When you try and sensor yourself that you actually block out a lot of stuff that's really important--

I know. I think--

--because I think your mind-- how anyone's mind wanders, so if you get to these little pockets that you didn't know were there and then those are real gems a lot.

Right, right, you're right. But I think it's also that was much more so at the beginning. I think now I'm winding down a bit.

OK.

Say anything with anyone you like. Go ahead.

OK. Yeah, I used to get back to the religion, and it's always been-- and I have Jewish friends who are religious and who resent the fact that I have been-- I went to a synagogue once with a-- well, actually, no, I actually joined a synagogue in Berkeley for a while, thinking that maybe my kids could go there. My kids refused to have anything to do with the religion and Jewish religion in the first place.

And then I found myself being there and feeling bereft because I don't have-- my kids wouldn't go. And these friends of mine with whom I went, their whole family goes to services and they all know the Torah. And so it was too painful for me to sit with them and-- especially as I didn't understand it anyway. But I know someone. I know of a woman in my writing class who is actually-- she's younger than I am, but she's actually done bat mitzvah recently for herself. And she gets a lot out of it. And it's nice, but it's not for everybody.

Prior to the war, how would you characterize relations between Jews and Gentiles in Coburg?

In Coburg?

I don't know if you could remember them, but--

Well, all that was before the war. The war started in 1939 in Europe. Here had started later. So I only knew it before the war. And they were awful. I mean, I experienced a really, really bad antisemitism after Hitler came to power. I don't know. I think before Hitler came to power, if there was, it wasn't obvious at all. But you see, once it's organized by the state, it becomes-- too many people take advantage of it. So many-- there were people who took over Jewish stores.

There were people who, when the Jews had to leave, got a tremendous amount of profit from that. And this there are those-- there's a wonderful book, a wonderful novel by Ursula Hegi. I don't know if you've heard of it. It's called Stones from the River. Ursula Hegi, she's not Jewish. She's a German. She was born in Germany before the-- no, after the First World War. And she lived in Germany until she was 18, then she came to the United States.

Well, Ursula Hegi describes this town, which is very much like Coburg, she called it even as Burg-something. And she describes it from the point of view of a dwarf, a girl, a young woman, very bright, who is a dwarf. She has very short arms, very short legs, a large head, and who, on growing up, would try to stretch, hoping every day that she would get to be a normal size, put bandages on her head to try and keep her head from getting larger.

Well, a dwarf growing up in Germany got the same prejudices, the same kind of treatment that a Jew did. You see, that was a tremendous-- I mean, she was-- people thought there was something the matter with her. They thought it was her fault. And so she suffered all these. At that time, when she was a small child, there was no antisemitism yet. And there were-- the town, which could have been Coburg, was a community of people who had stores. The town's doctor was a Jew. The town's attorney was a Jew.

And the Jews were integrated into the society and were liked there and were very positive members of this. And she describes what happens when Hitler came to power and how gradually these people were pushed out of their office, had things taken away from them. Later on, they were sent to concentration camps. Many of them left Germany. But all of a sudden, life was hell for them. And this dwarf, this girl who's gone through all of this herself, she emphasizes very strongly with the Jews and did all that time.

Her father was the town's librarian, and her mother had died. And so she was in the center of things. And her father and she helped some of the Jews. And OK, that was-- then came the war and things got very bad in Germany. And then in that town, people suffered a lot of hunger. There was-- I don't think they were ever bombed, just like Coburg was never bombed. But many of the men went to the army and were killed and so on. And the women were left behind, all right.

Then comes after the war. The Americans came-- took over the town. Nobody had ever been an antisemite there. None of the people had had, and nobody could remember even what it was like during the war. It was like there was total amnesia. Nobody talked about what they did during the war. And I think this is so generally in Germany that there are very few people who will admit that they were for Hitler that they did anything that was-- they did anything detrimental to the Jews.

But of course, this dwarf is there. She knows. But it makes me think-- you wanted me to describe Coburg. This was Coburg. Only Ursula Hegi is a superb writer. She lives in Spokane now. And she was speaking in that series of writers in San Francisco, and I saw and heard her. She's blonde, plump. She looks like the typical German frau. But she has so much understanding. And she's a-- I would recommend that. I've bought about six or seven copies of it, and I handed them out to my kids and friends.

And if I could write, that's the book I would have-- if I would have been there, that's the book I would have liked to write. It really gives you a very good picture. And it's almost understandable. Nobody-- I mean, OK, during the war, especially with the kind of thing that happened under Hitler that it was a very rigid society. Everybody told on everybody else in order to protect themselves. And if people were known to have been friendly with the Jews, they could have been taken out and bad things would have happened to them.

So it's understandable that they wouldn't-- unless they were very extraordinary. But that's what happened. So it was a total denial. And sometimes I was thinking, I wonder if I had grown up in Germany and not being Jewish, I wonder how I would have turned out. I would have been a-- because you know how it is when kids love to throw stones. I mean, everybody does, especially-- and I wonder if how antisemitic I would have been. It's there in all of us. Thank goodness I was Jewish. I am Jewish.

It's rather nice to be-- it's the safe thing to be the-- I was going to say, underdog, but it's not the right word, to be the one that everyone picks up because it means that you'd end up likely to do that. Although, oh, God, here I go on and on. Once I philosophize, I get into that. Although there are many people who have been picked on and victimized, who then become the aggressor, so what does it take to do that? OK, that's it.

Do you remember the first time you noticed antisemitism?

I think I noticed it when I wasn't-- I mean, what I remember, when I wasn't invited to parties anymore. I used to be-- my parents, we were in the center of things. And I used to go to all these parties, birthday parties of-- where particularly my friend Heidi who lived across the street from me. And as I said, we looked alike. People often got us mixed up, Helle and Heidi. And she didn't invite me to her birthday party. And then they would talk about having gone to these Brownshirts meetings.

And I asked-- I'm not sure whether I did this or whether I just heard about that. I asked our maid-- or I haven't told you anything about our maid, Mali. I'll tell you more about her. I asked her, oh, let's go and-- let's go to this. It sounds like a fun party, all these people getting together. And Mali said, oh, no, no, they are Nazis. There are bad people there, antisemites. You wouldn't want to go there, and you certainly couldn't.

I'll tell you about Mali. She came from [? White ?] House, which was the place where my grandparents had the shop. And her mother was very poor, was a widow. And my mother or grandmother employed her from very early on when she was quite young. They employed her to babysit me and to do things with me or to-- because my mother worked in the store, and so they wanted someone to be with me.

Well, she was a-- Mali she was a wonderful companion. She wasn't-- I guess when I was three or four maybe, she was 15 or 16. And we used to go in the woods together and gather mushrooms and do all kinds of really nice things together. Now talking about a dwarf, Mali was not a dwarf. But she was very small. She was close to-- it's called achondroplasia. She was close to it. She had very short arms and very short legs, but her head was normal size. But she was about oh, well over a head shorter than my mother. And my mother was rather short.

And she wasn't that much taller than I. So she was more like having a grown-up friend to do things with. Well, anyway, she-- when we left White House, she came with us wherever we went. She became my mother's maid. But she was so much more than that. She was my friend, too. And when the things with Hitler started in Germany and kids stopped playing with me and wouldn't do things with me, and then there were some boys who actually really were nasty. And they didn't hit me, but they weren't very good to me, and what are you two girl doing here with us, and so on.

So Mali, small as she was, sees the-- they had these carpet beaters. There were the talon carpet beaters for cleaning carpets. She seized one of those as her only weapon, and she went down with me to the playground, holding the carpet beater. And she went right up to these tall, big boys and told them, if you dare to be nasty to my girl, you're going to get into real trouble. And she swirled the carpet beater, and then she took my hand and we walked back up to our flat.

And it felt-- I was so-- it was so nice to have someone there who was willing to fight for me. But anyway, she stayed with us. And then-- I don't know if you knew about that. But the Nuremberg Laws came in 1934, I think, or 1933. And Jews were not allowed-- no, Jewish-- no, Christian girls, non-Jewish girls were not allowed to live in the house of Jews. And there was this thing that Jewish men would molest them and so on.

Well, it came a dreadful day when things were really bad for me at school and Mali had to leave. She had to go to the police, and they said, you have to leave within three days. And oh, for me it was dreadful. I have a story about that. My only friend and someone who-- and somehow that I had always expected her to be able to do whatever she wanted, to be able to fight her way through. But no, she had to leave. And I watched her pack, and then she was gone.

And my mother worked. And that meant that I came-- well, I either came home to an empty apartment after school, or I went to stay with my parents where they worked in the factory. It was a terrible loss for me to have lost Mali. Again, that was in 1934, yes. And we still had two years in Germany until we left. Now Mali, she went back to the village, and then she got married. I knew she had a man friend whom she-- it's funny. She was very short, and he was very tall and thin.

But when we went for walks, we often met him. And he sat with us. And he was not a Nazi. He was a very nice man. I forget his name now. But she married him very shortly after she left. My mother stayed in touch with her. But I did not want to have anything to do with her, which is surprising. But I think, for me, the fact that she left was a desertion. And I was young enough not to see the real picture of it. But Mali was a-- she was my friend after-- she was a much better friend than the other Jewish girl in my class.

But you see, slowly, they took more and more and more away from us. And OK, compared to being sent to concentration camps, it was still minor compared to that. But it was very painful for a child anyway. Of course, Mali was never antisemitic. She has a son, and my mother got in touch with her after the war and had helped them out quite a bit. The funny thing is I did not want to have anything to do with her, even when I was sensible enough after the war to realize that it would be good.

Now I wish I had. I have no idea what she's-- she's about-- she must be-- wait a minute, she's about 10 years older than I am. So it means she would be in her 80s now, and I can't imagine that she's still alive. But when you get to be my age and you realize, hey, anyone that was older than I at that time has-- OK, they might still be around but being 80 is-- it's not that many people survive it that you'd better take the opportunity and do the friendly thing while you have them around because after, it's too late, all these lessons.

[CHUCKLES]

How did that come about, Mali? You reminded me.

Antisemitism--

Antisemitism.

--and Nuremberg Laws.

Yes, oh, yes, yes, yes.

Were there other ways that you were affected by the Nuremberg Laws?

Well, Mali was the big one that I don't know of any others actually. The Nuremberg Laws-- oh, I think so. I mean, you had to not be tensed. I let that don't affect me so much. But they had to report whenever they went out of town. And what my parents did while they were preparing to emigrate-- to leave, my they would at night-- oh, yeah, it's quite a story. At night, after I was in bed, about two or three times a week, they would drive the car, fill the car up with stuff, with oppositions, and drive to Nuremberg, which was about a two hours drive from Coburg.

And my grandmother, that is my mother's mother, lived there, and she was immigrating legally to Argentina to be with her son, who again-- uncle, who again, who moved to Argentina a long time ago. Well, she had a-- they were allowed to take what's called a lift, which is a big wooden case. And one of her big wooden cases was going straight to Argentina. And the other one was going to be staying at Rotterdam in Holland.

And my parents packed our stuff into this other lift, which was going to leave Germany with my grandmother. And they had arranged that that lift would be staying in Holland, whereas the other one would go on to Argentina. And so our stuff remained in that lift in Rotterdam until we immigrated to England. And then about a week after we got to England, they went over to Rotterdam to claim that other lift and had it transported to England.

But you see, the preamble to that was that every-- well, almost every two or three nights, they would leave our house. They would leave me alone in the house, while they drove to Nuremberg to put that stuff in with my grandmother's stuff, and then they would come back the same night. Well, that was all. That worked out fine. But one night, I woke up during the night. I must have had a nightmare or something. So I came from my bed and went to my parents' bed and found it was empty.

And so I cried. I didn't know what had happened to them. I mean, there's always these tales of people being picked up by the Nazis and being taken away. Well, I stayed awake all that night, and I stood by the window at the front, it was a front window, and looked out to see when my parents were coming home. And when they came home, they saw me standing there. And they rushed up, and they were furious with me. How can you stand out there and watch?

And all I could say was, well, where were you? I was so worried about you. And they said-- well, they said something that they were visiting grandmother. But why didn't you tell me? Oh, blah, blah, blah, blah. And after that, they said, if I ever wake up at night, I must never, never stand by the window. And they may have to make other visits, but I've just got to go back to sleep and not look for them. And I think I was pretty scared there for quite a while. But I never went to the window again because I realized that that was dangerous.

So getting ready to go, I see they made all these preparations. And how they kept it, well, they kept it from me. And I guessed that there's something going on because we had three big rooms in the front, one was the everyday living room, and then there was a large formal dining room with very nice furniture in it. And then there was a-- what's it called in Germany, a herrenzimmer, a smoking room so-called, and again, beautifully furnished. Well, those two big rooms were locked after a while.

And my parents just-- and it was from there that they took the stuff to take to Nuremberg, you see. And we lived then--

my parents said it's much nicer to live in a-- for all of us to live together in this small-- and we lived in this small room and just closed off. It's closed off to the rest of the house. But I guess I had some wonderings about it. But there was this thing-- this atmosphere that said, don't ask questions. You're not supposed to. That was all over the place. That was in school, you don't ask questions. Parents, you don't ask questions.

And your mind closes, and I was that way for a while. It was not an actual depression, but it was a sense of don't look around. Don't be too aware of things because it's dangerous. That was the whole atmosphere that I'm sure a lot of refugee children went through that. Only for them, of course, they were there much longer. I mean, I left in '36. But those last years before the war started, I mean, Jewish children really went through some hell. Yes, anything else?

Were there curfews or anything in Coburg, or that did you have to wear stars?

Pardon? No, not then. Not then, no. That came later. We had already left then. I have this book with a Star of David that my husband put together. No, I think that came '38. We didn't have that at all. And maybe there were curfews. I don't think there was at that time. I don't think my parents could have done all this traveling if there had been. There were open demonstrations. There was a Jewish shop at the corner, where the windows were broken over and over and over again.

And there were signs in the front of the store, you don't go in there. It's a Jewish shop. I remember-- that this I do remember. The radio at that time was full of antisemitic propaganda, especially from Nuremberg. The Sturmer was a Nazi newspaper. And on the front cover, there were pictures of hook-nosed Jews, like this, and we had-- and I saw that. Somehow I never felt it applied to me.

But those papers appeared every day. And they had them-- in Germany, I guess not everybody buys a paper. But they have them out open in the front corner-- at the corner stores. And well, there was this constant-- and then there were Hitler youths would March in their uniforms. And they sang a song called [SPEAKING GERMAN], which was when Jewish blood spurts from the knife. And they sang that to a some sort of tune as they were marching.

And I would meet them coming back from school, and I would have cringed and tried to be invisible. The town where we were, people knew each other though. It was small enough that people knew each other. When I went to-- when I couldn't go home anymore because Mali wasn't there and I went to my parents factory, I would have to go across town. And I would see that and hear that quite a bit.

It's funny though how when you live in these conditions, I think one puts blinkers on in order to survive because I mean, I know it, how it must have been there. I know we had a friend a Jewish man who lived below us, and he was dragged out one night and taken to a concentration-- he's an old man. Well, he came back severely crippled afterwards, and then they moved away. But he had been beaten up. And I knew that. But I also ignored it at the time, anyway. It's only coming-- remembering it back then.

Actually, none of my relatives were beaten at that time. After we left though, it was Kristallnacht. And that was in 1939 or '38.

'38.

'38. Well, whole of my father's family were-- the men were taken to concentration camps, and the women were left, and the children were left at home. And my cousin Eva tells me how-- she was still in a crib. She was a small baby, and I think somehow she remembered that. She woke up covered in glass because the windows had been smashed in. And it had fallen onto her crib. And she was not hurt, but still that was when her father was taken away, and uncle was taken away.

And my father's brothers and sister, until that time, had not wanted to leave Germany. They said, this can't go on. It's bound to get better. If we leave, as soon as we've left, it's going to be better again. But after Kristallnacht, when they were in jail, and they could not have got out until they could show that they had a visa to leave the country, and at that time it was very hard to get visas. I mean, you couldn't get any visa to the United States unless you were here.

However, to England, there was still a colony of England that needed white settlers and that was Kenya. So they all got visas to go to Kenya. And they were-- so they were able to get out of jail. And I think they were allowed to take one suitcase and something like, 10-- not much money either. But of course, they did. They put gold pieces in sandwiches and things like that, which was very dangerous, which afterwards is a stupid thing to do.

But anyway, they got out, and they were on the boat to Kenya very shortly after the-- no, the war had not broken out yet, but it was coming close. And there was a German prisoners' camp close to where they moved to in Kenya. So it was just last minute. Of course, so many people did not get out. They did not have someone who could supply them with a visa. And they just stayed and hoped for the best.

And for once, my father said he'd always been a pessimist. And for once, his pessimism paid off. And it's so nice to be an optimist. I don't think I am. Whenever something difficult has happened for me, it's gone on to go really bad. And once then, it got-- I had this car accident. Obviously, I was hoping but there's something in the back of my mind that said, no. And with my son above it, there's no point being an optimist. It's just going from bad to worse.

So if something turns out well, it's a nice surprise. But somehow I'm prepared for it. But I'm thinking as I get older, I wonder what my really old age will be like. I see it as a time of decay, slow-- maybe fast decay. And I'm not looking forward to it. On the other hand, Paul is such an-- he doesn't-- well, he's American. He's never had to leave any-- he's never really had anything terrible happen to him except that his wife died, and that's how we got together.

He always sees the best things as these are going to turn out. And I'm thinking that those were just the people who didn't survive in Germany, certainly. Anyway, any other questions? You get a lot of philosophy from me. But to me, it's trying to draw conclusions from things that happened. It's almost a necessity for me, even though I say, well, it's not like-- you can't always count on it. But that's what it does.

Wasn't your father imprisoned in Germany briefly?

Yes, but only for a short time.

What happened?

Well, in Coburg, when the Nazi mayor first came to power, almost all the Jewish men were taken and were imprisoned but only for a short time. They were quickly let out again. That was in 1932, I think, or 1933. That was Coburg. That was very-- and we were in we were lucky, you see. And I think he was in prison for a short time. But then he was let out.

But in England, he was-- in 1940 after Dunkirk, after the British fleet was returned from Dunkirk and when there was this fear and this danger of the Germans invading, he was-- it wasn't really prison. It was in a-- what was the word? It was a camp. It was a camp for interned. He was interned, which was like prison because you couldn't move around. So he was there about three or four months until we managed to get him free. But for him, those things were terribly painful. How is our time? Oh, wow, it's 3:30.

We should probably stop.

We should stop.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yes, yes, I think so.

OK.

[SIGHS]

Well, this has been very interesting. Oh, you heard us.

Ooh, wow.

Yeah, I didn't--

It's 3:30.

I know. It's funny. I can't-- they carefully placed that clock so I can't see it.

[LAUGHTER]

That's exactly right.

I was watching my watch and then I realized, oh--

And?

Shall I--

Yes.

All right, we will end the interview at this point.