and my husband was introduced to his first job at Hastings by a friend, she said to him, I cannot introduce you as Philip Seligsberger. That will never work. And she said she introduced him as Philip White.

And the name then stuck with him. And when we became citizens, we made it legal. I shed a few tears. Because I had so many things engraved with our initials. But I got used to it. So that was the change of name.

I'll let you know. OK, tell us about this photo.

Those were my parents, Gustav and Frieda Roederer. And that was taken in-- that was taken when they were on a vacation, probably in Hamburg. And it must have been 1922 or 1923.

--seconds.

OK, tell us about this, please.

This is my husband and I, Philip and Anna. And we were on a Sunday hiking to outside of Nuremberg, something we did so often.

Do you know the year?

The year could be 19-- oh, 1932. It also could be B34 '34, but I think it's '32.

Tell us about this photo, please.

This is my daughter, Ruth, with her husband, Alan Block. And that was taken probably in 1989.

Where was that taken?

I think in their house in Berkeley.

Tell us about this one, please.

This is my son, Leon White and his wife, Barbara, and their son Joel and their son David. And they live in Lexington, Massachusetts. And it was taken in their home.

In what year?

1991.

--about this, please.

Here, I am with my three children, Leon, Ruth, and Dan. And that was the occasion of Dan's daughter, Katie's, wedding in May 1992.

Where?

Oh, in Boston.

Tell us about this, please.

And this is my son, Dan White and his wife, Nancy. And it's the occasion of Susie's bat mitzvah, who is standing in front of her mother. Her sister, Katie, is the tall girl. And then there's my cousin, Rosie, and I. And sitting is Nancy's mother, Bella, and her sister. And that was 1991.

OK. Yeah, let's see. Yeah, tell us about this photo, please.

This is my daughter, Ruth, and her husband, Alan. And they were on vacation. But I really don't know exactly where they were. It could have been in Colorado this year, 1992. That's probably it.

--a few seconds. OK.

This is Ruth and Alan's son, Eli, who is 9 years old and who loves to play baseball. And it was taken this year, 1992. He looks like his father.

A few seconds.

Tell us about this, please.

And this is Ruth and Alan's younger boy, Misha, who is six years old. And that was taken, I'm sure, in their house with their dog, Jesse.

How many grandchildren do you have?

Altogether?

Yes.

Six. We showed them all. Yeah. When was it taken?

Tell us about this photo, please.

This is my husband, Philip White. And it was taken at my retirement party, I remember. And when it was-- I can't remember the date-- 1977, I think.

How many years were you married?

Yes, 1977. I was married 40, almost 45, years. And I had a wonderful, wonderful marriage, the happiest marriage and the best husband. [CHUCKLES] No, really, we had a-- we had just a wonderful marriage. It's all I can say-- no guilt

feelings of any kind. I didn't tell you yet where he died.

Eight seconds. You can start.

How do you know that your mother came to the Anne Frank House with some flour and some yeast? Who told you?

A friend of mine told me, whom I must have met her in San Francisco. She was on a trip. And she told me that. She told me that she knew. And then Ruth, at whose house she stayed, confirmed it. But she didn't want to talk about it much. But it was definitely true.

Have you been to the Anne Frank House?

I couldn't go. I wasn't-- we were in Amsterdam. Because we were twice, in '71 and '72, in Europe. And we were in Amsterdam. But I could not go. We even stayed in the same street in a pension, and I couldn't go there. That would have been too much.

The aunt, or other people in your family who were in Holland, what happened to them?

I think Linchen, her husband died before, and she died a natural death. Yeah. And well, their daughter-- their son went to London. I think I said that. And Eltz went, also, I guess first to London. And then she ended up in Geneva.

And your other aunts and uncles, who--

They died, yeah.

In the Holocaust?

No.

Natural deaths?

Mm-hmm.

Your mother was the only one of her siblings--

And her brother.

--and her brother--

Yes.

--to die in the Holocaust.

Mm-hmm.

What happened to Ludwig?

Ludwig went-- before we left, I think he went in 1933 already because he had a Gentile girlfriend. And that was very dangerous at that time. And he went to-- he had nobody in the United States to go to, so he went to Montevideo alone.

And later, he mar-- he started a business and was very successful, quite successful. Because I know he sent me, later, pictures of his house, his villa and so on. And later on, he married a woman who was older than he who I don't think she was Jewish, but she had had a Jewish husband.

And she had to leave Germany, also, with her son. Apparently the husband died or was killed. I don't know. And then I never got to-- I never met Ludwig anymore. I loved him dearly, and it was really very hard. We corresponded always.

And then, one day, when I came home from my job, I had a letter there that he had died, not even from her, from the son-- from her son. And that was very sad. Because he had, apparently, lung cancer but only for three weeks, which was, of course, good for him that he didn't have to suffer.

But that she didn't write to me or call me or do something was very disappointing. And I never heard from her anymore. That was the end. And he was only 56 years old.

And Fritz, Fritz-- Fritz was a person who was very intelligent, especially in geography and history. He was tremendously well informed, and he had traveled all over the world. He managed to be able to travel all over the world.

But he settled in New York then. And he married a young woman who stayed with him for six years. And I admire her that she could stay with him for six years. And apparently, then, they got divorced.

Because he was just odd. He was hard to live with. We always corresponded. And he came to see us. He was with us once in a while. And in-- I tried to remember-- it was in Montreal, there was the--

Expo?

Expo '67.

Who was there?

I was here. We were there. And then we visited in New York and visited with Fritz. And we really had a nice time that time-- very, very nice, a day with him. And I came home. And then he lived in a part of New York where a lot of Portuguese people had moved in.

And two guys held him up in the apartment house. And I think that, from then on, he really got sick. And then he had a stroke. And he was recuperating but apparently not enough. And then he died. He died on Yom Kippur of the same year.

And I flew to New York and arranged to bury him. So he was an excellent bridge player, too. And he really never had a regular job-- well, I think he did once in a while but not very much. He managed somehow.

When you and your husband came to this country in 1933--

6-- '36.

'36. You landed in New York?

No. We came directly-- 42 days on the ship. We came to San Francisco through the Panama Canal. It was a passenger-freighter combination ship-- steamer. And it was called The Oakland. It was from the Hamburg America Line.

And the officers said to us the first day that we shouldn't forget that, as long as we are on the ship, we are under Nazi jurisdiction. Because it was a German-owned ship. But there was Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. And they were very nice to us, anyway. I mean, we didn't have any trouble on the ship. And the baby did, also, very well.

And when the ship docked, it docked where?

In San Francisco.

And what did you think when you got off the ship?

Well, our uncle picked us up with a distant cousin of mine who was here already. Well, he took us to an apartment that he rented on Telegraph Avenue in Oakland, which was full of ants. And I think that's when I cried the first time in the United States. Because I didn't know quite what to do.

But see, my uncle-- I mean, I described him a little, Philip's uncle, to you. And he probably couldn't get a better apartment because he probably came in his slippers and without a necktie and in short sleeves and so on and didn't make the best impression. Of course, he was an older man by that time. He was in his 70s, you know.

So anyhow, I'm sure-- four weeks later, Philip found a better apartment in the same street but much, much better. And we stayed there until-- I think only three months, until we found a place to live.

And we found then an upstairs flat on Greenwood Avenue in Oakland, where we lived for three years then, with wonderful owners, a Mr. and Mrs. Stevens. She really mothered me. I mean, I had a little baby, and everything was so strange here. And she took care of me-- just a lovely, lovely woman.

When were your other children born?

In '39. And that was still in Mrs. Stevens' house-- yes. Yeah. And Ruth was born in '44 on Edgewood Avenue in Oakland, where we lived, then, for 16 years. And I had her all by myself.

What do you mean?

She flew out. [LAUGHS]

Was there anybody home?

Yes, my husband was downstairs on the telephone, telephoning the doctor, I think, at the moment, or maybe an ambulance. Because he thought we could still make it to the hospital. But she was in a hurry. And she was only six pounds and some ounces. And I had her right there in front of me.

And then he called the doctor. And our friends, Dr. Shmuel, and his wife came. And then I left in the ambulance with Dr. Shmuel. And my two boys were upstairs and said, goodbye, Mommy. [LAUGHS] And so that was very nice.

You mentioned a retirement dinner. What did you retire from?

I retired-- well, I worked first-- I must say that I worked first-- when I never had enough money for Hanukkah gifts. My husband was-- well, he started in the receiving department, and maybe by that time, he was a salesman.

But still, things were not that plentiful. We were without a car for 10 years. We didn't want a car until we could afford it. And so I think a friend of mine worked already in the school cafeteria. And that, I thought, was a good idea. So I applied.

And I started at Westlake Junior High School in Oakland and only worked for two and a half hours washing dishes-- mostly washing pots and pans, dishes were done by a machine-- and serving at lunchtime. Because I wanted to be home when my little girl would come home from kindergarten, or from school, at 2 o'clock. And I was.

And then they moved me to Hamilton Junior High School in Oakland. And I worked there for four hours then, made sandwiches and things like that, and also served and didn't wash pots and pans anymore.

And then, later, I became the cook for 1,000 kids and 50 teachers. And I did that for a good four years, enjoyed every day. I worked with 10 women. And we had a good time. We worked hard, but I enjoyed it. I really liked it.

And then we moved from Oakland to Castro Valley because my husband became manager of Hasting's there-- of Groden's. And so he let me do it yet for one year. But it was hard. Because I worked from 8:00 to 2:00 in the afternoon.

And we never had a break until we sat down at 1 o'clock for lunch, which was wrong, of course.

Because it's a law that when you work four hours, a woman should have a break. But anyway, I sometimes had to stop on the side-- I mean, while driving home to Castro Valley. And that wasn't good. So I stopped.

And I had seen that the principal secretary always came for a break at 10:00 into the cafeteria and had coffee and had 10 minutes' or 15 minutes' break. And so I thought, why don't I start working in a high school and do the same thing, be a secretary?

And so I took a year and refreshed my typing skills and also learned something about different office machines. And then I applied in the Hayward School District. And I became registrar and secretary to the vice principal at Tennyson High School. And I stayed there for 18 years and loved my job.

I made a special job out of it, and it was wonderful. And I had nine-- I served nine vice principals over the 18 years. And they all said they worked for me instead of me working for them. I really-- I had a wonderful place there. I enjoyed it a lot and made lots of friends with lots of students and was invited to weddings and to baby arrivals and so on.

When you're there 18 years-- and some came back from the war. And I had one student get to Annapolis, a Philippine student, who was so nice. Because I wrote the transcripts for the students when they were ready for college.

And you know, you can make something out of a job. And I did. And then, when I retired, that was-- when that picture, I cut it out from a big picture.

How did your husband die?

Well, in '78-- he had had two heart attacks, one in '73 and one in '76. And he wanted to go back to Israel to see how it had changed after so many, many years. Of course, we had seen films. But he wanted to see the real thing.

And he was in wonderful condition. You wouldn't have believed that the man has a heart problem. And the doctor said, you can go. And we took two days' rest in London. And then we went to Tel Aviv. That was in March '78.

And then we spent a few days in Tel Aviv. And then we took a tour to Jerusalem, I think a three-day tour with stops in hotels. And then we were in Jerusalem and did sightseeing. And he was so happy to see. Because he remembered everything. And he saw so many things that we had seen in '33 still around.

And then, in the middle of the night, he called me. And we were in a hotel on the 12th floor. And he called me. And he said, I can't breathe. I can't breathe. And I thought-- I didn't even think of heart at that very moment.

Because it was a very cold day. And we had been walking around. And I said, why don't you put on your sweater? And he said, no, I don't feel cold. And I thought he might have bronchitis, something all of us-- because of that cold day, and he wasn't warm enough.

Well, then, of course, I realized. And I put a robe on him and a robe on me. And I called immediately the desk and said, I need an ambulance. And he called me back and says the ambulance will come in an hour. I said, this is a matter of life and death. Call a taxi. And by the time I got him into the elevator and down, he was already half-dead.

Then there was a taxi that didn't want to take a dead man. And then the ambulance came with a doctor. And so he went into the ambulance. And we went to the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. And that was-- aside from my husband dying, this was one of the worst moments in my life.

And I have talked-- I belong to Hadassah. I've always belonged. But this was-- the treatment I got there, I will never forget in my life. Because they shoved him into a cubicle. And there was a doctor, a middle-aged doctor, and two very young nurses. The doctor did nothing but flirt with those nurses, didn't pay any attention to me.

It was 1 o'clock in the morning. And he said, your husband is dead. And you come back tomorrow morning in the morning to see what is done next. He didn't offer me even a cup of coffee. He said you take a taxi, and go home to your hotel. He didn't say I'm sorry or anything, neither the nurses.

I got the dirtiest treatment that you can ever imagine. And that hurt me a lot. After all, I was a stranger in-- but of course, I was told later that when it's-- and my husband didn't even look very old. But when it's an older man, they don't care. I don't know.

Luckily, Philip had a school friend, Fanny, with whom we had dinner not that night but the night before. And I was able to call her. Because in Israel, you can call so early. I called her at 7 o'clock in the morning.

She couldn't believe it, of course, because he was so well. I mean, he was wonderful. And she came over, by the way. And then we went to the Hadassah. And then they wanted, of course, they wanted to convince me that he should be buried there. Because it is special blessing when you can be buried in Jerusalem.

But I called my rabbi, and I called my children. And I took him home. And so that was-- and for him, it was wonderful. Because he hardly knew-- he didn't know what happened. It went too fast. By the time he was put in the ambulance, he was already gone.

So I was happy for him. After all, he was a heart patient, and it had to happen sometime. And he and I knew that it would be-- we knew very well. We made the most of it every day.

How old was he?

69-- not old. So that was the story.

I want to ask you, what images come foremost to your mind when I ask you to think back on your life in Germany up to 1936? What images flash before you?

What images? You mean, from early on?

[INAUDIBLE]

I don't know, my wedding and time with Philip, when we were just friends. It's something unforgettable. Because, for instance, I don't think, at that time, I took the streetcar on Shabbat. And he didn't, either-- I don't think so. Because we would meet-- because his store was closed on Saturday.

So he was in Furth. I was in Nuremberg. And I would walk-- we would usually meet at the cemetery-- not in the cemetery but around the cemetery. Because it was about halfway. And then we either would go to his place, to his house, or to my house. That was the way we would meet. And those are all very dear remembrances.

And the times with my mother-- I had wonderful times with my mother and with my brother, especially Ludwig. And when Hitler came to power then and Ludwig had to make up his mind very, very quickly what to do in order not to be taken to a concentration camp, those were exciting times. And we tried to make the best of it.

So it was good, OK? You had to make the best of it. It's all you could do. It was hard to say goodbye to his mother, very hard, because he was such a good son. It must have been terribly hard for him, too.

But we did the best for her, for sure. And we corresponded with her until it wasn't possible anymore. And she probably was very-- I don't know how her mind worked. But she probably couldn't understand why her Philip didn't write to her anymore.

My husband always said that if we make it again here, I mean, if we lead a decent life, then we have lived on two continents and have had almost a richer life, in a way.

Shelli, did you want to--

Yes, I'd like to ask a few questions. Did your family consider itself to be German?

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, yes.

And your father served in the First World War as a German soldier?

Right, yes.

Was there a sense of betrayal of you, as Germans, by the Third Reich?

Of course.

How did that feel?

Bad-- very, very bad. Because we looked at ourselves as Germans. We loved Germany. Germany is a beautiful country. And all of a sudden, it wasn't ours anymore. Nothing was ours. And we were not considered Germans anymore. Of course, it was very, very sad.

You and your husband recognized that early and knew you had to get out.

Yeah, right.

Other members of your family stayed longer?

Yes. The doctor, for sure. Well, and my mother and her brother and sister-in-law, also, because they thought that we would be able to get them out yet. That's why they stayed in Germany for several years.

Are you able to distinguish what made you so anxious to go and they [INAUDIBLE].

Because we were young, I think. And we just realized that there was no future for us at all and that we had to leave. There was no other question. I mean, in '33, we knew for sure that we were going to leave.

You talked earlier about your weekend hikes and that, at a certain point, villages would no longer allow Jews to enter.

Right.

Were those villages that you had previously been comfortable in

Yes, of course.

Had you known the people?

No. No, but we would go into a restaurant and either eat something there or-- of course, we always had food in our backpack. But still, something to drink. Just the idea that we were not allowed to go in there was very bitter, very sad.

Had there been a gradual sense before the forbidden entry that you were not welcome?

Yeah, it came gradually. I'm sure it did. It always got worse and worse, definitely, no doubt about it.

At some point, did your identification papers change so as to identify you as Jews?



No, I don't think so. But they gave us a lot of trouble getting out. And we had to pay a big sum of money. It was called Reichsfluchtsteuer, a tax to get out of Germany, yes.

Do you recall how much that was?

No, that I don't. But I know that it was quite an amount of money that had to be paid. But luckily, we were still lucky to take all our furniture and belongings with us. I took, for our little baby boy, I took clothes and shoes until age five. I didn't have to buy him anything for a long, long time. Everything for him was in there-- shoes, all kinds of different sizes. He was very well dressed. [LAUGHS]

And I brought the perambulator along. And I brought, even, I remember, a German washing machine, old-fashioned thing. But we just brought everything that we thought would help us for the first few years.

In your parents' home, was German the language that you spoke at home?

Of course. I didn't-- I never learned Yiddish. I never-- to this day, I don't know it. It wasn't spoken in Germany. I never learned it.

Do you know what happened to Dr. Muntz and Dr. Klein?

Well, I had to get into-- Dr. Klein was killed, that I know, in the concentration camp. But Dr. Muntz went to Israel with his wife. And I'm sure he had children. But I do know that his wife died. Somebody told me once.

And I had to get in touch with him-- when was it-- when we wanted to get reparations from Germany. And I had to show-- because I had something like Social Security in Germany while I worked for them. And so I was able to get his address in Israel.

And I got-- we got-- in touch with him. And he was able to confirm that I did work for him. I had also-- they wrote a letter when I left and told in the letter that I worked for them and so on. But I think we needed something from him yet, in person. And I got it. But that's all.

Did you ever find out what happened to Madam Lilienthal?

No, no nothing.

Any of your friends [CROSS TALK]

But she must have died a long time ago. And after all, she was in Switzerland, so she was safe.

Did you ever learn what concentration camp your mother had been sent to?

Yes, and I should-- the strange thing is that my husband kept such wonderful order with all the papers and so on. And I couldn't-- and I know that there were letters from my mother. And after he died, I looked for them. I couldn't find them. And I still, I cannot. I could not find-- that part, what happened, I don't know.

So anyhow, it may have been Ravensbruck or something like that. We got later-- I mean, Rosie and I got a letter from the Red Cross, which told us. And see, that letter, I don't have, either. So what happened, I don't know. I couldn't find it. I found other things that I hadn't known about. But I guess those things happen.

Well, Anna, we want to thank you very, very much for sharing this wonderful--

You're welcome.

--story of your life. It's incredible. I'm sure we could go on.

[LAUGHS] No.

I'm sorry that it has to come to an end.

Right. Well, thank you for the interview, for asking such good questions, both of you.

It's just persistence is-- We can turn it off. Thank you.

Persistence.