

--seconds before we get started on the recording. I'll let you know.

OK. No makeup?

[LAUGHTER]

No makeup artist.

[LAUGHS]

OK, any time.

OK. Today is September 24, 1993. We are at the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco with Andrew Tegl. Interviewers are Ruth Durling, Lani Silver, and the video producer is John Grant. Andrew is going to tell us a story of his mother, Charlotte Elizabeth Tegl. And you can begin with giving us a background of where she was born, what year, and who her parents were.

Well, she was born November 18, 1925, in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. At that time, she was born a Hopfengartner, the daughter of Adolph Hopfengartner and Maria Valesova.

And did she have any sisters or brothers?

No, she was an only child.

And Maria Valesova-- was she also Czechoslovakian?

She was Czech, yes. That whole side of the family was Czech.

How long did they live in Pilsen?

They actually lived-- she was born in Pilsen, but they lived in Holoubkov, which is about-- I would guess about two hours away by train. It's closer to Prague, actually.

What kind of-- is that a city or a town?

Holoubkov is a very rural kind of community. The mainstay is a factory or was a factory, an iron foundry, and which employed just about most of the town, apparently. And they-- her father and grandfather before them owned the factory and grew quite wealthy off of it. They were a very wealthy family and one of the most wealthy in Czechoslovakia. So she grew up in a lap of luxury very much-- horses and just about anything you could imagine.

What was her schooling?

That I'm not certain of. She, of course, graduated from high school eventually after the war. Where she went, I'm not certain.

Did she have private instruction?

Well, she did during the war. She had to. She was only-- let's see-- 13 when the war started. And since she got into the resistance at a very early stage, that interrupted things, so to speak. So she had-- one person that they were hiding out was a professor from the Sorbonne, who had been lecturing in Prague University when the war broke out.

And the Gestapo apparently was after him, so they took him and hid him down their cellar for quite some time. And he tutored her while he was staying there. He also did her French exams, which was-- she-- I'm sure helped out quite a bit.

Did she describe her childhood as a happy childhood?

She described her father as being very strict. She enjoyed childhood, but she was a very rebellious kind of kid. They would expect her to dress for meals, dress for breakfast, dress for dinner, and the whole thing. She would always find ways of getting around that. When she had to be down for Sunday breakfast, she'd climb out the window, second story window, down a rope or whatever, and take off on a horse and go riding or go swimming or something like that.

No, she-- I have a feeling she didn't get along with her father very well. She wasn't that close. She was a lot closer to her mother and her mother's family.

Did she have any religious upbringing?

Yes, Roman Catholic. Yes. Very staunch Roman Catholic. What the rest of the family was, I'm not sure. But they were all Christian of some denomination.

And her father was German or not?

Ethnically German. The family lived in Czechoslovakia since about the 1870s, so they were citizens of Czechoslovakia but ethnically German.

Can you give us a little bit of background of your father's family, what you were told as you were growing up?

Sure. Max Hopfengartner worked for-- as accountant, I believe, for a German Jew who owned a series of steel or iron foundries throughout Czechoslovakia. And in the 1870s, apparently, the business went belly up. So Max was somewhat shrewd and bought him out pennies on the dollar, so to speak, and built it back up after the Depression was over, made quite a killing. By the 1880s, the family was quite wealthy.

And he-- he, Max, had built a house for every one of the daughters, and there were seven daughters and one son, who was born at the tail end. The son happened to be my grandfather. So there were seven villas around Holoubkov that were-- belonged to one person or another.

And then by about the 1920s-- let's say 1918-- Max Hopfengartner died, and my grandfather, Adolph, took over the business, but he wasn't quite as smart as Max was apparently, and he started making some bad business deals. And the fortune started going downhill in the '20s.

And by the time of World War II, the family was still very well off, but they were nothing what they used to be back turn of the century and before. So there was also the Vales side of the family that apparently was somewhat well off also.

They were-- let's see-- her grandfather was a physician, surgeon, and one of the pioneering heart surgeons of the period. They were also related to the Colloredo-Mansfeld family in some way, which I'm not sure of right now. That's still somewhat in the future. I hope to make the link there.

Now, the Vales family is on what side? Is that the--

That's her mother's side of the family, yes.

That was her mother's maiden name?

Yes.

I see.

And do you want to go into how she--

Yeah, what was the first sign or the first word that someone was involved in the resistance?

Well, right after the occupation of the Sudetenland in September of '38-- I hope my history is correct on that-- she started getting involved as a messenger-- my mother did-- as a messenger for underground groups, try and keep them in touch with each other because they knew, sooner or later, the Germans were going to take the rest of Czechoslovakia, which they did the following March.

And at that time, the work that she helped do coalesced a number of different cells throughout Bohemia, which is Western Czechoslovakia. And they were able to put together a very cohesive resistance called [NON-ENGLISH], which translates into "The Hawk."

Now, for some reason, there was no organized resistance in Prague. There were just a few people that sat behind closed doors and talked about how much they hated Germans and, you know, what they would like to do to Germans and things like that, but nothing active.

So there was one time, in '41, where she went to try to establish a link in a railroad they were trying to take out refugees, escaped POWs, things like that, through Innsbruck to Switzerland. And she had had an uncle who-- let's see-- through her mother's side of the family, who lived in Innsbruck, and they were able to make that link there. And that was successful.

When she came back from that-- and her commander at the time said, you're going to Prague. Why? I have nothing to do in Prague. He goes, well, there are seven paratroopers dropping in Prague next week, and the idea came to her that there is no resistance in Prague. Why are they dropping them in Prague or outside Prague? He said, well, that's what you're going up there for.

So she says, OK, who do I contact? He said, well, we don't know. There was somebody named Yindra and somebody named Uncle Hayek. But who they are and where, we don't know.

So she sat back and thought, and, well, her mother had friends who lived in Prague. So she thought, well, let me pay them a visit. Maybe they've heard something about what's going on. And she went there, and sure enough, they had heard her-- actually, the brother-in-law of the family had heard about this Uncle Hayek. So he had set up a meeting, and before this meeting, she discreetly asked around if anybody heard about paratroopers. And nobody did.

So she waited for the meeting the next day with his Uncle Hayek and went to him. He was supposed to be one of the leaders of the Prague resistance, so to speak. And mind you, at the time, she's 13 years old or-- excuse me-- 16 years old at the time.

So hardly anybody that would be impressive upon an older person as-- she went to Uncle Hayek, and there was another woman there, who had just walked in a short time before. And she was talking about this resistance that was supposed to be in Prague, and the guy was very tight-lipped and wouldn't talk to her and sort of brushed her off, didn't want to let on about anything.

And she got up to go, writing this guy off totally. And as she got up to go, this woman-- I think she identified herself as Aunt Marie-- said, I'm going to go with you. So they walked downstairs and down the street a little bit, and she goes, oh, why are you here? She goes, well, I'm actually looking for some paratroopers. And she goes, oh, I've got two in my kitchen. [LAUGHS]

In fact, she had been coming to Uncle Hayek at the same time to say that, I've got two paratroopers in my kitchen. I don't know what to do with them. So my mom swore this Aunt Marie to secrecy, not to tell Uncle Hayek because she didn't trust him. And she went to meet them. As it turned out, it was Jozef Gabcik and Jan Kubis, who were in her kitchen.

The way they got to Aunt Marie's house was by-- let's see-- by way of a former girlfriend of one of the guys-- I forget which one-- who steered them to Aunt Marie. So now, she's trying to get the rest of these guys, and there are supposed to be five others roaming around the countryside-- six others roaming around the countryside somewhere-- get them to Prague, try to get them to do whatever they came to do, which was assassinate Heydrich.

She-- let me see how the chronology of this goes. She set up two or three safe houses with other people that she could trust within the, quote, resistance that seemed a little braver than the others. And the others were hidden out among these people. And then, they watched Heydrich's route to and from work each day and found this one intersection where he always went through or he had to go through.

So they waited for him, and it was partly botched. The one that had the-- I believe it was a stun gun-- didn't take the safety off the gun when he fired, when he wanted to fire. So that gave some warning. And fortunately, the other one was able to lob a hand grenade in the Mercedes that Heydrich was driving in. And that wounded him badly enough that eventually he died a week later.

But now the question was, how do we get out of Czechoslovakia with these guys? He thought, well, get them dressed up in German uniforms, and have them go as an honor guard on Heydrich's funeral train. [LAUGHS]

So those plans were starting to get together, and this Father Patrick of the St Cyril's Church in Prague had heard about these guys. He was in touch with the underground and in touch with the resistance here in Prague. He said, well, hide them in my crypt until you can get everything together and get your plans going.

So on the day in May of '42-- I don't recall the exact day-- she had come to pick them up they were in the crypt. She went to the apartment of one of the people who lived-- in the resistance, who lived across the street from the church. And she was about an hour away from picking them up when the Germans pulled up in front of the church. And the rest is more or less history.

There was a terrific gun battle both outside and inside the church, and she had come within an hour of getting them out. But the reason they found out was that one of the paratroopers, Karel Curda, had turned and informed on them. And that's how they were able to pull into a church and find them there.

After that, she was-- as she relates, the massacres of Lidice and there was another village-- I can't recall the name-- that was similarly wiped out. And the Germans were going door to door throughout just about every town and city in Czechoslovakia. Anybody that looked at them crossed, they would take out, imprison, shoot, whatever. And terrific massacres all over the country.

How did your mother escape?

From Czechoslovakia?

From the church and that area?

Well, she waited until the Germans went away finally. The battle must have lasted an hour or two, and she stuck around, I think, for the rest of the day until the Germans finally packed up, cleaned up the mess, and left. And then she went back to Holoubkov.

Was the paratrooper who had informed on these others didn't--

He didn't know about her, apparently. She hadn't met him. She had heard about him. The only two that she was really in touch with were Kubis and Gabcik, the one that actually performed the assassination. And, frankly, I think she was somewhat infatuated with Gabcik. At least in her tapes, she comes across as that.

What did she say about that?

She describes him as being very much of a soldier, very handsome, very-- I saw a picture of him in the books a couple of years ago, and he looks very much like a Richard Burton type of guy with blonde hair except, so-- so I can understand how she might have been taken with him.

Would-- she originally was told to go to Prague. Did she know what her mission there was going to be?

Yes. Well, she didn't know exactly what the paratroopers were going there for, but she knew she had to organize something for them to perform their mission, establish safe houses for them, round them up initially because they were scattered all over the place. Nobody knew what to do with them.

She found three of them?

She found two initially, and the other two-- the other six, I believe, went to various other locations within Prague with other resistance groups. The problem was hiding them because Prague is a city of apartment houses. You just don't hide people in apartment houses. It doesn't work that well, you know. It attracts too much attention.

And where were they flown in from-- the paratroopers?

From England. They were dropped there overnight at some point, and-- I believe in April of '42.

And they were of what nationality?

They were all Czechs except for one Slovak. Well, basically, all Czechoslovakians, but they had escaped to England prior to the war or just as the war broke out.

And their ultimate assignment was this assassination?

Yes.

Wow.

And there was one group of them-- there were three of them that were also supposed to help set up a resistance group in southeastern Bohemia, but it didn't make any sense why they were in Prague if they were supposed to go to southeastern Bohemia. Prague's in the north.

Do you have any more names, the names of the full group?

No, I don't. I just know the three-- the traitor, Curda, Gabcik, and Kubis. Maybe she mentions them in the tapes, but I don't--

And how did they get to her kitchen?

To Aunt Marie's kitchen? One of them had a girlfriend in Prague or a former girlfriend before the war and just kind of gravitated toward that place because he was-- that the only place he knew where to go. And she took them to Aunt Marie. Malinkova, I think was her last name.

The girlfriend?

Yes.

What was the commander, your mother commander's connection in England? With what group had he been trained?

Her commander was General Washitkov. And prior to the war, he had been a general in the Czech army. So he had assumed this role of leadership once the war broke out. He was in hiding most of the time, apparently. And they had all

sorts of radio transmitters and whatever they kept in touch in-- kept in touch with England, got their orders from there-- shipments of explosives, weapons, things of that nature.

But they liked to use German weapons primarily because you can get German ammunition a lot easier than you could English ammunition. So they would generally kill Germans for their weapons, rather than rely on shipments from England.

Were there tactical reasons for that as well as far as finding bullets and things? If it was a German bullet, it would be less-- it might be less prone to trace it?

No. No. No, not at all. It's just that it's easier to come by them. You kill a German. You take his ammunition. It's that simple. Simple. [LAUGHS]

And so was there a training ground in England for these particular resistance fighters?

No, it was all homegrown. No, it was all homegrown. They had to-- most of them were people who had hunted before the war, you know, just-- they were well acquainted with weapons and things of that nature, being from a countryside setting. So it was second nature to them.

Can you take me again from the kitchen to the assassination, what you know your mother did during that time?

OK, I don't know quite what she did apart from setting up the various places where they stayed prior to the assassination. I'm assuming that the paratroops kept touch between themselves and organized what was going to happen. She did not actually organize it. She was there primarily to put in place a refuge for them in Prague and also to get them out once the assassination happened.

And how-- where was the refuge? What did she find?

A series of apartments and one bungalow in the suburbs.

Which suburb?

You got me. I don't know. I've never been to Prague. So I just don't for sure.

And I want to come back to the assassination, but did she describe a spark of resistance? What drew her to the resistance?

Initially, she said-- what she told me for years-- that her father was killed by the Germans early in the war. OK, that's what she said. I've since found out differently. But I do believe, though, that a member of her mother's family was probably killed by the Germans early in the war, and that's probably what sparked it. There was some sort of an execution. Who? I'm not sure. But if anybody, it was on our mother's side of the family.

And she related to me that her father was executed in March of '39. But that is not true when I found out since. It turns out he was actually executed by the Czechs in '45 as a collaborator.

What was her mother doing during the resistance? Was she like--

Well, she was more of a passive nature. She took care of the people down in the cellar, the refugees, whoever. She didn't actually go out and participate in any of the activities that much. She stayed at home and kind of ran the house. And I think they operated out of the Vales family house in Pilsen primarily, instead of the Hopfengartner house in Holoubkov. That would have been too much into the Hopfengartner nose, too close to home and too risky.

It's still pretty risky to bring people into your house. Your mother--

Oh, sure.

Did she-- did your mom appreciate her mother's bravery?

Oh, sure, she did. They ended up going to camp together and escaping together.

Before we get to that, can you tell us a little bit more about what she did between-- your mother did between 1938 and 1941, what her duties were other--

Gun running. She ran guns back and forth from various cells. She was also a messenger. She did some of the mundane stuff-- printing leaflets, things like that. Killed a few Germans from what I can gather.

Did you hear a story about slitting someone's throat?

Uh-huh. Yes. The story I heard, it was a-- she was taking a suitcase full of guns on a train from Prague to-- I presume back to Pilsen. And she ran afoul of a German officer on the train, who sort of discovered what she was up to. And she slit his throat. I guess dumped the body off the train or something like that.

How old was she?

At the time, 15 maybe.

What year was that?

I presume in '40, about '40, '41, some time there.

The Vales family-- what was their main reason for resisting the Germans?

They were Czechs. An American would resist a foreign invader too.

But not all Czechs necessarily resisted.

No, not all. Some thought it was better to go along with the game. And those are the ones that became the collaborators eventually.

Do you know of any particularly close friends or colleagues with whom your mother worked during those years?

Not personally, no.

Can you name someone?

Franta. I-- see, she never mentions last names, always first names. And that's the way they kept in touch. At least-- the less you know about another person, the better the chances are that if you are caught, you're not going to give that person away.

So there was Franta, who was an expert bowman. He made his own arrows out of razor blades and saved her life on a couple of occasions. And there was another guy named Yierka. That's all that comes to mind right now.

There were about 50 within the group, say, within 10, 15 miles of where she was.

Which was?

Holoubkov and Pilsen, that stretch of country between.

Did they do any sabotage on the railroads and--

However, one of her first missions she tells about, there was a railroad bridge that, a certain time every day, a train would cross. And sometimes it was a troop train. Sometimes it was ammunition, whatever. But it was a German military train.

And they went to this bridge with plastic explosives they had just gotten from England about a week before. And she had set the charges on one side and was going to go to the other side, and she came across a German sentry, who started strangling her. And she describes the playing of a bow. And suddenly, the hands were off her throat, and the German was on the ground with an arrow through his neck.

So that was probably Franta?

Yeah. Yeah. Not a bad shot in the dark at about 50 yards or whatever.

Did that mission succeed?

Yeah, they blew that bridge just as the train-- the locomotives on those trains were always pulled by-- driven by Czechs. So she made sure that the locomotive got across the bridge before they blew the train. And that was an ammunition train, which completely blew to pieces.

Do you know about how many trains they actually were able to sabotage?

That's the only one I know about. There probably were others. There was one time that they attacked an anti-aircraft battery near-- and I can't recall if it's-- that must have been near Pilsen. There was supposed to be an Allied raid, like, a night or so further on. And this battery was, for some reason, very troublesome to the Allies. So they went in there, and after a pretty heavy fight, knocked out five of the guns, were able to destroy them.

But they were discovered as they were crawling in under the wire, so several of them were killed. And--

And she was firing-- using guns--

Yes.

--and got her training from--

From other people who either had some minimum military service prior to the war or something like that. On the job training, you know.

Out of the 50 people of that group that you mentioned, how many survived?

As far as I know, about 40. Not very many apparently died. A lot of them went to camps and came back, like she did. But she mentions about 10 that died.

Out of the 50, how many were men and women?

She doesn't speak about any other women, so I assume she was one of the few, if not unique.

Did she have any thoughts about that?

No. It was sort of a, we're all in this together, brother and sister kind of thing. And she didn't have any thoughts whether she was female or male or who was what. It was just, you're here, and it's a job to do. And your gender had little or nothing to do with it, as long as you could do your job and were trustworthy.



It certainly doesn't sound that she-- it hampered-- the sign that she--

No, I don't think she was a hindrance at all, no. No. Very independent sort, very feisty-- always was.

How much did her parents know about what she was doing?

Well, her mother apparently knew everything about what she was doing. Her father I'm not sure about. He knew something, but since she seems to have spent most of her time in Pilsen during the war at the Vales home and Holoubkov at the Hopfengartner home, she-- he might have suspected something, which is, if you want me to get into it now why, in June of '44, her father turned her into the Gestapo.

And she went to Theresienstadt for about three months with her mother. And at that time, she was in the fortress, not in the model village. People talk about the model village of Theresienstadt. She was up in the fortress, which was the actual dungeon, so to speak. That's where they first extracted information, through one way or another, from you. She was tortured in various ways.

Just some things that I can recall-- she had her fingernails and toenails pulled, teeth broken out, burned with various things-- hot irons, things like that. And her codename was Kaia, which was kind of funny because Kaia is a Dennis the Menace sort of character in cartoon strips prior to the war.

And everybody, when they were questioning her in Theresienstadt, would say, who is Kaia? Who is Kaia? She'd go, I don't know who Kaia is. They're looking for a guy apparently, since it was a boy character, a male character. They thought it was going to be a boy. But they had Kaia, but they didn't also. She never let on who she was, never gave anybody away.

She ended up, after about three or four months, going to what I can best describe as a Gestapo prison in Dresden, along with her mother. And they were both put under a death sentence. And that must have been about August, '44. And she was there in Dresden until February, when the Allied raid on Dresden wiped it out, basically.

The prison was somewhat lightly damaged. It appears they purposely tried to avoid hitting the prison. There was some damage to the front gate, and she described an incendiary bomb that hit the kitchen, and everybody cheered. [LAUGHS]

Then, the day after the raid stopped, there was such confusion in Dresden. The town was obliterated. They were planning to move the prison somewhere east, but first, they would take all the people under death sentence and shoot them on the spot before they made a move. And they lined her and her mother up against the wall with about 50 other people and were starting to set up machine guns in the courtyard.

And she sort of got the idea that they're not going to shoot me. Whether they want to shoot me, if they shoot me, it's where I'm going to be, where I want to be. She started walking with her mother through the front gate. Apparently, in the confusion of everything, nobody bothered to stop them.

When they got outside, they stole some clothes, got out of their striped prison uniforms, went to a refugee evacuation center, said they were German and were bombed out, but they had relatives in Czechoslovakia. So the Germans gave them free passage to Pilsen.

So-- [LAUGHS]

They both spoke fluent German?

Yes.

How many people were lined up?

About 50, and she says that, as far as she knows, she and her mother were the only ones that got out of there.

They just walked away?

Just walked. And nobody stopped them. And she got back in March of '44, got back to Pilsen-- early March, I presume. And she was-- nursed herself and her mother back to health because they had-- the food isn't all that good, you know. So they started putting on a little more weight. She got down to, at one point, 85 pounds when she was in prison.

And then they heard that the Americans were coming at-- the Third Army, Patton's army was not far away. And they kept hearing on the radio, they're coming any day now, coming any day now. Well, the underground got together and took the various buildings like the radio station, whatever was important at the time-- took it over, similar to what happened in Paris just prior to the liberation there.

And she was guarding a room full of about 20 German officers with another guy. They were just waiting there for two or three days for the Americans to come. And she was getting pretty tired. They could only spell each other every couple of hours, but it was only the two of them for those three days to watch those 20. And one day, she hears all this commotion going on, people running up and down the stairs and all kinds of stuff happening. And next thing she knows, the door goes flying.

She was waiting in a chair against the door, and the door gets kicked in. She gets thrown into the middle of the room, and she looks up, sees an American uniform, and says, good night. So that was her first introduction to an American. He kicked her in the middle of the room, basically.

And then was crazy for the next couple of days. There was some fighting going on in Pilsen. There was a hospital that the Germans turned into a-- sort of a fortress. They got the walking wounded and gave them weapons and started sniping at everybody that moved, all the Americans that would move.

There was some fighting at that hospital, but after a couple of days, it still quieted down, and the place was cleared up. And-- excuse me. Then within about a month, the war ended. The Americans were still there for a couple of days, and-- but then they had to pull out because of the ultimate agreement giving Czechoslovakia basically to the Russian sector. And she saw a lot of friends leave that day. She made very good friends with a lot of Americans, met Patton.

How'd she meet Patton?

There was a party hosted at her mother's house for some of the occupation officers, and Patton showed up. He happened to be around. And she thought highly of him and still did. She thought George C Scott gave a great performance. So very much a fan.

Did they talk?

Oh, yeah. Yes. They talked horses a lot. Apparently, Patton was an ex-cavalryman from many years before, and her love of horses-- they hit it off very well, just buddies chewing the fat, basically.

Did he know what her involvement was in the assassination?

I don't know about Heydrich, but he knew about her involvement in the underground, yes. I don't know about the particular incident.

When her mother and she left Dresden disguised as Germans, did they just take a train? How did they get from Dresden back to Pilsen?

Well, they went to a refugee center. Yeah, they were dressed in civilian clothes, and-- after they had gotten rid of their prison clothes. And they said they were bombed out refugees from Dresden and that they had family living in Czechoslovakia. So the German government relocated them to Pilsen.

They gave her tickets or what--

Yes, they put them on a train and said, nice knowing you, that kind of thing, but took them as being Germans.

Did they need any identification cards?

Oh, they just said they were bombed out. They lost everything.

What-- when she was in Theresienstadt, was she mostly in isolation?

Yes, in isolation quite a bit. In fact, when the movie, Holocaust, came out, and they had a scene in there taken in the prison, she called me up because she said that was the cellar she was in. I can't remember the character's name, but he had his hands broken and was being tortured.

And they put him in the cell, basically, like a 8 by 6 cell or 5 by 6 cell, something like that. And she got very worked up about that. The-- I guess what you'd call post-traumatic stress disorder hit her. At that point, it was just memories flooding back for her.

Right before that, what is-- you're thinking about her father turning her in. How did that happen and why?

How did it happen? I think for-- he was trying to cover himself, basically. He knew if she was caught or if his wife was caught, that he would probably go to prison too or be killed. And whatever the family had left in the way of wealth would be gone, would be confiscated. So it's basically to cover himself, I believe.

And then after the war ended, the Czechs executed him as a collaborator.

A collaborator with the Germans?

With the Germans, yes.

But he was afraid of being caught as a resistance fighter?

Well, he wasn't a resistance fighter. He was afraid of being painted with the same brush. Back then, if a member of your family was in the resistance or did anything like that, your whole family was wiped out or sent to the camp or something. It wasn't just the person involved. It was everybody. They assumed guilt by association.

So he wanted to distance himself and say, I'm not a resistance fighter, and, in fact, he was a collaborator.

He was a collaborator with the Germans, yes.

What does that mean? What did he do?

Just cooperated with them. I don't know exactly what he did. But the fact that he turned his own daughter and wife in, and I believe probably the factory did some work for the German government on armaments or something like that. That branded him as a collaborator pretty well.

People were executed in Czechoslovakia for a lot less after the war.

And he was German and part of--

He was-- he was born in Czechoslovakia. He was born in Czechoslovakia, but he was totally ethnically German.

And this upset your mother?

Yeah, especially given that and the fact that one of her cousins was an SS general, Generalleutnant Waffen-SS Fritz von Scholz, who was commander of the fifth SS division killed at Leningrad.

He was a relative on her father's side?

Yeah, a cousin, first cousins. It-- she totally wanted to distance herself from that side of the family, totally deny it. So then, after the war ended and her father was killed-- executed him-- she took the name of her mother's family, her mother's maiden name, Valesova.

And then in March of '46, she married my father, Tegl, Viktor Tegl. And they escaped from Czechoslovakia after the Communist takeover, and they escaped in July or August-- not certain-- of '48, went to England for about three or four years, and came to the States in '53, where I was born.

Was your father--

Now I'm here. My father-- my father was in the Royal Air Force during the war. He was Czech. And like a lot of Czechs, he had gotten out of the country just as the war started, made his way to England, and joined the Air Force there. And he was a radio operator on a bomber and flew God knows how many missions, something like 45, 50 missions for a bomber command and also coastal command, sub hunting, things like that.

Before we get to your dad, what was the basis-- your mother lied by saying your father was dead-- her father was dead.

Yes.

And--

In her mind, he was dead, you understand. In her mind, she was-- I mean, yes, in her mind, he was really dead because she must have seen the way his tendencies or his affections politically were leaning. So that killed him in her mind. And that's, I believe, why she said he was executed, why he was killed when the war started. Psychologically, he was.

Did they see each other at all?

During the war, I imagine they did. I imagine they did.

She was telling other people he was dead or--

I don't know if she was telling people during the war. I know she was-- she told me, and she told us about everybody else that she came in contact with after the war that that's what happened.

Did she tell you that through your whole life?

Yes, up until a year ago when I found out that's not the case. I finally got through and contacted some of my cousins through the Hopfengartner side of the family. I found them by accident, or they found me, rather.

Otto-- let's see, George Bartos called me in last September, and he said, hi, this is George Bartos. I'm a cousin of yours, Hopfengartner. I go, Hopfengartner-- who's Hopfengartner?

He goes, well, your mother was a Hopfengartner. She was born a Hopfengartner. And my mother and your grandfather were brother and sister. That's not right. My mother was a Vales. Her father was a Vales. He said, that's what I'd been told. And he goes, well, we better talk about this.

My sister still lives in Czechoslovakia. She was born there in July, '48, just before my parents escaped. They left her with my grandmother. She knows, through my grandmother, the real story, the Hopfengartner connection.

Well, when George Bartos went visiting the Czechoslovakia a couple of years ago, he ran across my sister. And I hadn't been in touch with her in about 20 years, and then-- well, my Czech is poor. Her English is non-existent. So we had no contact. It's difficult.

She asked him to look me up, so he did, and that's how I got the call from him. By coincidence, about two weeks later, I got a call from the family of Otto Springer in Marin. He said, hi, we're cousins of yours from the Hopfengartner family. I go, oh, no. [LAUGHS]

So we had a big family reunion a few months back. George came out, and it's a great family. It really is-- the whole bunch of them. I like them.

And that's how I started finding out the real story about my mom. It took a long time for the shock to settle down, for the shock to wear off because 38, 39 years of-- I hate to say lies, but that's basically what I'd been living, thinking you're something and you're not, one thing you're not.

And well, I can understand why she did it. I can understand her. I really wish she had leveled with me though. You know, it's like, I'm a big boy. I can take it.

What were your first thoughts when you found out about your father's club and your grandfather's collaboration with the Germans?

Well, at that point, I'd already found out that a lot of stuff my mom had said was not true, at least about her family. And at that point, I was willing to believe it because it was just one more new thing that I hadn't heard before.

Personally, I have a daughter. I don't see how in the world anybody could ever turn his family in like that. I don't. I would never think of turning my daughter in to something like that, not to go through what she did. I don't know what in the world he was thinking when he did it, except he must've been really scared or he just didn't care. Scared for himself is what I mean.

What other things were you finding out that your mother had not leveled with you?

Well, the family. That's basically what it is-- her background. A lot of the things that she did during the war, I'm able to corroborate through other sources too. So I'm not relying solely on her for everything, her wartime experiences. But her denial-- her denial was the big key.

All her life, she said--

We were totally Czech. We were-- actually, not totally Czech. She said there was some French and Danish in the family also, but she totally denied any German ancestry.

And that your grandfather had died at the beginning of the war.

Yeah.

How-- did she tell you how he died?

He had been taken hostage by the Germans because there was a train load of gold, which was supposed to have been the Czech gold reserve that was being taken to Germany. And he was one of 10 hostages that, if something happened to the train, they would be killed. Well, the train was blown up, so they were killed. That's her story originally.

Is there any truth to the whole--

Well, I would think there is some, but I think the person that got killed was probably on her mother's side of the family because something really triggered her off in a violent way more so than just an invasion of your country.

There was almost a bloodlust involved. She was out for revenge.

And never told you why?

Well, she told me because of her father being executed by the Germans in the beginning of the war. But, you know, of course, wasn't true, as I found out. But I think somebody else in her family really was executed on her mother's side, but I don't know who.

I had a question about when she went-- when she decided to go to Prague and she found these people. What were the secrecy codes, and how did she know who she could ask about the paratroopers to?

Well, by gosh and by golly, basically. It was-- she had those two names of supposed resistance leaders. There were no real codes to go by, so you had to go by reading a person intuitively. Talk to them in a roundabout way without getting to the point and see how they react or what they volunteer.

I don't know about any codes or any sort of things that she used at the time, except she didn't-- certainly did not trust this Uncle Hayek for some reason. And it was when that Aunt Marie volunteered about the paratroopers, that she had them in the kitchen, that was-- you don't volunteer things like that in an occupied country, in Prague, you know. So that was very reliable. You can trust her on that. You can trust Aunt Marie, whoever she was. That's-- we don't even know if that's her real name.

Did your mom, growing up, describe any kind of political ideology that would explain her resistance work more than revenge or--

No. Politically, she's always been conservative. She was a Republican, as much anti-communist as she was anti-Nazi. I don't believe there was a political motive to what she did. It was nationalistic. Her country was invaded. Her people were being killed. And that was her motive.

So you think that was her motive along with someone being killed in her family?

Right, right.

And that she was a little bit of a wild child.

Yeah.

It all added up--

That's right.

--resistance fighter.

Mm-hmm. That's exactly--

So now, tell us, hearing the stories growing up, what was it like, and did you feel pride and--

Oh, of course, I felt pride.

What were you feeling, and what were you hearing?

I was feeling-- well, first of all, I didn't really want to tell many people about it because some of the stories were almost too far fetched. It seemed too Hollywood almost, some of them. So I didn't want people thinking, oh, it's just some stories. So I didn't really share it too much. Closest friends-- yeah, I did share things with.

Yeah, there was an intense source of pride in it. Sure, there was. I've-- in the last year, I've become proud of two families, actually. The Vales that I originally thought was my family, which is actually my family still, and now I have another family, the Hopfengartner, which I'm just about as equally proud of. Maybe not individuals as much as the family as a whole.

You'll have to tell us about the family as a whole and show us the picture of the family.

OK. I told you the background of the family, basically. I imagine they were very pampered because they were sort of the Rockefellers of Czechoslovakia. They were-- very high lifestyle. They hobnobbed with the high society. In fact, I believe they hosted a ball at Holoubkov one time for Archduke Ferdinand just prior to World War I. That was the sort of circle that they rotated in, they mixed in.

There's some discussion that your mom's family was a royal family. Do you have any clues where that-- what that is?

From her mother's side. I believe there is some connection with the Colloredo-Mansfeld family, which they were dukes. I don't know the exact connection. I don't know the precise connection, but she was somehow related to them through her mother, her mother's side of the family, more likely through marriage at some point, maybe a generation or two prior to my mother's generation. There's a little bit of a tie-in there.

What was the name of the 84th Duke that you told us about?

Well, his name he goes by now is Richard Bayschock. But-- shoot, what's his-- there was a long title to it. All I know is he's the 84th Duke of Colloredo-Mansfeld. There is another long-winded title along with it, but I don't recall that at the moment.

And how did you find him or he find you?

When my cousin, George, a few months ago went to Australia on some business, he ran into him at a lawyer's office. The whole small world routine-- how I met my cousins, to begin with, a year ago. Now, they meet this guy in Australia. So I got the address from my cousin, and I've written to Mr. Bayschock a couple of times.

He-- trying to find out the connection with the Vales and the Colloredo-Mansfeld. But apparently, he's somewhat removed from that, and he doesn't know quite what the connection is either, but he believes there is one too. I tried tracing back my mother's mother's family as far as possible, and there seems to be a convergence at some point.

Did your mother describe herself as a princess growing up to you?

Not growing-- well, she mentioned it to me, or rather, she mentioned her mother was the princess, Coretta Mansfeld.

Her mother was the princess related to the Mansfelds

Yes. She did not refer to herself as being a princess. But I don't know if being the daughter of a princess makes you a princess. I'm not sure. But--

What was her mother's maiden name?

Valesova.

OK, and then her father--

Colloredo-Mansfeld is a family name, but a relation, if you understand what I mean. I'm not into family trees very much, and lines of succession are not my forte.

And what were your first memories of what your mom told you?

Oh, god, ever since I was I a-- ever since I can remember. Something else that makes me believe that most of her stories are true is that they hardly ever changed. If a person makes up a story, they will tend to elaborate on it. They will tend to go in different directions, some bizarre directions with it. But hers never did. Hers was always straightforward. That's why it was so believable to me.

She would always tell me about the Vales, that they were counts, they're of noble descent. She would talk about some of the family history, which I'm not sure if it's quite real or not right now. I'm not so certain.

Which part?

About the Vales. She claimed that the Vales line goes back several centuries, back to sometime in the 12th century. How much of that is true, I'm really not sure. And I'd rather not put that down on record because I don't want to mislead anybody. Excuse me.

And her role in the war?

Her role in the war, I believe, is true.

I mean that she would tell you a lot about.

Oh, she would. Not maybe some of the more graphic details. She was-- she told me about some of the things about the Heydrich assassination, and she would always get mad when she read a book or saw a film or something that talked about-- especially about how the one guy's gun reputedly jammed as he was going to shoot Heydrich.

And she'd go, it didn't jam. He forgot to take the safety off. She was very adamant about that. And I think that's the one thing that-- about that story that is the most credible is that she didn't go along with the regular story that it jammed. No, it did not jam.

And she was adamant that it was a safety he just fumbled around with and couldn't get off. He couldn't get the safety off. That's why he couldn't shoot. As far as I know, I've never seen that anywhere in a document or anywhere, so that's something she had to know one way or another.

Where was she at the exact at the moment of this?

She was back at Aunt Marie's apartment at the time. And she was waiting for them to come back. As it was, I believe it was Gabcik that was wounded. But the chauffeur was-- in the Mercedes-- was wounded, but he was able to shoot Gabcik in the arm. He was the one that was trying to use the gun.

The two guys split up and went totally different ways, so they couldn't be followed together to one certain place. One hopped a streetcar and took that back. One got on a bicycle.

Now, Gabcik, the one that was on the bicycle and was wounded, had to ditch the bicycle because he was leaving a pretty good blood trail. He dumped it, made his way back to the apartment, and my mom and a doctor, a doctor-- she summoned a doctor somehow-- and got him there and patched up his arm.

And that's when he told her what happened, that he had-- about the safety instead of the gun jamming. So that's how she learned of that.

And then what happened?

Oh, I can't really-- I-- it was shortly after then that that priest, Father Patrick, took them into the crypt of the church. And it was then her job to try and get them out. They thought that they could get them on the train as an honor guard in



German uniform, and she went to pick them up and was in an apartment across the street about an hour before she was to pick them up. And that's when the Germans came and trapped them.

Was Father Patrick in the church?

He was killed too. Yes.

And was he part of the resistance? He knew that they were--

Yeah, he knew what was going on. Whether he was actually a member of the resistance, I don't know, but he definitely knew what was happening. He knew who was down there, who they were. And from what I understand, when the Germans first pulled up in front of the church, he came out of the door and stood in front of the door and wouldn't let them pass, and they shot him down.

Did they know his role in it?

I don't think so, other than he was a meddlesome priest who wouldn't let them perform their duty.

And so everyone-- those people were killed in the church.

Yes.

Everyone.

Yes.

And so no one--

Except Curda, the one that turned informer.

And where's Curda now?

Curda came up with the Germans afterwards and identified the bodies. My mom saw that too. She said she remembered the Germans pulling the bodies out of the church, and they're dragging them by their feet. And she remembers the thunk as their heads hit the steps because they were being dragged down the steps. They lined them up beside the church, and Curda came by, and he identified the bodies. He identified the two that actually killed Heydrich.

And from there, the Reign of Terror took off. They were looking for conspiracies everywhere, and Lidice happened and-- all over Czechoslovakia.

What did the Germans do with Curda? Do you know?

I don't know. I don't know what his final fate was.

Did your mom ever express any guilt about Lidice or Lezaky?

Yeah, she felt that if she had been able to get them out-- I don't know how she figured this, but if she had been able to get them out, maybe it wouldn't have happened the same way. Maybe they wouldn't have been able to follow up other trails. It was an imaginary trail. Somehow they picked Lidice to exterminate. There was no real connection with what they were doing and Lidice. But maybe they had to make an example of Lidice, something like that.

That's a terrible thing because she couldn't have done anything different. I mean--

True, but it's the-- it's always the assumption that if you change history one iota, you're going to change all of history.

And it's quite possible that she thought if they had gotten out, maybe a lot of things wouldn't have happened the way they did.

Or if the safety hadn't-- I don't know.

Yeah, there's a lot of possibilities, a lot of possibilities.

I'm missing-- I'm just-- it's my fault. I'm missing the-- where it did go wrong. At what point it-- how did it not work out?

Well, when Curda went to the Gestapo--

Right.

--he told them where they were--

He told them where they were.

--at the crypt at the church. And I'm not sure that he knew when they were supposed to get out, or for him, it was just dumb luck timing, I suppose, that they got there an hour before they were supposed to leave.

Did your mother have an escape plan for them?

They were going to come in a bakery truck or some kind of a-- some sort of a truck. I'm not sure exactly how-- and get them out of the church that way, get them into uniform, somehow get them on the train. She wasn't sure about that. That's a little more difficult, you know. But--

Where would they have gotten the uniforms?

There are a lot of ways of getting uniforms, most commonly by killing the Germans that were wearing them. In that regard, you didn't want to-- you didn't want to shoot them. You didn't want to cause any wounds on the body. You would use garrote.

What?

Garrote, the wire or rope around the neck, strangle them. You don't want to get blow out or anything on the uniform. Cutting the throat was out of the question too. Or a couple of times, they actually stole uniforms from dry cleaners. Once when they needed a field marshal's uniform, they got one from a dry cleaner somehow. I don't know what the situation was there, but they apparently had quite a wardrobe of various equipment uniforms, weapons.

Did your mother ever talk about meeting Jewish partisan fighters?

No, I asked her about-- if she had ever smuggled Jews out. And she said no, at least she didn't know of any that were Jewish particularly, but that by the time she got into the actual smuggling business, there weren't many Jews left in that part of the country. So mainly, the people they smuggled out were POWs, shot-down pilots, things of that nature.

Did she witness a round-ups or deportations of Jews?

Not that she mentioned to me, no. She quite likely did early on, at least, but I hadn't heard of it. And partisans-- I'm not-- no, she didn't ever mention partisans. I don't see why there wouldn't be, why there couldn't be.

Because when you were talking about the train going over the bridge that they had bombed, I was wondering if she had ever seen trains with human cargo going through Czechoslovakia.

I imagine she had.

She doesn't talk about it.

I guess not. Yeah. That's a kind of question you should really ask her, really. And unfortunately, that's-- I can't delve into her memories. I wish I could.

Well, tell us about the 300 tapes.

Oh. Well, they basically cover her life from the date of her birth until just shortly after the war, maybe '47.

And how did this start?

Oh. Well, I thought-- well, she retired from the post office. And I felt it was something for her to do, something for-- to keep her occupied. You know, she was alone. She was divorced. And my father had died already. So I found something to keep her going, and she always wanted to get her story out in some form. She thought maybe write a book and maybe give the tapes to somebody who could write a book.

So over the course of about two years, she racked up some-- about 300 tapes to the best of my knowledge, going at it day after day, really, just talking off the top of her head, just memories, things-- some of the tapes that I've heard are-- some are engrossing. Some are very intriguing. Some are very mundane. We talk about daily life and care and feeding of horses and things like that. But she covered her life pretty well from what I can tell.

Was it a cathartic process for her?

Yeah. She told me a couple of times that, as she was talking, things would keep coming back to her-- memories, memories that she didn't think she could remember anymore, that she had forgotten, some very disturbing ones.

She talked about the day she got to-- I believe it was to Dresden, and sort of to impress upon the prisoners that Germans weren't going to fool around, there were three nuns that the Germans raped there in the courtyard in front of the incoming prisoners, and then crucified them. That she told me about just about a year before she died as something that she just remembered. And it was something that every incoming prisoner witnessed in her group.

After the war, was she shattered thinking of all of this? Was she full of pride? Did she--

Well, she was pride in what she did and also full of hatred, the result of which was also her denial of her family, her heritage. She never could get along with Germans. I remember any time we were in-- oh, say, somewhere out in the city or whatever, and we'd hear a tourist speaking German, she always got a shudder and get very cold and stiff and feel like she just wanted to-- she looked like she was going to kill just because the person was speaking German. She was-- she hated it that rabidly.

I said-- I kept telling her, Mom, it's 50 years or so, you know. Germans are not the same. She goes, give them another Hitler, and they'll be the same. Give him another chance. She had a lot of hate in her, a lot of pain that-- she hid it very well at times. I mean most of the time. There was times like that that it just came out.

Did she have a lot of nightmares?

Yeah, she did after she started doing the tapes. She started talking about it. She-- she'd call me up in the middle of the night saying she just had to talk to me because she had a dream about such and such or whatever. And she just needed to make sure it wasn't real. It wasn't still happening.

And in that regard, I'm sorry that I got her started on the project of doing the tapes because it left her in an emotionally sensitive state, I'd say, not anywhere near crazy or something, but she was very touchy, very touchy after that.

It was almost-- it was almost as if she'd changed. You know, she'd been the very independent, very-- devil make care

person all my life, but when she started making the tapes, she-- she was just very touchy about the war, about what she said about it. She would veil her words quite a bit. I think the only place she really let out her feelings was on the tapes.

And instead of focusing her energies into telling me how she felt, she told the machine how she felt. So that was her release then after that.

Did she ever talk to you about what she wanted those tapes to be?

She wanted somebody-- there was a guy she had run into who was a free-- excuse me-- freelance writer. And she was hoping that he could write a book using those tapes. For some reason, he never did. He backed out of it or something like that. I feel this is the best way to do it-- right now. She definitely wanted the story known.

And you do too.

Yeah, of course I do. I owe it to her.

Can I ask you if were close?

Very. I never got along with my father very much. He was an alcoholic, and they had divorced back in the '60s, '65. No, I was never close to him. I was very close to her though because she had to hold the family together. My father was not there a lot of the times-- emotionally, mentally, whatever. And she actually took the reins, kept the family together in a time when every mother was supposed to be June Cleaver, you know.

So she was a very powerful entity ever since I've known her, very strong individual, strong-willed.

Did she talk with other people besides yourself about the war and her activities?

Some, mostly people that were there during the war-- not there during the war, but persons who experienced the war who were there. She probably thought that they, more than anybody else, would understand, that they could relate to it better.

How do you-- in a country like America, how do you relate to things like that? How can you imagine that people can do that to other people? Yeah, she was very selective about who she talked to. And a couple of times, people just out and out didn't believe her. I think she was afraid of maybe ridicule or something like that, so that's another reason she was selective.

And you had said-- you said that some of the other stuff, some of the other stories you were afraid people wouldn't believe. Were there certain stories that you-- which stories?

The Heydrich assassination because that was-- it's famous. Let's face it. How many people can say their mother took part in the Heydrich assassination? [LAUGHS] Meeting General Patton, for one thing, another thing, another point. She got around, apparently-- witnessed the destruction of Dresden. That's become legendary.

Walked out of the--

Walked out of the prison. Yeah. That's another one, you know.

She was almost strangled in the railroad.

Yeah.

Survived torture in a concentration camp.

Yeah, so much. So much that is melodramatic almost. Well, it actually is melodramatic. It is melodramatic.

Did she feel the pride?

Oh, yes, very, very much. When she talked to me about it, it was like I could see her kind of brimming. She-- well, at times. Sometimes she got very melancholy about it, especially when she was talking about people she knew that weren't there anymore, that were killed or whatever. But there was a lot of pride involved and also a lot of hate, unresolved hate.

How could she live with her father turning her in? But she could never talk-- she never talked--

She never talked to him about it. She never mentioned that.

Is it in the tapes?

No. The story-- the cover-up story is in the tapes. That's why I wanted to give you a caveat before I give you the tapes because that part of the story is not true.

You also haven't heard all of the tapes.

No.

So maybe she talked about it.

Possibly.

Did she talk about it with anyone that you know of?

First time I'd ever heard of it was from my cousin, Otto.

What'd he say?

He said that my grandfather was executed not in 1939 by the Germans, but in 1945 by the Czechs as a collaborator. And I wrote my sister and I-- one of the-- I started writing her recently too, as a matter of fact. This whole thing's bringing family together. It's great.

She confirmed it to me too, and that was the story she had heard from my grandmother. She's been dead now 22 years, unfortunately, my grandmother-- that, in fact, she-- that he had turned them into the Gestapo.

Any more information about that, how he went to town and--

No, I don't know the particulars of it. But one other thing-- she says that when she was driven to the Gestapo headquarters, finally, she was driven in a Volkswagen. She never wanted to drive in a Volkswagen again just-- [LAUGHS] anytime anybody wanted to give her a ride in a Volkswagen, she'd rather take a bus or walk. It was peculiar little quirks, but--

The Gestapo came to there.

Picked her up in a Volkswagen.

Where they were staying?

Yeah.

And it was her mother's house?

Yeah, at Pilsen, and took her and her mother away.

Did she describe her thoughts or feelings at the time when they arrived?

No, I don't-- I don't recall her talking about that specifically. I guess, in broadest terms, that she got picked up in the Volkswagen, things like that.

Did she-- when did she find out that her father had been involved in this?

That's a very good question. I don't know. I wouldn't have found out from her because she was still telling me that her father was executed in '39. So--

Otto told you.

Otto told me that, yeah.

After the Heydrich assassination, she went back to Pilsen, correct?

Right.

From 1942 to 1944, when she was picked up by the Gestapo-- did her duties change during those years? Were there any-- were there any-- was she--

Hmm. There was one time-- on her 16th birthday, she got a 16th birthday present. The guy said-- the guys, her compatriots, said they were going to give her a surprise for her birthday. So she said, OK, great.

They set up an ambush for-- and along the road came three truckloads of Germans, and they disabled the first truck somehow, dropping a tree across the road or something like that. And they gave her a Thompson machine gun, submachine gun, and she pretty well raked all three cars, all three trucks. And that was her 16th birthday present. Like I said, it was a lot of blood lust.

That's fear, though, that drive showing her later life when you knew her. How did--

Her hatred of Germans, hatred of anything German.

What type of lifestyle did she have? Was it a quiet lifestyle? Was she very active?

She was very not active. She was-- she was very active mentally. She was not active physically very much. She was an avid reader. And later on in life, she devoted almost all her time to the tapes. She was more of a cerebral kind of a person than a physical one at the end. Oh, well, at the end-- I mean, for the period that I've known her, at least.

What was her profession in this country?

She was, for the most part, she worked in the post office for 20-some-odd years, retired from there in '87, and that's when I started her working on the tapes.

And where were you-- where were you born and raised?

San Francisco, and I moved to New York in 1980 to '85. And that was a tough time because physically, so far apart. She still lived here, and I was over there. We got to see each other once or twice during that whole period. And then I came back, and then I moved up to Santa Rosa. I've been here ever since.

And you have a daughter?

Yes. I've been married twice, and the first one in New York didn't work out. And I just got divorced a year and a half ago. And my daughter is 6, going on 7 next month. God, I got to get a birthday present. [LAUGHS]

Have you been telling her the stories?

No. I don't think she'd understand. She just vaguely remembers Grandma Charlotte because she did die three years ago, so her memory isn't that good. She vaguely remembers her, but--

What did your mom die of?

Cerebral hemorrhage. She basically blew out the left side of her brain very quick. She was in a coma for about a week, and she passed away on December 30, 1990, which, curiously enough, was 12 years to the date and almost to the exact minute after my father died. And they were both the same age when they died too. They were both 65.

How did your father die?

Heart attack, back in '78.

What was your mother's general state of health throughout her life?

Well, she had epilepsy, which is-- I have epilepsy too. We're still trying to figure out what happened. We think that maybe it was induced by something in prison that happened to her because she was knocked around pretty well, I imagine. And any kind of head injury can give you that condition.

And then it's passed on genetically.

It could be, yeah. I don't know if my daughter has it or not, so it's something-- it's a wait and see sort of thing.

She wasn't epileptic before the war?

Not that I know of. No, actually, I had an epileptic seizure when I was 21, and I only had two. That was the first. And I knew that she had had fainting spells occasionally. And after they diagnosed me as epileptic, I thought, well, let's give your mom a shot. And sure enough, she turned up with epilepsy also. So she wasn't just fainting. She was having seizures, except nobody recognized it.

Where did she live?

Well, she lived in San Francisco most of the time and moved to Daly City in-- oh, god-- moved to Daly City in '86. And then when she retired from the post office, she moved to Sebastopol. And we were only about three miles apart at that point.

So I could keep better in touch with her then. It was easier. But still, things I'd rather do-- well, looking back on things, things I'd have done differently-- spent more time with her, things like that. I think we all go through that.

Everyone.

Yeah.

Can I ask you a personal question?

Sure.

When you're talking, I hear that you're very close with her. Was there any emotional impact in particular of having a mother, growing up with such a role model and--

An emotional impact?

That you-- regrets that you have now? Was there any guilt, or were there expectations on you from her?

Yeah, there were. I was expected to-- well, first thing she always imparted on me-- always be honest. Always be truthful. And always be loyal to your family, which I'm sure had something to do with what her father did to her.

She always stressed loyalty and-- almost to an extreme, almost to an extreme. She was very strict in that regard. And that's the way I've tried to live. I mean maybe not always-- maybe not always the way she wished, but I tried to.

In her later years, did you feel certain responsibility to take care of her?

Yeah. Sure, I did. I was the only one around. And that's primarily why I had her move relatively close in Sebastopol after her retirement, so I could be in better touch with her. But unfortunately, I didn't keep in as good a touch as I'd want. You know, once or twice a week, or we'd call-- we'd talk almost every day on the phone. But as far as physically visiting, it was something else. I wish I could do that differently. Oh, well.

Were there other things-- pressures on you that she expected from you?

No, I really don't think so. I think maybe it's pressures I put on me. When you live with stories about how your family was, whether it's true or not, with these stories, you don't want to be the black sheep of the family and do something wrong. You don't want to go against tradition, against-- if your family was noble, you don't want to be less than noble. You understand?

But those are limitations I put on myself. I always try-- I just wanted to live up to an ideal. And if it's a realistic ideal, I don't know, but something I try to do at least. It's not so much things she imposed on me, but I did it to myself.

And that's good or hard for you?

No, it's good. It's hard, and it's good. I mean, you don't make steel without putting it in a lot of heat, right? You go through a lot to discipline yourself, to do things the right way, a lot of trial and tribulation. But I think, all in all, I'm glad I did it. I'm glad I chose that route.

And that's why I'm trying to tell you the story of the family as it really is, not necessarily what she wanted it to be because I do have the sense of-- a sense of honor about it, a sense of purpose that-- I'm also a trained historian, so I don't want to-- I don't want to give false information either. If I'm going to do a historical analysis, it's going to be with the facts or the facts as I know them to be.

What is your specialty?

Well, I have a BA in history and a minor in anthropology.

For a specific period?

Oh, well, military history primarily and ancient and-- no, ancient military history, for the most part.

This is such an unusual opportunity for us to hear a family that had both resistance fighters and collaborators in one family. Do you-- I mean, we have so much to learn from people that had both those feelings or both those experiences in their families. Is the collaborator part-- does that scare you or upset you or no?

It's not something I'd be proud of, just like having a-- the SS general for a cousin doesn't throw me a lot either. But it happened. Nothing I can avoid-- I can't-- I can try denying it, but it's not true. I'm not proud of what some members of my family did, but I'm proud of the family in general.



Tell me about Cousin Fritz.

Cousin Fritz-- he was-- all I know of him is he was a general in the SS, commanded the Fifth SS division.

Which did what?

It was on the Russian front. He was killed at Leningrad. I don't know anything about him personally, of course. I never got the chance to meet him, obviously. So all I know of him is through history books. And they don't tell you much about the person. They just tell you what he did and where he was.

But there was also another member of the family that had some prominent Nazi officials, party officials. I don't know who-- exactly what they did, but it must have caused my mom a lot of grief.

And Otto-- what do you know about Otto?

Yes, so much he-- he served some time in the camps, from what I understand. I don't know his full story, just from bits and pieces that I've been able to get from other people mainly. He spent some time in the camps, and then he worked for the CIA after the war.

[LAUGHS]

Did your mom talk to you about Otto?

No.

Or Fritz?

No, because that'd be giving away that side of the family.

Oh, OK. Oh, you couldn't-- none of that family--

None of that side of the family got taken up.

Did you meet any relatives on your mother's side?

I met my sister once back in '69. She came over for a visit. But other than that, no, never met my grandmother. She died in '71. That's all.

No cousins, aunts, or uncles?

No.

And your sister's story is a little heartbreaking.

Yeah. When my parents escaped, July of '48, actually, in probably August of '48, they were told to get out, basically. A police chief in Holoubkov was a friend of the family. And he sent his son over, and he said that they had a warrant for their arrest.

For?

Well, my mom was trying to organize some sort of political resistance to the Communist regime. Got her hands in everything, man. I don't believe she was actually involved in any act of resistance, at least political resistance. Opposition, let's call it. They wanted her out of the way, since it was still an influential family at the time. They may not

have had the money, but at least their name got them somewhere.

If they could get her out of the way, they'd have a lot less to worry about. So anyway, they issued a warrant for her arrest. The son of the police chief came around and said, we have a warrant and hold it for four hours, and get out now. So they were planning to escape anyway, but not at that time. They had a van of some kind that they had planned to borrow, one way or another, and drive across the border into Germany.

And my sister, at the time, was only a few weeks old, and they knew it'd be kind of dangerous, so they left her with my grandmother. And they took off across the border through some open country, crashing through a couple of barbed wire fences made in Germany, and near Straubing. And they were debriefed by an American intelligence officer there when they were picked up. And they showed them exactly where they crossed and everything.

That's where you crossed? Yeah. We saw them mining that two weeks ago. They drove through the minefield at night. Strange stories. That's another one that probably people wouldn't believe, you know.

What is your sister's name?

Anezka, named, interestingly enough, after one of the Hopfengartner sisters, which I found out later.

So they left your sister there, raised-- and she was raised by--

By my grandmother, right.

Why didn't they come back to get her? They couldn't get her out?

They couldn't get her out. My mom was-- because of her political bent, they were afraid of letting anybody have contact. They thought she might still be organizing something, which she wasn't as far as I know. But I wouldn't put it past her. Maybe she was. I just don't know.

They were trying for a long time to get my sister to come out, and then finally got a visa for her in '69. And at that time, the government over there probably figured it was safe because, at that time, she was married and had a kid already.

So they had a life and a family over there, so they figured it'd be safer, and they wouldn't want to stay here necessarily. So he let them out, and she was here for about six months, and I got to know her finally.

And she went back, and I really hadn't had any contact with her since about 1970 up until last year. I just lost touch. I didn't-- I really didn't know where she lived, didn't have her address or anything. When my mom died, I wanted to get in touch with her, but I didn't have her-- I couldn't find her address anywhere among my mom's things.

Did your mom keep in touch with her?

No. There was some kind of falling out, and I'll never understand what that was. I think it had something to do with my mom trying to talk her into staying when she was out here. And she refused. I understand. She had family and everything over there now. Her whole life was there. And I think that was the big falling out.

Where-- was she-- what city?

Holoubkov. She got the house back. The communists confiscated the former Hopfengartner villa that-- or mansion-- that my mom was raised in. And now, with the-- what's the good word-- repatriation, I suppose, of the confiscated things after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it appears she'll get the house back pretty soon. So it's nice.

Have you been there?

No. Eventually, I would like to go. That's going to be quite some time before I can.

Do you think that there are archives there that might be--

Oh, yeah. Oh, I could learn.

I think you can make some efforts in that direction. We have several good friends in Prague.

Great.

So I think maybe we could talk about interviewing your sister and looking in the archives.

She would probably know more about the family, at least the Vales family, than I do at this point. So yeah, she'd probably be a great person to look into.

Do you speak any foreign languages?

Oh, a smattering of German, very poor Czech. My accent's terrible in Czech. And in fact, my-- when I try to speak Czech to someone, they laugh. It's just--

Was it frustrating thinking about hearing that you were connected to great wealth, and I assume that's not for now necessarily?

Well, a little bit. Not really frustrating because I never had it, so you never have it, you never really lost it then-- just a historical footnote as far as I'm concerned. It's-- I'm glad she's getting the house. It's great for her. She's getting something of a family fortune back at least.

And there was no reparations for your mother?

No, because you have to be a Czech citizen and resident to qualify for the reparations, as I understand. And my mom was neither, of course. She wasn't a citizen anymore. She had full US citizenship, and she was living here.

Were there any--

Excuse me. I need to pause the tape here.