

This morning we're interviewing Lisa Burnham.

Burn-ham. [LAUGHS]

It is March 13, 1996. We're at the Holocaust Oral History Project at 400 Brandon Street in San Francisco. My name is Peter Ryan. Along with me is Elizabeth Ryan. And on the videotape is Katrina Sadler.

Could we begin by you telling us where you were born and when?

I was born in Vienna, March 1, 1921. It's hard to remember, [LAUGHS] to think of it.

Can you tell us a little about your family, how many people were in it?

When I was born, I had a brother already, who is exactly 13 months older than I am. And he was already then a very pretty child. There are very few photographs of me because I wasn't as pretty a child. I was fat [LAUGHS] and jolly, I think.

I had a beautiful mother, who came from Hamburg, Germany at the end of the First World War to marry my father, who was 17 years older than she and already a very, very prominent physician, famous for a particular operation that is still under his name again. [LAUGHS]

What operation is that?

It is a pituitary operation through the nose, where you don't have to open the skull. And he and Harvey Cushing, which is more of the household word, were in cahoots. [LAUGHS] And so he was very well known. I think one of the highlights as children is that Freud also came to his office.

And he didn't care for Freud. He didn't care for psychoanalysis because he needed it desperately himself. [LAUGHS] So that's how.

Did Freud come because he was having trouble with his nasal.

Yeah.

Yeah. So there were four in the family?

Yeah, there were four.

And can you describe the living conditions and what it was like in the family?

Well, at that point, we had hospitals and sanitoriums all around that area, in the eighth district. And I think the most important thing in Vienna is what district are you from. The minute you mention it, you know exactly what type of person it is. That's how Vienna is divided, the society.

What should we know about the eighth district?

Well, that's it. I would call it probably an upper middle class. It is more on the intellectual side and somewhat on the artistic side too. So that's the eighth district.

The best district of all is the first district. So you walk down the street I was born in. And then-- and this is how I fell in love with Vienna, just adored it since I was a little girl. I think I must have been rather sensitive to what goes on outside, always. As you cross one of the lesser nice streets, big, big streets, you come into there, into the first district. And this is where all the beautiful buildings are and all the beautiful parks.

And I think every single day of my life I was taken by the governess for a walk down that street. And I thought how lucky I am to live in this gorgeous place. I'm still going to cry. [LAUGHS] I get somewhat sentimental. I just loved it.

And we played in the park. There were three different choices. And this is where you play in the sandbox with other kids. And there were other children around there.

Were these state buildings and parks, or did people also live there? Was this a fashionable neighborhood?

Well, yeah. Before you get there, there are arcades. I think they still have them. And people lived there in very-- fancy apartments. Ours was not so fancy, but it was big, bigger than my house is with my five people in it-- and maids, and cooks, and I don't know what all. And there they have much more fancy apartments down there.

And then you have all the buildings that used to belong to the emperor and empress and king and queen, as they were, of Hungary. And that has become my emblem. I don't know. You probably didn't see it when you parked in front of the garage. I still have the double eagle. You'll see there in the thing.

The Austro-Hungarian--

The Hungarian Empire, yeah. And then I used to dream about this because of all the wonderful stories you hear about the empress and then the tragedies and so forth and the great love and blah. I liked all of it.

And then they had the big theater. And the buildings are still the way they were, which is amazing how they kept it up in spite of the Turks, who practically ruined Vienna. I used to always used to like to write. But I don't know where else to go.

What was it like in your family?

Well, we had a papa, who thought he was the kaiser, the king of it all, and ruled the family with iron fists if necessary. And we had a beautiful mother, who-- and my father was-- that's why he needed somebody-- I didn't realize it, unusually jealous. He was a terribly jealous guy.

I don't know what you call it when people are so jealous. He developed that worse when he got older-- persecution complex. But I didn't I didn't realize it at the time, of course. And I was able to sort of negotiate with him. On the other hand, he could be very loving to me too. So it was difficult.

What do you remember negotiating?

Peace. [LAUGHS]

Peace between your parents?

Yeah, and they were always fighting. And my brother and I slept-- it was a complicated household. You come into the apartment, and first was the kitchen, the maid's room, the most important number, maid number one, whom I adored. I even remember when she came to the house when I was still in the playpen.

And there was a huge mirror there in a big room as you came in. And way off there was a little room. And that was for the cook. And during the day would appear a day maid to help the other maid. I mean, it wasn't exactly poverty-stricken, but not rich either. And one, we had one bathroom only.

And as when we learned about the Turks invading Vienna before they came into the inner city, they saw water that a baker was getting ready to bake his bread, his daily bread. And all of a sudden he noticed the water was making waves. Aha, he said. The Turks are in front of the city ready to invade Vienna. So I used to, when the governors that we had would let the water run for our-- I guess, maybe we only had a big bath once a week or something. I would always look

and say, oh, there are waves. I think the Turks are coming to Vienna. I was petrified, things like that.

So were the Turks sort of the bugaboo people as you were growing up?

They were always the bugaboo, even when I went to visit them, the Turks were pretty low [LAUGHS] in spite of their culture.

They had invaded and conquered Vienna at some time in the past?

Yeah. I don't know if it was-- I don't remember it all now-- once or twice, I think. And maybe once the Viennese were able to push them back after all-- so something like that.

So you had a complicated family.

Complicated family.

And you were a negotiator.

And I was a negotiator because the fights my family had, I think that was my parents. And sort of interesting, that was, I mean, devastating. I never dared to talk about it with my brother, who shared my room. And much, much later, not so many years ago, he said, you know, when we thought the parents were fighting, I think they might have been making love too. And so the noises that you hear-- [LAUGHS] but I don't know.

There definitely was fighting and the jealousy. And they used to go out.

Did you know, even at a young age, about the jealousy?

Well, yes. I mean, you could hear them. [LAUGHS] And they went to a lot of parties. We were very social. And they went out an awful lot at night. And I missed my mother terribly. I didn't see her very much at all. She was always doing something for my father or visiting patients.

He had pupils from all over the world who came to Vienna to study with him, this method. And so that was an interesting time. And for me too, I was terribly shy, just terribly shy and tongue-tied. And I wasn't beautiful like my father wanted me to be. And my brother was the good-looking one, which has a bit changed [LAUGHS] in those years.

And many stories like that-- and then there was the Jewish question. That was, I mean, quite intense.

In Austria?

Oh, yeah, and in Vienna. At least--

In Vienna.

Yeah. All along we knew about it. So it wasn't--

What did you know?

For example, talking about playing in a sandbox, and there were some big bullies coming up. And some of us were playing, you know. And he would say to the boys, are you a Jew or are you a Catholic? And then if you say I'm a Jew, they come and beat you up. And if you say Catholic, they leave you alone.

Well, they came after me. And I don't know exactly the time frame, but I was fairly young. And would pull-- at that point, I know I was 11 because I was growing my hair long, had pigtails, and they would pull them and say something about you dirty or something like that. I didn't like it, but it's something you sort of have learned to live with.

And to belong to a Scout, a Boy Scout-- they didn't even have Girl Scouts-- was a sign that you belonged to the Nazi parties and stuff. So I mean, we knew about it. And yet-- I have pictures of that-- the places, what you call it, were so beautiful. And the flowers, and the lilac, I can still smell it I just adored it. I mean it was just gorgeous.

And the big theater, and then the university there where my father also taught, and so on and so on.

Were you ever tempted to say you were Catholic?

No. No. And I used to be-- [LAUGHS] and that went, even when I had to emigrate, and I would stand there and say, no. I am what I am, and I'm not going to change my religion for anything, only if I believe in it. You know, being a romantic, unrealistic [LAUGHS] [CROSS TALK].

What was your understanding of why they were persecuting you?

Well, that's a question I'd like you to tell me, to answer. God only knows. I mean, us, the Jews, I have no idea. I think they were afraid of them. They were intellectual, quote, "superior." And yet, I was so proud of my grandparents, my father's family, whose father apparently couldn't read or write but he would play card games with all the notables in that little town. And I remember the little town. I went back to visit it.

Like the mayor, who thought who wasn't Jewish, and the Catholic priest, and he, the Jewish thing. And he was taking care of land that belonged to a member of the aristocracy. So I was proud, but he wasn't an intellectual. He didn't even know how to read or write. And he married my grandma. You know, my father's mother.

Where were they living?

And they were living in-- God knows. You tell me what the hell you call it now. But I went back there after the war had gone there-- [POLISH], [GERMAN] in German. And that was Czechoslovakia then. And so-- but what is it now? [LAUGHS] Slovakia-- I have no idea.

How far back could you trace your family?

Yeah, that I could have brought. I have a family tree. But that is my mother's side, actually. The father was a-- what are those Jews called? They're the Ashkenazi. And what is the other?

Sephardim.

Sephardim. And which one came from-- that's how my mother's family started out. But I guess they would be the ones that came from the East, whatever.

The Ashkenazi.

So I think they would be the Ashkenazi, other the Sephardic. And the interesting thing is, when I saw a picture of-- what is that great Egyptian guy who was killed? Had a peace-loving--

Sadat.

Yeah. And my father looked like him, with the high cheekbones. And I've always wanted to study that too, to see the connection because there obviously was a connection, with the high cheekbones. And he had that. I don't have it because that's always, to me, a sign of beauty they say. Cheekbones is important-- and the small eyes.

And there were a lot of Jewish men who looked something like that, with the slits, more smaller eyes. And so that's-- [LAUGHS] And yeah, my mother was so beautiful that, even now, when I come to Vienna, and they say, oh, I remember your mother, who would be now a little over 100 years old. She was so beautiful, and you don't look anything

like her. So that was my life.

Mm-hm. In her shadow.

And my shadow, but I adored my mother. I mean, I didn't realize that until much later. Those are the things that you know when you grow up.

Tell us about your early schooling.

Well, people went to that-- what would you call it? A district school, whichever is closest to you. And now people that I've met, who also happened to come from that environment, they all went to that sort of school. And I wrote a rather amusing story about my schooling at the time, my first day and what it was like-- a dirty, neglected little school. Well, that feeds in from the left side, people who had-- whose family was nothing and very poor, and then from the side where I lived, more on that area, people who were affluent. And so they had already a start when you go to school.

I still remember my first school book and all the pictures in it and that I could read the first page. I begged to have that read to me because my brilliant brother had taught himself how to read already, before he went to school. And the stupid sister, who was also not pretty, hadn't. So they finally let me read that first, got that book for me, and I read the first page-- [NON-ENGLISH]. And I remember all the beautiful pictures, every picture.

What was it a story about?

There wasn't a story. It was Mimi, a little girl with the red cheeks and with dress. And Mama is the mother. It's an older woman. Im means inside, and Um means, at. I mean, it doesn't mean anything. But I thought it was the most beautiful story. It's sort of like a music [LAUGHS] or something.

What memories do you have of your early schooling?

Well then I went to a class and, of course, did better than most kids. And there, starting my first-- well, I don't know. I think I've had guilt all along, the great Jewish guilt resting upon me all the time. And at one point my mother had left a lot of clothing that we didn't need anymore in the school with the teacher, to distribute it as she saw fit. Well, I don't know whose fault it was, my mother's or my teacher. But all of a sudden, the teacher made all the children come by my desk to shake my hand and thank me for the clothing.

And I thought I wanted to die and never, ever go back to school. I had nothing to do with it. It was, I think, the worst day. And I think most children knew that I was Jewish because [LAUGHS] in school, you have to take, in the first four years of schooling, as well as all goes on. And you have to take every subject, of course, that's offered to everybody. And one of the subjects was religion, they call it.

So this very non-Jewish feeling-- you know, I was an Austria as far as I was concerned-- had to have religion. And religion was taught by the-- and I can't remember all the-- the floppy hats and cassock and the curls. And they all came from the second district. And the second district was the-- now they call it the-- what do they call it? The Matzos Isle-- Island is what they call it now. But then it was the Jewish things, where you don't go. And you cross the Donau, the Danube channel actually, not the big Danube.

Did you have to go there, or did they--

No. No. They come to the class. And yeah-- [LAUGHS] and the Catholic kids stayed in class where they were. I don't know how many were in the class. I'd say at least 20 or more. They stayed in the class. And every classroom has a crucifix in front. I think they still have them.

The Jewish children go into another classroom. And I think there were five of us or what have you. And so cassock, whatever his name was, would come in the classroom to say the Jewish prayer. And so what did all the kids do? They turned around so they didn't have to face Jesus. And I said, well that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life. I

mean, I didn't put him on the cross. Besides, he was a Jew at one point. So that's just ridiculous.

So I was the only one who was facing Jesus and said my Jewish prayer. Of course, my religion teacher didn't like that already. And then we had to learn Jewish prayers and ancient-- some Hebrew and also--

Was there any religion in the home?

No, that's it. We had none.

No?

No. So, my mother didn't know anything about it. I never, never heard-- that's another thing. What do you call that language that the Jews use?

Yiddish.

Yiddish-- never in my life until I came to this country, turned on the radio one time, and there was this weird language. And I said, well, that's not anything I know. It's not German, certainly. It's not Czechoslovakian. [LAUGHS] What the heck is it? And I was told, that's Yiddish. I had never heard about it.

And then I also wrote a rather interesting story about my first going to their synagogue. They didn't have reformed temples or anything like that. They had a real synagogue or forget it. I think maybe they had two. I only know about one, which was within our neighborhood.

And my father came from a family of eight. And they were how many? I think half and half, girls, boys. And some were-- most of them were still alive. And so one aunt, who I liked-- and they were all nice people. And she would take me to the synagogue. And I wrote a comparison.

I mean, to me it's rather interesting story about the Catholic, which I love. You know, you can kneel down and pray to God. And all your sins are taken away. I mean, they don't need a Freud or anybody else. [LAUGHS] It's cheaper. But I couldn't have that. But we had friends who were baptized. I mean, that was the big thing.

Most Jewish families baptized their children when they were born. So they wouldn't have to suffer being Jews until--

Baptized as Catholic?

Pardon?

As Catholic?

As a Catholic or Protestant. Protestant was better because there were fewer of them. And also, you don't have to kneel down if you didn't want to. So a lot of them were Protestant.

So they were actually taken to church to be baptized?

Not the Protestants, but the Catholics, yeah. The Protestants, in fact, when we all had religion, and the Catholics stayed in this castle with the Jews in that classroom because there were five or six of us or something. and there were two Protestants, and they were sent home. [LAUGHS] So that's how the division of religion was.

So, well, then I was--

Did you feel anything as a result of being segregated that way and everyone would know who was what religion? Did that bother you?

As far as I remember, not. I mean, I can't really think that it did. The only time it bothered me so much was when my aunt took me to-- I think I went to two-- and I can't remember. I've pulled them all together-- for the first time to the synagogue. And that experience I will never forget.

Tell us.

First of all, the women had to sit upstairs, which I didn't like. I think when I came in, one thing I did like, I think they had a ceiling-like, to make it look like stars of a heaven or something or other, as I recall. And so we went upstairs. And downstairs were men with hats on. I mean, in the Catholic Church, you take them off for heaven sake. So they were.

And then there was a-- in all these observations I had at that point--

How old were you then?

And the way I remembered was maybe a 10, 11-ish, or something like that, maybe younger. I'm not totally sure. And then during intermission, so to say, [LAUGHS] the men came up to say hello to some of the women. When my auntie wasn't there, but some friend of my aunt's came up. And I thought, oh, god, it 's going to be another boring thing. Yeah, because everything-- they took the Torah, and the kissed the Torah, as far as I remember. And then they stuck it back.

And they didn't sing pretty songs. They're just chanting. And nobody can understand what they were saying. Neither could I understand the Latin that they had in the Catholic churches. But at least there was incense. And it was a little more interesting to me.

And mystery, more mystery?

More mystery-- and music, beautiful music. And there was just chanting [CHANTING] like the Egyptian chant sort of thing.

So you identified with the Jewish religion?

Not particularly. But when the guy came up to talk to me, and I thought, oh, God, they were going to tell me how are the children, oh, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then he said, well, you know, I' the-- what is why I carry this bag? And she said, well, no. Why? And then he was telling the story.

And he said, you know, and he pulled out very carefully. It was wrapped in a handkerchief, a small pistol. And I thought, my God. And he said, you know, I carry it with me all the time. It's become so dangerous in Vienna that you don't know when somebody will come and attack you, or the Nazis, somebody will carry off or whatever it is. I don't go without a pistol.

And I was so shocked. I couldn't say how shocked. I was.

Tell me, do you know what year that was?

And this is what I'm not 100% sure. I thought I would be 11-ish. And I'm 75 now, so we figure it out. I don't know. And what happened then is I came home. And my parents happened to be there. And they said, well, how was it? And I just couldn't answer them.

I ran into my room. I threw myself on my bed, and I cried. And I said never, ever, ever will I go back to the synagogue. I was petrified at someone who had to carry a pistol around in my beautiful Vienna. It was devastating, totally devastating. And that happened in the synagogue. I didn't like it anyway. And I never, ever wanted to go back.

Did you go back?

Not-- certainly not on my own. What we did have, and that I, in a way, I liked. I didn't. And also at my aunt's house, one

of my aunts, we had-- I guess it's Seder, isn't it, where you say the Jewish prayer-- [NON-ENGLISH] See, I still remember it. [LAUGHS]

That's so [INAUDIBLE].

And I was the youngest of all the cousins. And God knows, I had to say it, the prayer. I was petrified. On the other hand, with everything you get this delicious food that I adored. [LAUGHS] So that's the better part of it. But--

Do you remember the depression having much impact on your life? Your family?

That's a good question. Not financially on my father. I mean, he was a physician. But I remember standing in the hallway-- We are five stories going up from down below-- and listening to the grownups talk. And they said, did you hear that plop, plop, plop-- I don't know-- had thrown himself out of the window? And then we had some other friend, non-Jewish-- had nothing to do with that-- who was non-Jewish and who was the-- the other things, when I think of things that happened then, I keep talking through them. And it's very hard for me to translate because both languages are there.

The lawyer of my father's, and he committed suicide. And that was terrible. I mean, he left his family in debts. And there were two children, more or less my age, in fact, and she herself. And that was the only-- what do you call it when you have your-- the first communion that I went to. And my mother was the-- oh, now I can only think of the German word. What do you call it? The one who sponsors the child.

I can't think of it anymore. And the tradition in Vienna is you take a, which I love, a fiacre, a horse and buggy thing from the [NON-ENGLISH] Platz, from the most important place in Vienna. And they are decked out with flowers and just beautiful. And the girl is in a white dress with lace and all that. And take her for a ride through Vienna, take her from the church and take her to it.

And my mother was her-- I don't know why I can't figure it.

It's not godmother, is it?

Yeah, a godmother-- the Jewish godmother to the Catholic. And I was allowed to come with them. Well, I was in seventh heaven. And why can't I have it?

You really had a love affair with Vienna, huh?

Oh, absolutely. I really did. But talking about the school, the other horror was that you're called by your last name in schools. And then I had a first--

What was his name?

Hirsch-- Hirsch. And now it's the Hirsch method. Oskar besides, ooh, what a name. And I was Lisa, but always called Lisel. And so my name was Hirsch, Lisel, two names. Every child in class had about four of them. You know, the Catholics of this saint and that saint. And they have their special birthdays. And I was not even Elizabeth, which I would have loved. But I was only--

And then they would-- the teacher would say, Hirsch, Lisel, you [GERMAN] too much. You talk too much, and things like that. And I hated my name, the shortest name in the whole class. It wasn't fair. [LAUGHS]

Did your family talk much about politics?

Three things you don't talk about-- politics, religion, and money. But I was totally aware of what was going on.

Do you remember anything about Dollfuss?



Of course, very much. Very much. But that was quite a bit later. At that point, we finally moved out of that big apartment, which has unbelievable memories, and moved to a big house that my father had been searching for in a beautiful district, the garden district more or less of Vienna.

Which number now?

Pardon?

Which number now-- district?

Oh, this-- well, we still were in the 18th, which is not as good as right next door, like between Kensington and Berkeley. You know about that distance. It was the 19th. And this is where all the beautiful old homes were. But some are still in the 18th district too. And that was a very, very, very lovely house. I mean, that was a fancy house.

Do you remember what year this was?

Oh, yeah. That was-- I think we started somewhere between I was 10, 11-ish. I think 10 still when we moved. And so a lot of good things I do remember about the house. I mean, that was very interesting, what was happening.

Well, it's up until we moved, we had to leave. I don't know where to start really [INAUDIBLE] to describe the house. It was a three-story house. And way down below, where you come in actually at the entrance, which would be more or less the first story. And the idea, and you could-- you had to come in in sort of a round room. And it has books at one side, a bar that you can open and pull a chain. And you light up, and there are all these after-- well, we didn't have whiskey or anything like that. But they're the after dinner drinks and liqueurs and stuff, which has some significance, and then a big, big room after that. And that was actually the living room.

And there was a grand piano and all that kind of stuff and furniture, which I hated. It was specially designed. And this is why I became a decorator, because it was overstuffed. Where the heck do you ever put it except in a big room. And who has that? Certainly not when you emigrate-- and some interesting pictures on the walls. And off that was a dining room, a formal-- a much smaller, but a formal dining room.

And there you have three different dishes. I mean, the very best china, and then an intermediate china, and then the every day china, [LAUGHS] also very interesting. I mean, and then there was someplace where you rinse the dishes and then the kitchen. No, the kitchen was down below. That's right. And then you had a dumbwaiter and stuff like that. I mean, living not exactly in poverty.

And then there was a little balcony with stairs going down into the garden. When I think of it, oh. And something was sort of missing. I mean, it was all very formal. And in the spring, the roses would come up. And they'd come up on either side of that staircase.

And of course, when I was going to get married, I was going to walk down the staircase. And I couldn't figure out, should I go the right side or the left side. It was a great problem.

And then in the garden were every kind of apple trees, for example, every kind of nut trees. It wasn't a very huge garden really. I mean, now the standards are so different that we were not that tremendous a house. But still, we each had our dog still at that point.

And then on the second floor I had a separate bedroom, thank god, and my brother did. And mine had interesting wallpaper. It was sort of English, in red, and his was blue.

Did you like your room?

Well, not really. [LAUGHS] But on the other hand, it was my own. And--

What didn't you like.

--my treasures were in there. And so on. Why didn't I like it? And we had our own bathroom, a I recall. I really don't know. Because I was decorating in my own mind the kind of furniture--

[INAUDIBLE].

--yeah, that I wanted. And I didn't have that kind of furniture. That's about it. But I had a-- a armoires. What you call them-- I don't know-- here even? They don't have closets, but they have a--

They still call them armoires.

Armoires, that's what I thought. And then something hanging on the wall with books and my favorite treasures, as they grew-- and always dogs. I was-- but in the end it saved my life.

Were you interested then in designing?

I think I always had an interest. Yeah. And I really wasn't an artist. I know that. But I had, quote, "taste." And I was very color conscious. And there were funny things about color conscious.

Good memories in that house?

Well, yes. I would say so. Yeah. Yeah. And we were far removed from my parents' room. They had separate rooms. And so that, in a way, helped. But they were out always then. And I always missed my mother. And that's a very, very important part in my life, missing my mother, ever since I was little.

Were you still with the mediator?

And at that point, I don't think so much at that point, really. Just trying to think how it was then. And it's very hard to remember all the details. But there was always a point where the family always meets together. And the big meal was always at well, what you would call now a lunchtime or at 1 o'clock. That's when the big meal was. And then later on we'd eat at a less formal place.

And at dinner very often my father would invite an interesting patient or interesting visitors. And so I, as I said, I was so tongue-tied that I didn't know how to express myself. So a British lord said to me, you speak beautiful English. Of course, I hadn't said one single word except yes or no, that sort of thing.

And so but I met very interesting people through my parents. And that was very important in my life, of course. And also, my father would sponsor little-- like you've heard of the Vienna [NON-ENGLISH]. Does that mean anything to you? We have them here. now too. And they're young boys that sing.

Oh, the choir.

The boys' chorus, boys' chorus. And he would sponsor one of those. And then when we'd go to our favorite place near Salzburg, [PLACE NAME], my father would bring in somebody less fortunate to stay with my brother. My brother could never get along with anybody, so I was the one who-- you know, he was bright, and I was stupid. And I loved to play. And I was outgoing with children, not so much with grownups. So that's how that was.

Was your mother verbal?

Yes, she was very, very verbal. And again, later in life, I realized she always talked for me. I didn't have to talk. And that was very bad. So you know, mothers can be bad for many reasons. So then I didn't realize how that hampered, me. And in many ways that came out later.

Missing your mother was a theme that went through many years.

Yeah.

Was she literally not around enough?

My father wouldn't let her. So that was-- and the fact that everybody, as I say, they still say, your mother was so beautiful. You don't look anything like her. I mean, I didn't realize it because I lived with her. But I don't think that helped me very much. [LAUGHS]

You keep mentioning that your brother was so smart, and he was so pretty, and you were not.

Yes.

And you were not smart. And yet you learned to be the mediator. I didn't learn it. I think it came to me. Yeah. I think I liked people, I think, always. And I didn't want to-- and I like peace and quiet and things like that.

You say your brother couldn't get along with anyone, so it fell to you. So those were the skills that you began to develop, huh?

Because he-- actually, as he grew up, it was terrible. We were very close, my brother and I at one point. And there are many stories about that. But later on, he couldn't get along with my father. And to his end, to my father's end-- I think I dreamed about him last night. He would not make peace with his father, even as he grew up. It was terrible.

Did you try to mediate that also?

Well, in some ways I did because my father said he was so mad at my brother. And that was, I mean, not so very-- well, yes, long ago because they're all now dead for so long. He said, well, I'm not going to leave my-- Erwin was his name-- any money when I'm dead. And he didn't have that much anyway anymore, at this point. And I'll leave it all to you.

I said, no way will you do that, absolutely no way-- down the line, half the line. I'm not going to put up with all that stuff. So what he then did, he, instead of doing that, yes, it was halfway down the line, but it was in a trust so that would go to his children. On the other hand, the were things about the will, I think-- do you have children? [LAUGHS]

Well, watch out what you do when your time comes for a will. I'll tell you. That's the end [COUGHS]. Excuse me.

OK.

So let's go on from when you move to the new house, around 1931.

Oh, yeah.

What happened then?

Where was I? Well, again the--

Did you change schools?

Yes. I remember I had to change. Oh, yeah. Well, I changed schools already. When did I? Yeah, and then I had to change again when I moved out. And that was also another neighborhood school in the 18th district.

And already at the age 10, you get weeded out in the school, so to say. And the more intellectually inclined children go to where there are gymnasiums and realgymnasiums and [NON-ENGLISH], whatever you call it.

Humanities.

Well, yeah, it's difficult to say-- gymnasium. And they go for eight years. And then, hopefully-- well, actually, anybody could go to the university. You don't have to be weeded out then. If you can pass your exams, fine. When you go to the university, take what you want. So that's another thing.

So I went to another school. And that was rather interesting because there, lo and behold, the principal of this very small school was Jewish, which is hardly ever heard of. I think there are two like that in all of Vienna. One is a private school, and this one is public school. And one of the teachers, in French, also was Jewish. And so that was rather interesting.

And so what you do after the first 10 years, you sort of almost repeat everything that you have learned for the first four years in that school and then the next four years even more so, add on a few others. I was in one where you take a foreign language and Latin. I had to have Latin. And I rather enjoyed Latin because I like grammar for some odd reason. Like German, I enjoyed.

I always liked writing. I was have done a bit of that. And I enjoyed, somehow. But I couldn't stand mathematics. I mean, that was-- and physics. And the things that did, good lord, horrible things. Because I had to be always good at home, so in school I really worked it all out. [LAUGHS]

Did you get in trouble?

Well, there I didn't say who done it. Otherwise, I would have been in real trouble. I locked the physics teacher, whom I detested, in her little lab at one point and wouldn't let her out. And she was knocking on the door. And then I-- at intermission or whatever, you have a mid-morning snack. We were hanging out the window from up where the classroom was and threw apple cores at the passing cars or people or whatever was standing. [LAUGHS]

And when somebody from down below came up and said who did it, no one, nobody had done it. And I don't think I let anybody know.

Were the teachers still saying that you talked too much?

Well, now we had so many different teachers at this point. And the first grade, the grade school, there was only one teacher. But she liked me so. I think some of them did. Yes. Yes. She talked too much-- probably the mathematics teacher, big fat woman, who was hideous.

And the other thing about the teachers in the schools in Vienna, they were very not educated in all subjects. They knew their subject. Now, one would teach German and Latin, for example. The other one was Latin and philosophy. And then they came from different backgrounds. And some of them were, and we knew who was, underground Nazis.

How did you know who was?

That's a good question. I don't really-- right now, I'm not sure how I can answer that question. But we always knew. And some just were plain Austrians. And I always claim that the Austrians, who are nothing but Austrians, are the dullest people in the world. The only thing that feeds a little bit of, I mean, a lot of life into them was the Hungarian and the Czech, the Czech people. I mean, they really had it.

And so when you mix those together, they were great. I mean, they were wonderful people. But by themselves, they could be duller than dishwasher-- dishwater.

Now, when you say an underground Nazis, what years are you talking about now?

I'm just trying to think. Well, that was the year when I was 10, 11. I think it started to show.

So it was just before Hitler actually came to power.

Right. Not too many years before that, but still-- And other than that, I can't really tell you how we knew.

Did you know much about what was going on in the world?

Yeah, pretty much and maybe more-- like, geography was a terribly dull subject for me. And I said the only way you can learn geography is if you go there, if you travel. And this is when I just-- I hadn't traveled much. I went to Switzerland at the age 10. That was a very interesting time for me.

And before I went, I read every book I could find on William Tell and all this stuff that went on so that I would know what I was seeing, what it was all about and things like that. And they had the underground, the Tyrol. You know, that was partly Italian and partly Austrian-- and the fighter who fought for the Austrian part of it.

And all that knowledge I still have. The other things that I should know something about, I know zero about.

What you were interested in stuck.

Anything I was interested in would stick.

How did you come to go to Switzerland? Were you with your family?

Yeah. Now, that was a very interesting-- that would go back to your question about my father. There was a congress. I don't know if it was called-- no, it wasn't quite called Harvey Cushing Congress yet. But it was the first neural surgery congress in the whole world. And all the famous neurologists, neurosurgeons were present. And they asked my father too. And he wasn't-- and I can't even think of the word I always called him.

He was betwixt and between. He was actually an ear, nose, and throat person. And so he was with the people who were authorities on eyes, and nose, and ears-- he was not too much into ears-- and of course the anatomy of the upper part. So he was a little bit of everything, and nothing too-- what do you call them. And there was a fascinating-- and there was a huge congress.

And I remember, I was 10 years old. And they had a waiter for everybody behind you, including me. And they served wine. Would you like some wine? And I thought, sure. And so they poured me wine, actually. It was good. More wine? Sure.

I've never talked so well in all my life, whatever language I could speak. And I was sitting next to someone who became very important in my life, even now-- 10 years old. And he was going to be the man I was going to get married. And I really was in love with him. So we were sitting next to each other and having a ball. And when my parents looked across the table and saw what was happening to me, they got me out of there. I had to borrow a bathing suit. I think there was a swimming pool someplace. And they threw me in there.

Because you had drunk too much wine?

Yes. And I still remember the color of bathing suit and lying on my back and looking up. I don't know if you've heard of the Jungfrau. I mean, that's a famous mountain in Switzerland, snow covered. And how beautiful. It was. So that's one way of learning about [LAUGHS] history and life.

A lot more fun than studying geography.

A lot more fun than studying geography.

Did you know much about when Hitler took power? Were you--

Oh, yes. Good lord. [LAUGHS] As I said, I was exactly-- well, how many years ago? 70? 60? No. Well, he came March 13, 1938. And before, as I've just mentioned. And the first thing I said to my father, well, we can't stay here. And he said, oh, Mr. Hitler would never throw me out. I'm so well established here, and everybody loves me.

I meant when Hitler first took power in Germany.

Oh, the Reichstag thing. Well, I knew about it, but it didn't particularly affect me. I think some people even moved out there already, that I knew of. And that was in Germany, in Munich.

Do you remember anything changing in the schools as a result of Hitler coming to power in 1933?

Not in 1933, no. No.

And Dollfuss, what do you remember him doing?

Yeah, I think it was, again, I was about 12 years old. And they had a civil war in Vienna. Is that right? I hope I don't get things mixed up. But I think there was.

1934?

Yeah. That was 1934. Yeah. Yeah, that's about right.

Did you see anything?

Oh, yes. I mean, that was scary as all get out. Again, my father had to get out. People were not allowed to get out of their house. And that's when we were in the big house already, in the garden. And so that was pretty awful, when you had to be stuck in your house, and you hear about it somehow.

And they were shooting the Social Democrats against the National-- against the Nazis, so to say. And there they had something else. That was the, more or less, a Catholic party. That wasn't Social Democrat. That was Heim, where they'd take care of the country itself, the more Vienna part.

Did you understand who was fighting?

Yeah, of course, that we knew because there were children in my school that were Social Democrats, and some that were not. And so we knew plenty about that.

Was your father political at all.

No, not at all, but he had to get out to see his patients. And while all-- and I was scared to think that he had to go out. And while all this was going on, I think I just went into the garden, into our garden. And all of a sudden things came falling out of the sky. And I thought, oh my god, my god. They're bombing. They're bombing us. They're bombing us. And I raced in the house screaming.

And then when I realized what it was were leaflets telling you to either join this party or that group. But I don't even remember. Well, that was a relief. But I had a nightmare about bombs falling over Vienna for years. And it wouldn't let go. I mean, even when I came to this country. That was a terribly traumatic experience.

Starting from the civil war.

From that civil war.

How long did that fighting go on? Do you remember?

Not very long, I mean, the shooting. No. No. I think within three days, as I recall. But I'm not an expert. And remembering things when you don't think about them is--

Did you remember who you wanted to win? Or did you even care?

Well, yes. Certainly not the nationalists. I think I probably more the Social Democrats, but they were sort of a little bit too much for me. And I wanted to-- Dollfuss was cute. I mean, there were so many, so many wonderful jokes. He was just a little guy. I don't know if you recall him at all. He was very, very small.

And what we loved to do as youngsters is sit around and tell jokes, and politically of course, and about Dollfuss and all this. So that was fun. But, I mean, he meant no harm, as far as I could tell. But I am certainly no political expert. I'm just do by emotion. That's the problem in my life-- still do. Yeah.

And then he was assassinated?

And then he was assassinated. And that was terrible.

Do you remember that?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Terrible.

Do you remember your parents--

And I remember where it was, because now, you know how many times we've gone past there. That's in one of the most beautiful areas, near the castle there, if that's what you call it-- castle, burg. I mean, I don't know what you'd call it-- in one of the apartments that has been used for political leaders all along. I almost had the name, and now it leaves me again. So, yeah, that was terrible, and he was--

Were your parents upset? Or did you have a sense of what was going on?

Oh, yes.

They did talk about--

Yeah, well I don't know how much they talked about it. But all I know is that, certainly, we-- we were all very upset about it.

Did anything change after that?

Well, then they had Schuschnigg. Well, he was another love. I mean, he was great. So that's right. They had a good, good guy. And so--

Was Dollfuss considered a good guy?

Yeah, well, because he-- I don't think he was harming anybody, as far as I remember. And I don't think he-- I don't know how much strength he had, and power. But they were-- and neither had Schuschnigg. I mean, they were more on the peace-loving side, those guys, as I recall. I mean, you ask my brother, maybe he-- he always knows everything that I don't know, and still does to this day forward. [LAUGHS]

So did the Nazi party get stronger in Austria then, after Dollfuss was assassinated and Schuschnigg came in?

Well, that's a very good question. And I don't think I can really answer. I would think so. I would think so. You can see them--

Do you remember, would they have parades or things like that?

Well, they sure have parades, for heaven's sake. And that I remember very, very much, even in my younger years. Yeah, I think, possibly before we moved into the big house. Yeah. Because I was closer to the center. And they had-- and I still can hear it in my ears. Then that was, yeah, I was still 10-is or so, nine, 10. And you could hear them. It was very scary.

And they had a vote. That's what it was. They were voting for somebody. And I think I was always more or less the middle, which is the Christian party or so. And they would yell. And one was left, and one was right. But this one was the middle. I mean, they didn't have that, I don't think.

So the left would be the Social Democrats. The right were the National Social Democrats. And they would go up and down the streets in hoards-- not that many people in Vienna, for heaven's sake-- and yell, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. And I still hear it in my head-- scary, I mean, to me. And at one point I had to be in it. That's when Schuschnigg's-- before Schuschnigg's abdication and before Hitler's coming. And I had to walk--

You had to be in the parade?

Not-- well, I was caught up in people. They were shoulder-to-shoulder, trying to vote, either for Schuschnigg or against him. And he wanted, of course, the vote. And, of course, I wanted him to have it.

Was this the plebiscite?

That was the plebiscite. Yeah. So that was shortly before this all happened. And actually, that was another long story. I was supposed to be picked up by my father's chauffeur. I don't dare to say mine. Because I'd rather be seen dead than go near even my school with a chauffeur. I mean, no way. And what I used to do is-- we lived uphill-- and take my bicycle to school. But as usual, I was late or something many times. But no way would I be taken to school.

So that was the plebiscite at that point. And the chauffeur this time was supposed to meet me someplace. They knew things were brewing, but they didn't know what. But nowhere could I meet him because of what was happening. And so I had to walk all the way from downtown to where we lived, which is a good half an hour plus, maybe almost more than that probably. And that was terribly scary, terribly scary.

What was scary?

To walk through what that mob of people.

Excuse me.

Yes. And I turned to get where I was supposed to get, and I didn't know who was behind me and what was going on. So that was a scary, very scary.

Was there much talk about being a Jew at that time? Was there much antisemitism out in the open?

Well, yeah, it became-- well, after that particularly is when it really started, after the plebiscite. I mean, after Hitler was coming in. That's when it really started. I mean, that's when life changed overnight. And that was--

Tell me some more about that.

Well, you have to sort of lead me into it. This is when the Nazis were already on the streets. And there the SA and the SS. But we haven't even gotten to the Holocaust. And the SA had khaki uniforms, and the SS had the more elegant black uniforms. And they all had boots And they would-- I don't know where to start really.

For example, I was, at that point, still too scared to get out of the house-- that was the day after he had moved into Austria-- because I didn't know what was going to happen. No, maybe I did already and went to school that first day.



And there were the underground Nazis taking over. They were the principals. The other principals were thrown out.

So they weren't underground anymore.

No. No. They were the overground, too much overground. And they were terrible. And they said, well, we have to make changes here. And now all the Catholic go to the left side of the classroom. And the half-and-halves go to the middle of the classrooms. The Jews sit there. And the Protestant-- I don't know-- sit in back or something, the Jews. And that's the way it's going to be.

And I don't know. It was so bad that I couldn't go to school. I mean, obviously, they didn't want people in school anymore. So they threw us all out, the halves-and-halves. Some maybe stayed on. That I don't know. But the Jews, I mean, couldn't go to school anymore. And this is when life really started.

And they came to all the Jewish households. And if there was any woman living in that household that was not Jewish, either the man was rounded up, taken away, or the woman couldn't be there anymore, and on and on and on. They wanted to get my father no matter what, on whatever count.

Because he was prominent?

I don't know. Because he was heading a Jewish household, I guess. And also because he was known. Well, that actually saved his life, that he was known. And then down below, all these years, live a chauffeur. And when he first came to work for us when we moved into the house, he had divorced. So I think he has left the Catholic Church and taken on a young, a young woman with whom he was living, this man and wife.

And my mother said, well I hope you're not going to have a baby. And they had a big, nice apartment down below. And I used to go visit there a lot. And they said, oh, no. No. No. So what happened is, of course, the baby was born. And I just, I loved babies, just adore babies. And I would go and take care of the child. And he would mostly do gardening. And my mother had learned how to drive and how to swear. And so she could get around. And [INAUDIBLE] whether that's the best way. There weren't that many cars, mostly more prominent people who needed a car, most like my father did.

And he would do the gardening. And he loved the gardening. And I loved his baby. And so we got along very well. And his daughter from the first marriage was upstairs. She was then the washer woman, so to say. She did the laundry and the ironing and stuff like that.

And also, somebody would come in, a seamstress, and make dresses. And they were not the fancy dresses that my mother had made specially. They were handmade stuff that was cheap. And, oh, I've had so-- uglier than ever and so on and so on.

And then I finally dared to go out on the street. And I said, well I can't stay in the house forever. You know, what do I do? So whenever I--

What had you heard about what was going on out there?

That people would be rounded up. And they will, again, round them up and they make them scrub the sidewalk and pour-- it's really so horrible for me, I could never talked about it-- pour acid over their hands and stuff like that, or take them off to their army quarters. What do you call them? They have a special name.

Barracks.

Barracks. Barracks.

Barracks, to barracks. And even the men, put a gun to their-- I mean, that's one story I heard-- put a gun to their head and said say that you are dirty Jew. Say it. Say it. And if they don't say it-- and I had an older friend whom I'd met. And

he was more like I was. And he refused to say it. But they didn't shoot him. They said, well you have so much gumption, go.

And things like that-- those are the things. But friends of mine were picked up. I mean, they were not all shot. But you know, acid, and I even heard that after I went back to Vienna to visit and things like that. And then women-- well, anyway, and so I walked out.

And so when I saw the SA or SS men coming toward me, I crossed over. But it was a pretty wide street. So then another guy would come on that side of the street, I crossed over. And that went on. And then I decide, well, this is for the birds. I mean, I can't go on like that. While I'm here I just have to do the best I can.

While I'm here-- was there talk about not being there?

Oh, yes. I mean, you had to get out. And that was a difficult thing. You needed an affidavit. You had a string that long that you had to do all the stuff.

So when did they first start talking about leaving, your family?

Well, I started the minute-- the next day.

The minute Hitler came to power, in '38.

Yeah. And then we learned so many things about the-- it depended where you were born, and about getting out, how quick. Now, my brother had been slated to go to Oxford, England to study medicine already before he-- before he got his matura, which is the-- you have to pass the last exam to get out of the gymnasium before you can do anything. And he was very bright. And he went to the special gymnasium that I mentioned, where you would take Latin and Greek. You don't have to take a foreign language, but he had studied English privately.

We both had English lessons. I hated English because I didn't like the sound of the language. So I didn't study it. I was always hiding someplace when [INAUDIBLE]. So that school let him finish his year. But I never could finish mine. So I still haven't completed a year and a half of high school, but graduated on a scholarship from Radcliffe, cum laude. So I guess I didn't-- [LAUGHS] I didn't do all of the-- to heck with high school.

Of course, the schools are much advanced in Europe. And I think that still holds quite a bit.

So you grew up and figured out that you weren't so stupid at all.

That's-- yeah. And I'm sure my dad, he wasn't going to pay for my college. He said you're too stupid. Go learn how to make hats. I said, well--

Was this typical of the way women were looked at at that time?

I don't think necessarily so because there are a lot of women doctors, lawyers, even engineers I think-- not so much-- who have become also world famous. So I don't think it's- I think it's Pop-Pop.

So there really wasn't much talk of leaving until Hitler came in.

Yeah, that's right.

In your family.

Yeah.

And not much fear before he came? He had to be afraid?

That's hard to say. I think that's very hard to say. Well, what is the word? I can't think of either German or English. Apprehension-- there was a lot of apprehension. I mean, that we had.

Did you have--

Apprehension? Sure. [LAUGHS]

Did you know what you were afraid of?

Yeah, I was afraid of Hitler coming in, didn't want him at all. And also, I had boyfriends in other places in the world. And there was Mussolini there, and I was madly in love with an Italian boy, who-- and they were not as prejudiced, really. But they had nice Mussolini, who was not exactly the greatest, but not as scary at all like Hitler. And then they finally strung him up, so that was OK.

So when he came in, you started talking to your family about leaving?

Oh, yeah, right away. And I had unbelievable friends in France, who wanted me to come to stay with them. But I couldn't get a visa to go into France. And so, actually, the first one who had heard about the difficulties of the Jews after Hitler came in was a Catholic priest from New Jersey. [LAUGHS]

And he wired us or something. He's going to leave some money for us. And to come on out. Get out. Get away from Austria. That's dangerous. Come on out. He would help me.

Who knew him, that he was-- what was the connection there?

Well, this is where my father had all these connections, medically speaking. The sister of that priest was sent to Vienna, the only one who might help her because she was suffering from the pituitary tumor. And lo and behold-- and that was such a dramatic operation. I don't know if you realize it. Because the tumor lied on the nerve that goes to the eyes, so you become blind.

And then the tumor-- he has radiation through the nose. Then the tumor is shrunk, disappears. They can see. I mean, what can be a happier, more dramatic operation? And so he had several of those. And then he would be, also-- well, there were some maharajahs from India, and he would charge them all he could because they took over whole hotels with their entourage and stuff like that.

But the lesser people who couldn't afford much, he would sometimes even not charge, so I understand. And maybe I'm making him more of a god than he was, in many ways. So they would all come to help him, when they wanted to take my father away. And how wonderful a guy he is.

And they had a trial. And a trial in Nazi time can mean a terrible thing.

They had a trial for your father?

Yeah. And they were going to have a trial for him.

About what? What was the trial for?

Well, two different things that I recall-- one was just that he was-- I don't know really which comes first. Maybe it was about the chauffeur. The Nazis had come into the house and seen how the chauffeur lives down below, which I thought was really paradise for them too, big places there. Is that all you have? You join our party, and we give you everything you want. You can make money, and you become a big dingaling in the-- the [INAUDIBLE] or whatever here-- in the SA or SS or whatever the heck it was. And you'll make a lot of money. It'd be wonderful for you. and your family. We'll set you up, and you'll have a wonderful life.

I think what this guy out there does, this Professor, Dr. Oskar Hirsch is nothing. And we will get him. And this is no way for anybody to live in the party. So this is when they had it.

And then that other woman who was a patient of his came and told them how wonderful he was as a physician, what he had done. And no way would she let them do anything. We had another maid whose boyfriend belonged to the SA, to the Nazi thing. And they were helping us. [LAUGHS] I mean, we had nothing but help from all these people who have gotten to-- I should say my parents. they loved my parents because-- that is the way I do remember the good things.

They'd ask some Jewish families who, all of a sudden, had made money, you know, like my father had probably because they were prominent physicians and what have you. But they were showing it. They were flinging it around, their goods, they're beautiful this, and their beautiful that, and furs, and I don't know what all. But my parents had friends from the bottom to the very top. And that is what I always say I appreciate of my education more than any schooling, going to-- cum laude, which doesn't me damn bit of good ever-- overqualified for whatever I wanted. So, that's all.

So did you stop going across the street when you saw them?

Yeah. Well, absolutely.

And how was that for you? Tell me, what was it like?

Well, I obviously survived. It was scary, sure.

Were you--

Oh, sure.

--hassled at all?

I don't remember having been hassled.

Yeah.

And in a way-- and that goes way back to my childhood, about this being Jewish. I think, as I got a little better-looking maybe, I was always-- people always thought I was Spanish, or French, or Italian. And once there was a public dance, where anybody could dance with whoever wanted to. And some guy, who I thought was simply atrocious, came and wanted to dance with me. And I don't know how to get out of it very nice.

So the first piece of conversation was, they said, are you Italian? I said, no. Are you French? No. Are you Spanish? I said no. I am from Palestine. And he disappeared, never to come back again. So sometimes it comes in very handy, to be Jewish. But there I was 14, so-- oh, no, I just had just turned 17. So that's--

Anything happen to your brother when the Nazis came in?

Well, no. He was the lucky one. They were so wonderful to him. It was a Catholic-- I don't know how you call these institutions, you know, a school attached to the church in a beautiful part, near where we used to live in the 8th district. And he stayed through that school. Of course, there were only two others-- one other school like that in all of Vienna. So this was the second-best, so to say, of these fancy schools attached to the Catholic Church.

And he had all the same teachers. And so they let him finish. And then since he had already his papers to go to Oxford, he just left the day he finished school.

Do you remember the date that happened?

That was also '38, but it was sooner than I left. So that was-- when is school out? I think June.

June of '38?

Probably. And I missed him very much.

Did Hitler coming affect your father's practice?

Well, yes. It affected our whole life. I think he had to-- I'm just trying to think when he had to give up the practice. And then his-- that nurse, who was-- that was our number one maid, he had trained to be his office nurse. And since she was not Jewish, he couldn't really do anything anymore. But I can't think of how much. Probably not very much.

I mean, it affected his, yeah, his practice quite a bit. And then he didn't have the chauffeur to drive him. And I mean, things were very, very different from the word go. And so all my mother spent her time is to try to get the red tape going. And since I was born in Austria, Vienna, I had still my passport.

I was the first of the three, now of us left, to go. And my father, born in Czechoslovakia, God knows what his number was, way down the line. And my mother, born in Germany, in Hamburg, was-- what was she? Well, she also stayed with my father. And I think she couldn't get out either. And I had no idea when they could get out.

When did you go?

But when I went, that was, again-- a friend of ours from Yugoslavia, who was a dear, dear friend, he's always liked us children a lot. They had no children-- had heard-- yeah, and was going to go to Italy. And he had heard somewhere along the line-- he was underground, not Nazi, whatever you call that. What would you call it? He was a freedom fighter, so to say.

Partisan?

Yeah. And he was Catholic, I guess, or Protestant. I don't know. And he was in the First World War with my father. But he was considerably younger. He wanted to meet my mother and I, furtively-- is that a good word-- near that Catholic Church there. And I still remember where we met. And he pulled us aside so no one would see us together and said, I just heard that you have to get baptized to become a Catholic in order to go over the border. And he knew I was ready to go. That was the beginning of August '38.

And I have already a Catholic priest lined up who would do this for you. And I said, you know, here I am. I said, I will not get baptized just to save my skin. I am so great, so there. And we embraced and kissed. And that was that. And so I did a few [CROSS TALK]

What about you mother? What did she want to do?

Well, I think they all would have wanted me to do that, of course thing. But then I had sort of an, in a way, amazing story about how I did get over the border.

Please, tell us. I'm now very worried because you didn't let yourself be baptized.

Well, I was so great. All I could take with me-- and I the ticket already. All I could take with me was one suitcase to carry. And the other things were supposed to be put in a-- they call it lifts, vans, to be sent over the ocean in the future. I don't know. So the whole house was being dismantled already at that point. And so I had to say goodbye to all my collection, with one suitcase-- and my violin. That's a very important thing-- and carry my violin.

And then I saw, in my collection there, my toy dogs. And I love my toy dogs. And I couldn't stand it. And quickly I picked up one that was already in bad array, one dog, because it was give it to me by blah, and then another dog and through on top of my suitcase and closed the suitcase.

Well then, my ticket I had. I've got on the train. And it was an overnight train with a compartment. So we got to the border while I was in the compartment. And it came bang, bang, bang. And I, of course, died. And I think my mother had given me a diamond watch to carry, which was stupid. She promptly lost it. But [INAUDIBLE].

And I thought, well, now what's going to happen? And so the Italian guys, who were already the Nazi-infected country, said passport. I showed them the passport. And I hoped I wasn't shaking. Open your suitcase. What's it there? What have you got in there?

So I opened the suitcase, which wasn't that easy. And there were my toy dogs. He looked at the passport-- 17 years old now. Toy dogs? [LAUGHS] What on earth? She's probably demented. Through this suitcase, [INAUDIBLE], all right, go. They didn't want me there.

And I always make that my story. This is what saved my life, is my toy dogs.

Now, you had tickets going to where?

And that was to Italy, actually, because my aunt and uncle, my mother's sister, that side of the family, had gone there already to try to open a boarding house in a gorgeous place in Milan. Have you heard? Are you familiar, Milano?

No.

No? What about [NON-ENGLISH]? Well, it's in northern Italy at one point and then became a southern Austria, the Tyrol part of. And it's just gorgeous. I mean, It's gorgeous country. And I was supposed to have my auntie by marriage teach me a little more about the violin, which I'm lousy at-- and the aunt to teach me cooking.

Were you to stay there?

Well, I mean, they wanted me to stay there until my parents knew what they were going to do. But the day I left Vienna, I noticed a little something on my little finger. And that something grew and grew and grew. And it became a boil, a festering boil. And that happened, then, to go throughout my whole body with a temperature. And here I was. And so I couldn't do anything.

And my auntie, who loved to hike and who is nutty as the day grows long, is a brilliant artist. And so all we could do is walk. And then I had to go to a cure-- is that what you call it, a cure-- in one of the sanatoriums, where they feed you nothing but grapes. That's it, what they have a lot of. You're not allowed to eat this. I mean, it was crazy-- trying to get rid of these boils because nothing helped.

And then all of a sudden, I was notified I had to leave Italy. They were coming in, the Nazis were. The persecution was going on.

How long?

Who notified you?

My aunt and uncle, somehow they knew, I think through my parents, that I had to leave.

How long had you been there?

And I had been there-- god-- I think-- I think till October, so almost three months, something like that. And then I had to run off. And then my father, who has contacts all over the world, had someone in Zurich on my way out, where I had to take a plane to go to London.

And the woman in Zurich, who was an old friend, had money for me too, so that I could get my plane ticket and all that.

It was a very, very complicated.

Were you-- did you feel competent to--

No! Good lord. I've never been on the plane and all my life. And how many planes were there in 1938, passenger planes? No. And I didn't speak Italian all that well about finding out where I had to go, from the station, where my train was going to be. I was still-- my aunt said it was very complicated.

And you were 17 years old.

And I was just 17. And I had an Italian boyfriend. And I quickly wrote him. I said I'm going to come to Milan. Yeah, this is where he lived. That's it. I had to go from Zurich-- from-- I can't remember-- from where I was put on the train, to Milan someplace-- to Zurich-- from Zurich to Milan, and from then on the plane or something like that-- very, very complicated. So I told him, well, I'm coming through. I'm not quite sure when, where, or-- you know, they have separate compartments on the European trains. I don't know if you know it. And I just don't know which compartment I'm going to be.

And then starting all these miracles that happened to me. And I opened the door-- and I wrote about that. I opened the door of my compartment, not knowing what I'm going to do next. And there he stood. It was incredible. And in Italy, the kind of family he came from, you're not allowed to be alone. Then you are a woman of the street and grabs for all. So where is your-- your whatever you call it, governess.

Chaperone.

Chaperone. [LAUGHS] And then we had time to talk to each other and sit in his car and talk about what's going on. And he gave me his M for Mussolini that all the-- he was five years older. He was an engineering student. And he was going into the air force, the Italian Air Force. So he was going to be the enemy.

He was not Jewish, I guess.

No. No. No.

How had you met him?

Another one of my great-- on a cruise the year before, on the most wonderful cruise anybody could have dreamed about. Everything was happening to me. For once I was really popular by all-- Nazis and not Nazis. It was a German ship. And my father had money out in Germany that he couldn't bring into Austria.

So he decided, well, he's going to, for once, do something nice for his daughter and take her on this cruise to Norway the, up to Spitsbergen, Iceland. In those days, that was-- except, when I arrived in Iceland, and I was so thrilled. I mean, Iceland. I mean, who, where is it? At the end of the world.

There was a magazine about Shirley Temple. I wanted to turn back and go home, wherever that was-- things like that. But, yeah.

Was it hard for you to leave Vienna?

Well, yes. [LAUGHS] Very difficult.

Do you remember your feelings? Can you describe how you felt?

I remember even-- interesting about Vienna, when my brother and I were so close, when we were 14 or so, and we would come home from a play together, the parents would go out to some fancy thing. And of course, I was too young to do anything like that. Or from a concert or an opera, we would sit together, and the maid would bring some little

sandwiches. And we would talk about our future.

And we said at that time already-- I was 14, he was 15. I said, you know, there's no future for us in Vienna. There's nothing for us to do here. I wanted to go to the Sorbonne to study history of art, which is really a subject in Europe and isn't here so much. This is not for football places. This is-- I mean, really a serious study-- more like library, becoming critic and so forth. And he was going to study medicine in Oxford. He was going to go there.

But he said, but we always are going to come back to Vienna and meet here because we love it so. So that's how difficult it is to go, to leave Vienna, how necessary it would have been for us because there was no future there. We knew that. And how we always wanted to come back.

It sounds like you really identified yourselves as Viennese rather than Jews.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

How was it to part from your parents? Were you confident that you would hook up again? Or what did you think?

Well, I've been, I think, when you come right down to it-- except lately I've been terribly depressed after my husband died-- is that I've always been confident that something will-- that they will get out. I think I believed in them, but it was not easy. And then the minute we did finally meet up under also very complicated circumstances, we just left.

I think we need to stop.