

All right.

OK. Today is February 21, 1996. We are at the Holocaust Oral History Project at 400 [? Brand ?] Street in San Francisco. And today we are interviewing Lily Gerson. My name is Elizabeth Ryan, and with us is Peter Ryan and Sean Simplicio, who's doing the video. So we'll start by asking you to tell us your name and when and where you were born.

I'm Lily Gerson. I was born in Vienna, Austria. And I was born on October 24, 1922.

And can you tell us a little bit about your family?

Yes. My maiden name was Zimentstark.

Maybe you could spell it for us.

It's Z-I-M-E-N-T-S-T-A-R-K. My father's name was Sigmund. My mother's name was Anna. And I had a brother, Fred, or [? Freddie ?] was called then.

We lived in the second district in Vienna, which was sometimes called jokingly the Matzos, Insel, Matzo Island, because so many Jews lived there. [LAUGHS] Have you heard that before? No. It's true.

And my father was a-- it's kind of hard to explain. It was a sort of a furniture finisher meister. He was a master. He had his own shop, his own studio in the sixth district, in Mariahilfer Strasse. And he was very, very good in what he was doing.

His clients were mostly furniture stores, where he finished the fine furniture for them, also individuals, rather well-to-do individuals. And one time, I had the thrill of my life because one of his clients was an actor on the Burgtheater on which I had a crush.

And my mother stayed at home. She took care of the house, her children, me and my younger brother. And she kept a kosher kitchen. And she was a wonderful cook and baker.

We were not particularly wealthy, certainly not, but we were comfortably off. Our apartment was small, but it was very nice. And I went to school just up the street-- I just had a couple of blocks to walk-- and went to first Volksschule for four years as the school is in Vienna. Then you went four years elementary school.

And then we went to either Hauptschule, which was when you were interested in entering a trade. And it went on for four years because you only had to go to school until you were 14. And then-- but I wanted to study, so I went to gymnasium. Was also in the same street. Was a Real Gymnasium, and I went there until we were thrown out.

Were there non-Jewish kids as well as Jews in your schools?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were by far the minority. There were about, in the gymnasium, 30 students in the class and about four Jews, four to five Jews, usually. And--

What kind of housing did you have?

What kind of house?

Housing, yeah. Could you describe where you lived, what it was like?

Well, they were apartment houses. And we lived-- I mean, they were not huge apartment houses. They were maybe-- I know we had three-- what do you call it?

Story.

Stories. Yeah. Three stories and maybe three or four apartments on each story. So it was a small apartment house and sort of middle class. Everybody was kind of middle class.

But there again, the majority of the tenants were not Jews. They were mostly Christian. There were maybe, I think, one, two-- three or four Jewish families in the house. And the rest were Christian and-- Catholic, all of them. It was a Catholic country.

In our class, for instance, everybody was Catholic. We had one Protestant. One Protestant, four Jews, the rest were Catholic.

Were you aware of being treated differently in any way because you were the Jewish kid?

I certainly was aware of antisemitism, but not so much personally against me as directed against-- there were a lot of Orthodox Jews in Vienna at the time with the traditional garb, the payos and the beard and the hat and all that. And there were often people making derisive remarks about them on the street. And I really was not aware of any personal attacks on me or my family.

Do you remember roughly when it was that you began to notice those attacks on the Orthodox? What year?

Oh, that went on a long time, just about ever since I can remember. That was nothing new with the Nazis. I mean, Vienna was antisemitic. I found out later just how. But as I grew up, I was not too aware of it. But of course, you were aware of the fact that you were Jewish because you had to register with the police all the time. And then you had to--

Because you were Jewish?

No. Everybody.

Everybody.

Everybody. And you had to state your religion. So certainly, I mean, there was no question that you were aware that you were Jewish. But also in school, of course, you had religion in school.

That was one of the subjects that was actually taught.

Oh, yeah. Everybody.

What did they do with you while they were teaching?

Oh, no, everybody had religion.

So did they teach also Jewish history?

Oh, Yes.

They did.

Oh, yes. We had Jewish religion. And from the moment you entered school from first grade we had religion. And in fact, later in the gymnasium the Christians sort of envied us because they had to go on Sunday, and we didn't. [LAUGHS] They had to go. They had mass on Sunday in school. But--

Did you have to go to school on Saturday?

Yeah. Oh, yes. School was on Saturday. School was six days a week and two afternoons a week. We had a lot of school. But I liked school. I thought I really learned a lot. We had a good education.

I would have liked to go into a gymnasium. The gymnasium had various-- there were various ways. There was humanistic, which had languages. They taught Latin and Greek. And there was Real Gymnasium, where I went, which only Latin and also some education in-- also rather heavily on mathematics, which I didn't like.

And then there was Realschule, which was all mathematics, no Latin and very little emphasis on languages. But I loved languages. I really wanted to go to gymnasium, but the one that was near me, my mother said was too lenient or something. She wanted me to go to the one near me, which was known for its very, very strict discipline. And it was. But it was OK.

Is that where you went?

Yeah. But it was OK. I liked it except for the emphasis on mathematics, which I was not good at, especially-- we even had-- I don't know-- mechanical drawing, I guess it's called, [GERMAN] in German, where you had to have the t-square and the whole bit. Oh, God, I hated that.

Were they preparing people for particular careers?

Yeah, for the university. If you wanted to go to university, you had to go to gymnasium and had your Abitur. You had to have the exam in the-- after eight-- you had eight classes, eight years of gymnasium, and then you had to pass this very difficult exam at the end. And then you could go to university.

Also in order to get to the end of the gymnasium, you had to pass an exam. Not everybody could go.

Was it determined entirely by the exam or was it also a financial concern whether you could go?

Well, you had to pay, but it was very minimal. Yeah. That was not a problem. It was not a private school. It was public. And while you had to pay some, it was nothing that was of-- and I think there were scholarships for students that could not afford to pay even that small amount.

Everybody was already trembling years ahead of that exam because it was always on the top floor. And the whole school did tiptoe when those exams were going on. It went on for a whole week.

What was it like in your family?

Well, it was, I would say, sort of a typical European family, where my father was working all day, including-- he worked Saturday. We didn't see too much of him except in the evenings.

My mother was, I must say, an angel. Was a wonderful mother. And it's always nice coming home from school because it always smelled so good from her cooking and her baking.

Do you remember her making any particular Jewish things?

Well, she didn't make so many particular Jewish things. She was born in Poland. No, she made borscht, Polish borscht. And she made-- yeah. But it was a lot of Austrian dishes too. Or she--

Did she do Austrian baking as well as--

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. She did. And in fact, I inherited that from her because I do some-- a little professional baking now even. I still have her cookbook, her baking book. And--

So I'll bet you do it all by weight. Am I correct?

Yes. I have a scale. I have one that has the metric.

How was she an angel? What are you thinking when you say that?

She was so devoted to us. And I think, by Austrian standards, very understanding and really lenient because in those days it was nothing to slap a kid around. A lot of families did that. And it was all right. It was considered OK. But she never did.

How about your father?

No. He never hit us.

So he worked on Saturday?

My brother, he hit, yeah, once because he-- well, he didn't run away but he befriended a taxi chauffeur. And the guy took him for a ride. Didn't come home for hours and hours. And of course, my parents were worried sick, so he got a good thrashing after that.

How much younger was your brother?

Two years. And of course, we fought, but he lives in New Jersey now, and now we're very good friends.

I take it if your father worked on Saturday, that you weren't really [BOTH TALKING]

Well, he wasn't. My mother was. My mother was more religious than he. He couldn't-- he didn't care about being kosher, but my mother did.

So how did how did that affect you and your brother that one parent was religious and the other really wasn't?

I don't know. We just sort of took things for granted. We didn't think too much about it. That's the way it was. At home we were kosher. My father would-- if he went out to the circus-- he'd love to go the circus-- and they were selling ham sandwiches, he bought me a ham sandwich. So we ate outside of the house, not my mother, but my father and I. We ate out.

Did they argue about this or--

No.

--was it just understood that they were different and that's it?

It was understood. It was OK.

Would you feel guilty that you were going against your mother's way of doing?

No, but she knew about it.

She knew.

Oh, yeah.

So she didn't really impose it on you.

No. No. She knew about it.

Did you and your brother have any religious training?

Oh, at school? Oh, and he had bar mitzvah.

And he was bar mitzvah?

Oh, yeah. But we had religious training in school.

But from any separate Jewish school or organization?

No, no. Well, then of course, he had private lessons. Somebody came to the house, and he had to go through all the Hebrew training, through all that Hebrew.

Training for the bar mitzvah.

When he was bar mitzvah, yeah. And then we had a nice party in house. That was nice.

Did you or your parents go to shul?

Yes, but they did not go so often. We always went on high holidays. And my mother and father fasted on Yom Kippur, but they didn't make us fast. My mother prepared food for us, and we could eat. But she said we could not write on the high holidays. We had to stay home from school, and we couldn't write. We couldn't write at all.

But did she impose that limitation for Shabbos or only for the high holy days?

No.

So it was a pretty liberal life.

Yeah. Now, talking-- that reminded me that in school, there were two-- at one time for about two years there were two students who were very Orthodox. And they did not want to write on Saturday. And that was a problem.

How did they solve it?

Well, they didn't write. But I felt that they were not treated very nicely, especially by the-- there were a couple of professors that were not overtly but were known to be antisemitic, the math professor and another one. And he made it hard for them.

They stayed for two years, and then I think they went to probably the Jewish school. There was a school exclusively Jewish in Vienna. And so yeah, I noticed that.

So you witnessed that?

I'm sorry.

You saw that happening?

Yeah, I mean that he seemed--

And you felt it's because they're Orthodox--

Yeah.

--and they're Jewish?

He seemed not to be very nice to them.

Do you think it affected their grades?

They were not very good students to begin with. They were not. I think maybe if they had been brilliant students, it might not have mattered. But they were not particularly good students. And I think they just were not feeling comfortable there. I had non-Jewish friends.

All the time?

Yeah. Yeah. Now, in elementary school, I had one Jewish friend. Actually, in elementary school I think most of my friends were Jewish, I remember. In gymnasium I had a lot of non-Jewish friends.

I had two best friends. One was Jewish but totally unreligious. I mean, just totally to the extent that they had Christmas trees and they didn't-- she didn't stay home on the Jewish holidays and so forth.

My other friend was half Jewish. But she was raised Catholic. Her mother was Jewish. Her father was Catholic, and she was raised Catholic. But they were my two best friends. And--

And they were welcome in your house and you in theirs?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. And the other friends with whom I was not so close but they were also my friends were not at all-- I mean, we got along very well and were friendly. And I later found out that one of them actually sort of leaned toward-- the family leaned toward-- they were not Nazis, but they leaned that way. I found out later. But I wasn't aware of it while we were growing up.

Was that the one who was half Jewish?

Well, she was sort of more Jewish than-- she was raised Catholic. And actually, I'm still in touch with her. Yeah. She lives in France. And actually, she left when the Nazis came. And actually, her mother was deported from France.

And she always sort of felt more akin to the Jews, perhaps because her mother was Jewish. And she was always more in tune with her mother rather than her father.

Even though she was raised Catholic?

Yeah.

So her mother was deported to France.

From France.

From France.

No, no, no. She left.

She left to France and was deported from France.

From France.

Did she come back?

No.

Do you know what became of her father?

He went back to-- yeah, they all left Austria, including-- she had a younger sister. And they all left long before I did. And they went to the South of France, where her grandmother lived, her mother's mother.

And in fact, they went there every summer. I envied her so. She went to-- she lived at the [NON-ENGLISH]. And it was so-- I mean, we just went to the mountains in Austria. And going to the French Riviera, it was so exotic. And so that's where they went.

But somebody denounced her mother. And she was taken away in the middle of the night. And then somewhat unjustly, she blamed her father for not intervening or not doing something, although I don't think he could have done anything. But she just wouldn't have anything to do with her father anymore.

What became of the mother's mother? Was she--

She died a natural death. She was not deported. And the younger sister then went back to Vienna. In fact, I'm very good friends with her. She lives in Vienna now. And I'm corresponding. And in fact, I talk to her on the phone quite a lot.

And she married a non-Jew. She married an Austrian. But they're very more leaning, both of them, more leaning to the Jews than the Christians somehow.

So this younger sister then went back after the war.

She went back to Paris. They were in the South of France. She went to Paris and then back to Vienna after the war.

Was there much politics discussed in your house when you were growing up?

Not really.

No.

No. We were Social Democrats.

Social Democrats?

Yes.

Your father?

Yeah. My parents were Social Democrats. And yeah, we were aware of that. And they subscribed to the paper. I know the newspaper, that was Social Democrat newspaper.

And we were aware of the many advantages the Social Democrats brought to the people of Vienna, like the housing, the low-cost housing they erected-- the Gemeindebauten they were called-- the free milk that was delivered to school, the free library that they ran for the children.

We went to the parade every May Day, 1st of May. They had a big parade. We went to that. But other than that, there was not much political discussion in our--

How about your parents' friends? Were they all having similar leanings?

Yeah. The friends were Jewish.

And most of them were Social Democrats as well?

Yeah.

Yeah.

They didn't really have any Gentile friends. We were friendly with the neighbors, who were Gentiles. But really friendly, really friends, no. They were Jews.

Your parents' friends were mostly Jews or entirely Jews?

I would say.

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

So what do you remember of Premier Dollfuss?

Oh, well, I remember that things changed when he took over, some ridiculous changes.

Like what?

[LAUGHS] Like in gym, we had shorts. We had black shorts and a white top, white t-shirt. When he came into power, the shorts had to be longer, down to the knee. [LAUGHS]

He was a conservative.

Yeah. And some of the benefits-- I think there was no more free milk, if I remember. Some of those welfare things, some of those benefits stopped. Other than that, I-- oh, there was a big fight when he took over. And there were-- I remember the day.

All of a sudden, they were shooting in the streets. And all of a sudden, our apartment was filled with people that came running in from the streets trying to hide. And in our courtyard, they were shooting. They were pursuing two-- I think they were two important people from the-- they were chasing them down. Nobody was killed. But they were shooting.

How old were you at this point? About 10?

Yeah, about that. Yeah.

This is 1934?

Yeah. So I was 12, maybe. 11, 12 something like that. Then, of course, he was not in power very long.

And then I remembered-- this was in the summer. We went away every summer to the country, for the whole summer, just about two months.

The whole family?

Not my father. But we were never far away. He came weekends. He visited on weekends. And my mother and my brother and I we were away for two months every summer in the mountains or someplace. And I remember that happened during the summer. I can--

The assassination?

Yeah. Because I dreamed the night before. I told my mother. It was so weird. I had a dream that we were living in a kingdom, and the king was killed. I told my mother about it. And then we heard about it. We were all blown away. [LAUGHS] And then Schuschnigg came into power.

And what did that herald for you?

Somehow, it didn't really make any perceptible changes in our life.

The shorts still had to be down to the knee?

[LAUGHS] Yeah, I think so. That wasn't changed.

And the social programs-- do you remember any changes there?

Not that we were aware of it. And we were not so affected by these things. I think the Social Democrats did really a lot for the really very, very poor people. And the living standard in Vienna wasn't all that high in those days.

Now, Dollfuss suppressed the Social Democrats, didn't he?

Oh, yes.

How did Schuschnigg feel about them?

Oh, they weren't in power at all. It was the Christian Democrats that were then in power. And that was the government. But he was OK.

Your family liked him?

Yeah. Yeah, he was-- now thinking back of it, it seemed to-- it really not-- you're asking me if we discussed politics. Really not too much.

There wasn't a lot of--

No.

--focus on that.

No. No, there wasn't.

But a certain understanding of what the family's views were.

Yeah. But--

Were you aware of an Austrian Nazi party?

There were elections. I remember the elections. I don't remember how often they were. And I remember-- I don't know what you call it. They had posters, advertising that people should vote for the National Socialist Party. That I remember.

And my mother and father always said, how awful they were and how terrible they were. But--

You were young then. Did you understand why they were terrible?

I know they were bad for the Jews.

Yeah.

I knew. That was about the criterion. They were terrible for the Jews. We knew that. And of course, you see, in Germany, although we heard that Hitler took over in '33, it was gradual. What happened in Germany was gradual. In Vienna, it happened overnight.

What do you remember of then, of the Anschluss?

That I remember.

Tell us what you remember.

Well, we remembered that things were happening. And now looking back at it, it just seems incredible that we weren't more aware of it, that we're so blind to what was happening. I guess you didn't really want to believe it.

So you felt things were happening. And just even days before-- well, we knew that things in Germany were getting worse and worse. And then even days before, there were these-- they had parades. The Nazis had parades at night with the torches.

But it's incredible how naive even my father was. They said, oh, it's not going to happen here. And there was going to be a [GERMAN], a popular vote. Oh, they're going to be defeated. Schuschnigg is going to come out on top. So till the last moment, we didn't believe it was going to happen.

Did you see those parades?

Did I see those parades? Oh, yeah.

How did you feel when you saw them? Can you remember?

It was scary.

Scary.

Yeah. It was scary, but we just thought they were just the few. We had till the last no idea. I think there were people who were more aware. I'm sure there were. But my family and the people that I knew were not.

And I remember waking up that morning. And my brother's friend who lived in the same house as we, same apartment house, came down and said, well, Hitler's here. Came out in the street, and there were all these huge swastikas hanging from the roof, from all the windows. And it was--

So it was put there by-- were these apartment houses--

Yeah.

--and the inhabitants put them out in support of the Nazis?

I really don't know who. No, they're enormous flags. Enormous flags.

So they had been preparing for it.

They had been put there. It was overnight.

What was that like for you?

Well, it was bad.

Did you know what it was going to-- what did you think it would mean for you and for your family?

I thought right away we would have to leave. We have to leave. We can't stay here. My mother and my father said, no, it's-- they still thought it wasn't going to be-- stay. They just thought it couldn't last. It's going to get better. And people are going to get-- people are not going to let this happen.

But they knew pretty soon that it's not going to change. It was not going to get better. It's just going to get worse.

Was there any one precipitating thing that led up to your family's decision to leave?

Well, it was just gradually becoming aware of-- actually, it's only my brother and I got out. My mother and father didn't.

Tell us how that came to be.

Lily, you said it was bad. What was bad?

Well, things changed just completely right away. First thing, right away they were taking people, although it didn't happen to us, but happened to a lot of people. You heard about the scrubbing on the streets that they had to do? Yeah.

Tell us.

Tell us a little bit about it.

And so right away they were collecting people. On some of the sidewalk they had slogans for Schuschnigg and the Christian Democrats. And so they made people scrub that off. They were collecting people from the street that were Jews from the apartments and made them kneel down and scrub. They put acid in the water too or lye or something.

How did they know who was a Jew if you weren't Orthodox?

Well, first of all, if they came to the apartments, everybody knew that they were Jews. They asked the janitor who was Jewish and came and collected them. On the streets anybody who looked Jewish-- and they would ask, and people couldn't deny it.

Did you see anyone that you knew scrubbing?

Well, you couldn't see because there was this crowd around them laughing and jeering. It was awful. Two thugs came for my brother. [CRYING] He was only 12, 13. And my mother wouldn't let him go. [CRYING]

Anyway, they called her everything under the sun. And she wouldn't let him go.

He was there in the apartment, and she stood in between so they could take him. Did they eventually leave?

She called a Christian neighbor. And she was a decent woman. And she persuaded those two to leave us alone.

Were they someone who knew your brother from school, or were they just thugs off the street?

They were just thugs off the street, and they-- especially one of them, they always sort of teased my brother. And he was older than my brother, but he was always picked on, my brother, on the streets and so.

Your mother was a tough angel.

[LAUGHS]

Were you scared?

I'm sorry.

Were you scared?

Yeah. And then I wasn't taken, but my girlfriend now, the one who went to France, she looked quite Jewish. And oh, all the non-Jews had to wear the swastika sign. They handed out these little metal swastikas.

So they stopped my girlfriend and I on the street. And then she looked-- I didn't look Jewish at all. And in those days, I wore two long braids, and I didn't look Jewish. And they wanted to take her. And she said, I'm not Jewish.

Oh, they didn't believe her. She had the swastika that she was supposed to wear. She had it in her pocket. She took it out, and she showed it to them. He said, why aren't you wearing it? She put it on-- you put it. You're supposed to have it here.

And they didn't say anything to me. They just walked away. So it was close.

How did people get those swastika medals? Were they handed out by the government?

They handed out these, and you had to pay for it too. I think they got it in school. And I think about a week after, we were thrown out of school. It was in the middle of-- I mean, right away, right away. When we came in the classroom, they had to jump up and yell, Heil Hitler, instead of saying good morning or whatever it was. It was Heil Hitler.

And then-- yeah, it was in the middle of a German lesson. The janitor came in and said, the Jews have to leave immediately. So I just left the school.

Who had to leave?

The Jews.

Did you have to leave?

Oh, yeah. All the Jews.

Right then.

You just had to get up and leave.

Get up and leave.

A week after?

About a week after the Anschluss.

What happened to your friend who was half Jewish? Did she leave?

No, she stayed.

So at that point, she was allowed to define herself as non-Jew.

That's right. Yeah.

And that must have changed later.

Well, they weren't about to take any chances. They just left because they had this relative, the mother in France. And they decided that it was just not safe anymore.

What was that like for you to get up and leave in the middle of a class?

Well, it was pretty bad.

Was it scary or humiliating?

Oh, very humiliating.

Did it make you angry or were you too afraid to feel angry?

No, we were angry. I think all of us-- we were four. We walked out.

And did you go home at this point?

Yeah, we went home. And then they assigned us to a special school so we could finish the year.

And the school was only for Jews?

Yeah.

Was this the school that had existed previously?

Yes, it was a school that had existed previously. All the Gentiles were taken and assigned to other schools. I suppose to ones that the Jews had been thrown out of.

Had there been Gentiles, then, in the Jewish school before this?

Oh, yeah. It was a regular school, just a public school, a gymnasium. And then all the Jews from-- I don't know whether it was all over Vienna. Maybe not. But I know from certainly the second district was sent. It was the Radetzky School, I think it was called I have a very blurred memory of that school.

But basically they segregated you? Everyone could go to school but not together.

Yeah. You mean the Jews? Oh, yeah. Jews were segregated. Yes. This school was just for Jews.

What else changed for you?

Oh, well, everything. Well, my father's business was taken over by-- they call him [GERMAN], an Aryan manager. And all the businesses, all the Jewish businesses were taken over by what they call [GERMAN]. And they just took over.

Did your father have to leave or was he allowed to stay with this supervisor?

He was staying with the supervisor, but none of the businesses survived because within a week or so, he closed it up. He couldn't make any more money, and he wasn't allowed to make any more money. And so within a week, I think, business was closed.

Now, my father had some faithful clients, furniture stores, and they allowed him to work in their stores illegally. But it

was too dangerous so it couldn't last very long. And then it became very difficult because there was no more income.

Do you remember your father coming home and telling you what had happened?

Yeah.

How was he?

Well, he was very dejected. He was able to do this for a while. I think maybe a few months. But not very long. It just got too dangerous.

How did you manage?

I'm thinking back. I really don't know how we managed, my mother managed. I know that they sold-- they had savings. They had life insurance policies that they sold. And then we just sold our belongings.

And the Jewish official organization, the Kultusgemeinde, they opened a-- not a restaurant. It was a place where they served a hot meal once a day.

Like a soup kitchen?

Yeah.

You went to eat there?

Well, my mother went to pick up the food. And you could either eat there or bring it home. So we did that.

By this time your father was also at home?

Yeah.

And were you and your brother still in school, in the Jewish school?

We could have gone another year, not to that school, but to the one that was a Jewish school all along. But I don't think any of the Jews went. There was no way of graduating anyway. What we did then was just to concentrate, really, on emigration.

We had relatives in the United States. As a matter of fact, when my mother was a young girl, she was-- well, let me tell you about my mother. She was born in Poland in a small village. And she was one of 16 children.

And in fact, she was telling us that her mother couldn't go to her oldest sister's wedding because then she was busy having my mother, who was the youngest. Only eight lived to adulthood. And two of them emigrated to United States.

One was her oldest sister, Selma, who went to Chicago. And then her younger brother-- no, not her younger brother. She was the youngest. It was a brother that's just a year older. So and he went to Hollywood and became a screenwriter and unfortunately was killed in an automobile accident.

My mother always said if my brother Sigmund were alive, we would be out of here after the Anschluss. We'd be out of here in no time. And when she was 18, she went to Chicago to visit her older sister and stayed for two years. And she would have stayed, but her father was dying.

She was called back to be with her father. And then she met my father. And then she never-- she always wanted to come back to America.

So she met him when she was very young, your father.

She was-- well, let's see. She was 18, 20. Yeah. But then the war started, World War I. And he went-- he had to be serving in the army. And then they married before he left, but they didn't see each other for years and years because he was a Russian-- he was taken prisoner by the Russians and for some reason didn't get out until he escaped.

It was a very strange story. But I know that my mother told me that when she saw him after all these years, she hardly recognized him. He was not--

Was that because of the lapse of time or was it because he had changed so much [BOTH TALKING]

He had changed to-- he had this disease. When don't have enough vitamins, the teeth fall out and that sort of thing. Maybe scurvy or something like that. Yeah.

So he was there for a long time?

Yeah.

So but then they were reunited after the war. And he and his older brother then established their business. His older brother was in the same trade as he was but not in the same location. But they did the same thing. They were both furniture finishers.

So anyway, in the meantime, my mother's older sister, the one that she had gone to visit, had a nervous breakdown and was confined in an institution. She had two children, a girl and a boy, who by then were grown up and had married.

My cousin-- no, it was my cousin Della. And she was the one who lived in Chicago and whom we corresponded, whom we tried to get us to give an affidavit. And however, she was not in very good financial circumstances.

Her husband drove a taxi. She had two small children. And you had to have a certain financial, I guess, enough financial assets to sponsor people to come over. It wasn't all that easy. It was not made very easy, as you know.

And of course, that was the problem that there was really no place to go unless you went through all kinds of-- but she did finally get somebody to sign an affidavit but only for the children. He wouldn't sign for the whole family.

Because of the concern about cost?

Yes, it was actually a former suitor of my mother's when she was in Chicago. He wanted to marry her, and she wasn't ready. And he subsequently became very wealthy. He was in the meatpacking business in Chicago. But he didn't want to take the responsibility for the whole family, so he just sent for the children.

And also another problem was that immigration in the United States was by quota. We were [INAUDIBLE]. It went by where you were born, the country, not where you were a citizen. So they were on a Polish quota, both my father and my mother, which was bad.

I see. Did the quota have anything to do with being Jewish or not being Jewish? Or was it strictly where you were--

I don't think it had anything to do with Jewish or not Jewish. But non-Jews didn't-- couldn't emigrate. The Polish quota was very bad because I guess so many Polish Jews that had immigrated into the United States in earlier years. The Austrian quota was so-- the people on Polish quota had to wait a long, long time before they were permitted to emigrate.

My brother and I, being born in Austria, were on the Austrian quota. And so it was easier, but not by any means easy because both-- I mean, Nazis were so anxious to get rid of the Jews, but they made it extremely difficult to get out.

What did they do?

Oh, God. All the things that you had to-- papers and more papers and more papers. And for everything there was an endless waiting and just waiting-- lines, lines, lines. We stood in lines everywhere.

And money? Did you have to give money?

Yeah, everything cost money. You had to-- oh, and then they claimed that everybody owed taxes. So you had to say all these names, [NON-ENGLISH], meaning that you had paid all your taxes and that you were-- didn't owe anything to the government.

Even for children they did this?

Well, if your family-- we couldn't get out because--

If your parents owed taxes--

--if your parents owed money, you couldn't get out. My parents didn't really owe any money, but what can you do? When they're claiming you owed money, you had no--

So they trumped up charges that you owed money.

They trumped up charges that you owed money, and then at first they said, you're not going to get out. As a matter of fact, I was trying-- for a while they let females emigrate to England as domestics. And I tried that, but then I was too young for that.

I could have waited. You had to be 18, and I wasn't 18. Also that stopped after a while because the people that arrived in England as domestics, of course, weren't domestics. They didn't know anything about what they were supposed to do.

And most of the English really expected them to work as domestics and so were disappointed. In fact, the Jewish organization established then classes for--

To prepare you to be a domestic.

To prepare to be a domestic. And even I went, although I was still too young. But I thought, well, God knows how long it's going to take for me to get out of here. Maybe I better be prepared for when I'm 18 and I can.

And so I-- but I knew everything because my mother had told me everything. I knew how to mend. I knew how to iron. I knew how to do all these things. I passed with flying colors.

How old were you when you went-- started taking these classes?

Well I was 16, I guess. 16, 17, between 16 and 17.

So at what point did you realize that you might be able to get out and your brother might but that your parents would not be sponsored?

Well, when we got the affidavit that was made out for the two of us. And then you could start the procedure of emigration. You had the affidavit. Of course, then you had to get a visa. That was also not so easy.

What was required of you to get a visa?

Well, I think all your papers had to be in order from Austria. You had to have all the permission. And then--

Who did all of that?

Who?

Who got all the papers?

Well, we did.

By "we"--

My brother and I. And in some cases, my father had to come along. And others, I remember when we went for the passport, which was in the Rothschild Palais that had been taken over by the Gestapo. There you had to stand all day long, from 8:00 in the morning all day.

And so then I think that was pretty much the final step after you had gone through all the other papers, all the papers that--

How long of a process was that, getting all this together?

How long? Oh, it took-- OK, the Nazis took over in March '38. We got out in February, 1940. Almost two years.

Were your parents at this point continuing to look for some way for themselves to get out?

Oh, yeah.

[BOTH TALKING]

And we were too. We were trying to-- we weren't sure we could get into America. We were trying to get into Israel too. That was another possibility. And so we were in Hakhshara, which was a preparatory-- agricultural preparation. We were sent to these farms

In Austria?

Mm-hmm.

And were they run by Israelis or by [BOTH TALKING]

No, they're not-- by organizations, Israeli organizations and Jewish organizations.

Were they teaching you Hebrew also?

Teaching Hebrew and teaching agriculture. We worked in the fields and did the cooking and everything.

Were you aware all this time that there might be a possibility that you and your brother would get out but your mother and father wouldn't?

Yes. But the thing was that once we were out, of course, we thought they were-- well, it was going to be so easy for us to get them out, you see, because we would get somebody to sponsor them. And once we were there, we thought, well, that's going to be a cinch. Well, of course, it wasn't.

But that was another possibility of going to Israel. And whatever came first, you were going to take.

America, Israel, what else? I meant Palestine.

Palestine, yeah.

Anything else?

No.

So those were the options.

Those were the options.

England was closed to you.

Yeah. I mean--

By the war.

Well, we really couldn't-- I don't know where else there was to go. Some people had relatives in, I think, South America. Some people went to South America. But--

You had to know someone somewhere.

You had to know somebody somewhere. Nobody-- none of the countries would let you in. There was no place to go.

So what happened next?

So let's see. Where were we? OK, then when you had your passport and then you finally got all your papers together and you-- then you went to the consulate for the visa. And--

So you really had to do all this work?

Yeah.

It wasn't like your parents would do it for you. You did it.

No, we did, my brother and I. In some places my father had to come along, but I know that, for instance, for a passport, we were by ourselves. And to the American consulate, we went by ourselves. Of course again, endless lines. I'm waiting everywhere.

And the consul very obligingly had his feet on his desk. They said all the Americans sit at the desk with their feet on the desk. He did. I guess he had to show. [LAUGHS] And we had no problem there, although among the people that were waiting, there were people that were rejected for health reasons. Oh, and the medical exams you had to go through.

What were they trying to screen out?

You had to be really in perfect health.

So anything wrong--

Yeah.

--was a reason to--

Well, not if you're nearsighted or anything like that, but I mean-- I know this one woman was-- she was coughing and she said she was denied the visa.

Did you have to go to the Gestapo by yourself?

That was in the-- when you went for the passport, yeah, you went there by yourself. And they were terrible.

What do you remember of that visit?

Some of the things I kind of blocked out. I don't remember my brother and I being in the room with the Gestapo. We just don't remember that. I remember that some-- they came out and screamed at us for whatever reason. You were a centimeter out of line or something like that, so that sort of thing. I don't remember being in a room with them.

So then we finally had our visa. Then we had to-- oh, of course, you had to pay for your passage. We didn't have any money for that. So my cousin sent some money, but it was a loan. I had to pay her back when I came.

And so then you had to make arrangements for-- you had to book passage.

To where?

And we got passage-- that my father did-- on an Italian ship that was leaving from Trieste.

How long did you have to wait? Were the ships crowded and [BOTH TALKING]

Oh, yeah.

And you had to get to Trieste.

You had to get to Trieste by train.

How did you get the money for the trip? How did you get the money for the passage? Or the loan?

You mean from Trieste, you mean?

Well, my cousin sent it to us.

And was it enough also to pay your--

Yeah.

--passage to Trieste?

Yeah.

So you and your brother took the train to Trieste.

That's right. And then-- oh, when you packed, of course, you were allowed to take absolutely nothing of any value, nothing. You got 10 marks per person, which was, of course, of no value whatsoever.

So then when you were ready to pack-- my father actually made a trunk for us. He did that. And then you had to lay everything out that you were taking. And an inspector came along and looked at everything and shook everything out and searched everything and made sure that you had nothing of any value, no jewels, no nothing.

And then you were allowed to pack. And then you had to hire a [NON-ENGLISH], somebody to transport that for you. Don't know what they're called.

Shipping--

A shipping--

--clerk.

Shipping agent or something, agent. And he arranged that the suitcase or whatever it was that you took out was taken.

So that went before you went?

It was taken to the-- well, to the station before because I know that even at the station, even after it had been inspected, they opened up everything again. My father was there. We didn't go to that. And you know scattered everything about and searched everything again. So anyway, that was finally done.

So to get out, you only had 10 marks and your brother had 10 marks? Nothing else.

No. And it was too risky to try to-- if anything was found, it went straight back. So and then till the last minute, they made it difficult, everything they could do to make it difficult.

The train was supposed to leave at-- I don't remember-- maybe 9 o'clock in the morning. So we had ordered a taxi to take us there. It was the coldest winter in Vienna ever. There was no public transportation for a couple of days when we were left. Was February 1940. And my mother was sick.

What they did was to put up the time of departure ahead an hour. And up until midnight, people-- they sent people from the Jewish organization-- came to your door, knocking on your door to tell you that it was not leaving it 9:00. It was leaving at 8:00.

Another person came. It was leaving at 7:00. Another person came. It was leaving at 6:00.

What was the purpose? Do you have any idea?

Just to make it difficult. I don't know what other purpose there could be but-- so whenever it was, it's 5:00 in the morning, my father went out and start getting a taxi for us because the one we had ordered was coming. Anyway, he managed. And we did get a taxi. And we did get to the station.

All of you went to the station?

When?

All of you went to the station?

Not my mother. My mother was sick.

What did she have?

She just had flu.

What was the parting like?

The parting? Well, it was bad, but we were convinced at that time that we were going to get them out. But it was, of course, difficult.

You were 16 at this point.

17.

17. Your brother about 15.

Yeah. But we finally got on the train and left. Never relaxed until you were over the border, of course, because they kept coming in in their uniforms. They were trying to scare you.

Was the train teeming with other people in--

Yes. Yes. Yes. Got to Trieste, finally. And in Trieste, it was also the coldest winter ever. There was a blizzard. They had ropes on the streets, I remember, so that people could hold on because otherwise you are blown away. And they had--

Was that a free city then? Did they belong to Italy or Yugoslavia?

Oh, Italy.

Italy.

And they had made-- I don't remember who made the arrangements for-- because we had to spend two nights in Trieste before the ship left. And I don't know who made the arrangements for staying overnight.

You didn't have any money.

That was my question also. How did you manage to [INAUDIBLE]?

No, no, this was arranged.

But maybe a Jewish organization--

Through the Jewish organization, yes.

They provided somewhere for you to stay.

Right. Yeah.

Do you remember anything about that stay? What kind of place was it?

It was some sort of-- I guess it was a cheap hotel. I don't really have-- some of the things I just don't seem to remember. I don't remember what that place was like.

Did this bring you and your brother together closer?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Were you kind of taking care of him? Were you the older sister?

We sort of took care of each other. Yeah. Well, we became closer. We were fighting like siblings, but after the Anschluss, we became close.

You knew you had to stick together.

Yeah.

Common enemy.

Yeah. And so then after a couple of nights in Trieste, we went on the ship.

Where was it going, Lily?

Where? It was going from Trieste to Palermo, from Palermo to Lisbon, and then to Gibraltar, and then out into the Atlantic.

So it was a long trip, it sounds like.

Yeah. About 14 days. And it was OK. We went ashore in Palermo. I remember it was the first sunshine we had seen in a long time. It was warm and sunny.

How long did you have off the boat?

A few hours. But I have a picture of my brother and me sitting on a park bench in Palermo. Lisbon, it was raining. I remember that. And I remember the women carrying baskets on their heads. I remember some of these pictures.

And then in the Atlantic it was considerably rougher, especially the last night. Everybody got seasick.

What month was it?

February.

So it was winter and a choppy winter sea.

Yes, it was pretty rough. But my brother and I were about the last to get seasick. And the boat was full of refugees, but not only refugees. I remember there was some people-- there was a Greek man there and-- but most of it were people from Vienna and Germany.

Did you compare notes at all with other people who were on board or did you stay by yourselves?

Well, I made one friend-- I remember that-- a girl about my own age. Her name was the same as mine, Lily, and I'm still in touch with her. [LAUGHS] She stayed in New York.

I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty. That was quite an experience.

Tell us about that.

That was quite an experience, rising out of the fog. I remember. That was wonderful. But then the arrival in New York was somewhat less wonderful because-- one thing on the ship-- I saw them loading our trunks with a crane and dropping it from God knows how many feet. Oh. And it looked like it was going to fall apart any minute when you finally got it on dock.

And about the only thing that held it together was the lock. And we had a really mean customs official. And he broke the lock. And I started dissolving in tears because then we have to get us to Chicago. What am I going to do?

So then he felt bad, and he felt guilty. And then he called-- talked to some officials. And they got somebody to put steel rims around it all over the place so that it would hold together. But he was really nasty. Looked at everything.

These people knew that people that came had nothing. They just came with nothing. I had a dinky little box camera. They looked at that and looked at that. Anyway, he was awful.

Did you speak English then?

Very little. I had some English in school. I spoke some. Oh, and the lady from the HIAS met us, my brother and me. And she saw to it that we got on a Greyhound bus to Chicago.

I wondered how you made the transfer.

Yeah. She arranged that.

Did you go direct from the boat or did you stop over in New York?

No, we didn't stop over. It took-- it was a few hours. But she helped us. Whatever it needed to be done, she did. And she got us on the Greyhound. And then we took the bus to Chicago.

How long did that take?

New York-- it took many, many hours.

It must have been overnight, at least one night, maybe two?

Yeah. No, one night, I think. I don't think it was two nights. But it took a long time. And she gave us a little money so that we could buy some food on the way.

Say, the bus would stop for --

Yeah. Yeah. And there was--

It must have been bewildering. There you were, trying to figure out what this American food was with a little bit of English. How did you manage?

I don't know. Just pointed. And there was a nice young woman that helped us in the bus. In fact, I remember she came after me when I went to the restroom, and she offered me a piece of gum. I didn't know what it was. It was a stick of gum.

You never saw it before?

We had gum in Vienna, but it was a candy-coated one.

Like a ball of gum?

Not a ball, but it was-- well, we were-- like a candy. In fact, you can still buy it here. I forgot what the name of it was. But that was the gum I knew, and I had never seen a stick of gum before. And what was it?

So she put it in her mouth and just showed me what to do. So I did it. She gave me one, and one for my brother.

The first step toward Americanization.

[LAUGHTER]

So you were going to your uncle?

It was my cousin.

Your cousin.

Yeah. And she met us at the Greyhound. I guess the lady from HIAS phoned her or sent her a telegram to tell her what

time we were going to arrive in that. She met us there.

She must have spoken German then, the HIAS lady, to help?

No, no, she didn't.

She did it in English.

I spoke some-- I spoke enough English to get by. I had English in school, and so I spoke enough to get by. And anyway, I was very good in languages, so I picked it up very fast. But of course, our trunk was-- when she saw the trunk, she said, oh, my God. What am I going to do? They left it there.

And the next day, she and the neighbor came with laundry baskets and put our stuff in laundry baskets and brought it home. And then the clothes-- we had very little clothes to bring at that point. And she told me what I had was not anything I could really wear. She made me a dress. And then she took my brother, who had knickers-- said you can't wear that here.

How old was your cousin?

Oh, she was much older than I. She was in her 30s, early 30s. And she was married, and she had two children.

Little children?

Yeah.

What was that like for you to be there with them?

Well, of course, you were so glad to be away from-- so it was wonderful.

And you stayed in their-- did they have a house or an apartment?

An apartment. We only stayed for a very short time, a week or so. There was a Jewish children's organization in Chicago that took care of my brother. Of course, in the affidavit you had to sign that they were not going to be a public burden of any sort, so private organizations, Jewish organizations did help people out.

And it was a Jewish children's society or something in Chicago that then found him a place, placed him in a home.

So you were separated.

Yeah.

Were you surprised by that or had you known that would happen?

Well, no because we were pretty much-- sure, I mean there was no way for us to be together.

Because you were no longer considered a child--

I had to go to work.

--and you worked.

Yeah. That's right. And I had to work. And he had to go to school.

How did you manage?

I went to work as a domestic. And my cousin found a place for me. I had to change a couple of times because the first person expected me to cook, and I couldn't really cook at that time. And then I found a-- my cousin-- through an agency.

My cousin contacted an agency, and then she found me a place where-- well, I had to do everything, but mostly take care of a-- they had a little child two years old. But I changed after a while, because I was really expected to everything there, including washing windows. And it was an awful lot for me to do at the time.

So you weren't living in. You had your own--

Oh, yeah.

You lived there.

Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Had to live in. I had no money.

So they paid you a--

\$5 a week.

Oh, boy. Just--

But that was--

A lot.

It was pretty much average, what people got then.

But you had housing and food, at least.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Were you able to see your brother?

Well, I had one afternoon a week off. So then I went to visit him. We met at my cousin's. On my day off, my afternoon off, I went to my cousin's. She lived on the South Side in Chicago in a rather Jewish neighborhood.

And how far away was your job?

I was on the-- near North Side. But it was no problem with transportation in Chicago. Transportation, public transportation was very good. And my brother was housed with a Jewish family. And he had to go to school. And they paid for him.

Your education was interrupted.

Oh, yes.

Did you get to go to school?

No, because I had no-- well, what happened, finally, was that I got a-- well, I had a job where I didn't have to work so hard because we lived-- these people lived in a residential hotel so the maid services and so forth took care of that. And I mostly had just care of a baby. I took care of a baby and just did-- by that that time I knew a little bit about cooking, so

I cooked a little bit and kept a baby. And--

Were these Jewish families that you worked for?

Yes. And then, of course, I had to pay back my cousin who had paid for our transportation, so I had to pay her back. So I didn't spend any of my money. The \$5 or \$6-- when I got \$6-- I just saved up to--

How much did you owe her?

It was seven hundred dollars.

It must have taken forever.

Yeah, it took a long time. But I really wanted not to be a nursemaid or whatever it was. Then I got a job in a factory so that I would have my evenings free to go to school. And that was something else, working in a factory.

It was a factory that they were packaging cereal, breakfast cereal. And what you had to do is-- you were on a belt, of course, and had to seal the packages. You did the same thing all day long. But then I had the evenings free, and I went to school, business school. I wanted to work in an office. My dreams of going to university and so forth, of course, were gone.

So I went to school. I learned bookkeeping and shorthand and typing and business English and all that. And eventually I got a job in an office.

So you worked all day and went to school at night?

Yeah.

How long did it take you to finish and get an office job?

Well, that didn't take all that long. It was maybe-- I got my first office job-- maybe the whole thing took about a year and a half from when I arrived to when I got an office job. Yeah.

And your English had improved a lot?

Yes. Languages were my strong point. And I picked it up very fast. And I had no problem with English. And my brother too.

And during this time, this adjustment period, what was happening with your parents? What did you know?

Well, then we were trying and trying. This person that had given us our affidavit refused to respond to my parents. And it was very difficult to find somebody to sponsor them.

What was the legal responsibility of a sponsor that made it so difficult?

Well, they had to guarantee that in the event this person, they couldn't find employment, that they would take care of them. They were responsible.

Financially responsible.

Financially responsible for their upkeep, for whatever these immigrants would need, that they would not become a public burden, that they were responsible.

It was quite a responsibility in fact.

Yeah.

Yeah.

What about the Jewish organizations, the synagogues or local organizations? No one was able to accomplish that?

Nobody did anything. I'm just telling you the-- it was very difficult for anybody.

You couldn't find a sponsor.

We found a sponsor finally. We found a sponsor-- two. One of my employers finally agreed. And then that was one of the family where I worked taking care of the baby. And then another one was a distant cousin. And they got affidavits then.

But you see, the thing was that it became increasingly difficult for them to get out. So not only did you have to have an affidavit, but you had to have passage. So at first, if you had-- say if you needed two ship tickets, if you got half of it, if you got one, then HIAS would supply the other amount.

By the time-- and of course, for us to raise, at that time, \$800, it was like raising for me \$8 million now. But we did. I just walked around to everybody I knew and asked them to loan me the money. And with \$50 and \$25 and so forth, I got it together.

By the time we got one ship ticket together, they didn't do it anymore. So it was always, you solve one problem, another one happened. So it just went on and on and on and--

Were you writing?

Yes.

Was there any possibility of telephone calls at this point?

Oh, no.

No. This is too early for such a thing.

No, we wrote.

How were they managing? When you left, your father wasn't working.

They were selling everything. And we just tried until it got too late.

When you found out that it was too late because the--

The United States entered the war. That was the end. My brother then was drafted into the army when he became 18. And he went to Europe.

And after the war was over, he went-- was still in the army. He went to Vienna and tried to find out what happened to my parents. But they were just sent to Auschwitz.

Did he find anyone at all that you had known or that you were related to that had survived?

In 1967, I think it was, we had a reunion of surviving cousins. One cousin-- there was my brother, I-- well, Della, our cousin from Chicago, even though she wasn't really a survivor, but she was one of the cousins.

And then there was a cousin in Toronto, who had gone to Toronto. He had survived by hiding under a heap of corpses and left for dead, but he survived.

This was in a camp?

Yeah. I don't know exactly where it was. But he had survived that way and then got out. And one cousin who was saved by Schindler. I heard about Schindler long before the book came out, long before the movie came out. And he lived in Israel.

So we came together, he from Israel and Toronto-- and my cousin that survived in a camp from Toronto and my brother and I from Chicago. And so he told me exactly what the book and the movie then said, that he was in Krakow. And he was already an engineer at that time and just married.

And he was hired by Schindler. And he told me exactly what this amazing man did and what a terrible husband he was because he was just-- he loved the women. And also that-- did you see the movie, by the way?

It was true. It was true to facts, including that his wife and other women were sent to Auschwitz, sent by mistake, and that he got them back, out of Auschwitz. And so then after the war, he went to Israel.

He died in the meantime. I wanted to see him, but I didn't get to Israel until about two years ago. I never-- that was my first trip. So those are the only people that survived through my family.

Were you never able to find out anything about your mother and father?

I don't know how they died.

Your brother, young as he was, went back to Europe as an American soldier.

Yeah.

Where was he sent?

He was-- where was he sent? Well, he was in England first, and then he went to Germany. And then he was stationed in Germany for quite a while, somewhere near Munich. He was in intelligence.

My brother was sort of a genius. He could do everything right. There was nothing that he couldn't do. And he always teased me. He's a very talented artist, and everything that I can't do, he could do. He always teased me. And I said to him, how come you can do all these things. He says, well, there was so much left over after you were born. I just got it all. [LAUGHTER]

So he had an enormously high IQ. So they said something like the highest IQ they ever had at Camp Grant where he was. So they put him in intelligence. And I don't know exactly what he did, but he had a pretty good time in the army, I think.

I wonder what it was like for you when-- here you had escaped, and then now your baby brother is being sent right back into the fray.

But it was good. Yes, it was good to come back as an American soldier. Yes. He wanted that.

A lot safer.

Yeah. And he was looking for that thug that had come to the door. [LAUGHS] I don't think he found him.

Too bad.

Did you ever go back to Vienna?

Yes.

When?

Well, in fact, a strange thing happened. When I was married, I married-- well, I never liked Chicago. And I made a very good friend in Chicago in school, in the school that we went to to learn all the office skills. And she's still my friend till today.

So anyway, we-- at that time, sort of everybody got married when they were 18. And we said, oh, my God. No, not us. We wanted to see a little bit of the country. So we went-- by that time, the war had started. And it was very easy to find jobs.

So we went to New York for a year. That was great. And then we went to, of all places, Florida because we got tired of the cold winters, and we wanted to see what it was like. So we went to Miami Beach. And we lived there for about a year and a half.

And then our aim was really to live in California. We just wanted to come out west. We went back to Chicago for a year, and we just never liked it. So then we finally came to California. And two weeks later, I met my husband at a B'nai B'rith picnic [LAUGHS] of all places.

How long afterward were you married?

I met him in August, and we got married in December.

So much for your plans.

[LAUGHS] Oh, well, by that time, I was ready because several years had passed. I was about 24, 25. I was ready.

Wasn't he also somebody who had gotten out of Europe, your husband?

He was what?

Someone who had escaped?

Oh, no, no.

No.

No, he was an American, was Jewish, and from New Jersey. And we had 26 very, very happy years together until he died of cancer. And that was 22 years ago. I remarried sometime later.

But we had three children, my husband. And he was a veterinarian. But he was very much interested in ophthalmology. And he became one of the first specialists in veterinary medicine, and he became a veterinary ophthalmologist.

And he wanted to study under somebody that was a specialist in that field. And of all places, this person was a professor at the veterinary school in Vienna. So he got a grant. In those days, it was easy to get grants. It was not like now. And he got a grant for the whole family to go to Vienna and study there for a year.

So what year was this?

It was in '61.

And how old were your kids at this point, roughly?

They were nine, seven, and three.

What was that like for you to go back?

Well, I went with a great deal of apprehension. But then I decided I'm going to be here for a year. I'm going to have a good time. And I did.

You did. Tell us a little bit about how you spent that year.

Yeah. I did all the grown-up things I never had a chance to do. And my husband loved it. He was endlessly amused by the Viennese and their quaint ways. The food was wonderful. He loved it. And he had a very good education. He did what he wanted to do. He got out of it what he wanted to do.

And it was OK. My children went to the American school. I couldn't send him to an Austrian school. They have very good memories from it.

And I've been back about twice since. I still have this very good friend that I have there. Well, as a matter of fact, my other best friend from school days, Erika, the one who was Jewish but not at all religious, she had a hard time. Her parents were Romanian citizens. And so she went to Romania during the war, and she had a very hard time there.

She got married and had a retarded child. Went back to Vienna after the war. But she just had a very hard life. And I saw her the couple of times that I went to Vienna. She took her own life eventually.

But I still have this other very good friend. So we've been back a couple of times. Now I don't have any desire to go back anymore. So that pretty much--

Where did you meet your present husband?

My present husband? How did I meet him? Well, that was very conventional. [LAUGHS] He lost his wife to cancer about the same time when I lost my husband. And friends introduced us. And it worked.

So how long have you been together?

Oh, gosh. About 20 years.

Oh, my.

That's about two years after my husband died that I met him.

Tell us a little bit about your life with him. That's a whole new life now.

Let's see. Have we covered all the-- see? [LAUGHS] That was fast, wasn't it? I didn't tell you about Kristallnacht in Vienna. I just remembered. Well, you know what happened then. And they came to our apartment. My brother and my father were hiding because they grabbed every man that they could and sent them to Dachau.

And they came and searched our apartment, wanted to know where the men were. And my mother said she didn't know. They left us alone. But if my father had been there, they would have taken him.

They weren't hiding there?

No, no. They were hiding somewhere else.

How did he know in time to hide--

They just-- you know, now how did you know about this? Because it wasn't on the radio. It wasn't-- it was just word of mouth. Well, after all, I was out, and they were throwing furniture out of the windows and burning it, so you knew something was going on.

You saw that?

Oh, yeah.

In Vienna too. And the synagogues on fire.

And burning the synagogue.

They burned synagogues also in Vienna too?

Yeah. And they burned the furniture that they threw out the window.

What effect has all of this had on you, Lily, in your life?

Just always there. Doesn't leave you.

We went to Israel. I've always wanted to go to Israel. And so finally, about two years ago, I went to Israel for the first time, my husband and I and his son who wanted to go to Israel. And his wife didn't want to go, so the three of us went. And it was great.

We went to Yad Vashem. And that was quite an experience. Was hard. And we met a couple in the hotel afterwards that had been to Yad Vashem the day before.

And they had-- they hired a-- they took a taxi after they came out of the hotel. Asked the taxi driver, who was-- most of the taxi drivers are Arabs. Asked the Arab, the taxi driver, if he had ever been there. And he said no. And then he said, but it didn't really happen, did it?

What did you say?

So it's important that you do this sort of thing.

Exactly. And now you'll be part of Yad Vashem.

Because they can have the nerve to deny it. I mean, there are still people walking around with their tattooed arms. It's hard to understand. [CRYING]

But in general, my life here has been good. I have three wonderful children. And I have two daughters and a son. And my husband has two sons and a daughter. And between the two of us, we have 11 grandchildren. I have eight, and he has three.

Are they close enough for you to see?

Yeah. My son lives in the same town as I do, in El Cerrito. I take care of two boys every Tuesday. And--

Same old job, huh?

Right.

[LAUGHTER]

Only then you get paid.

Yeah. I'm not getting paid for that. And then my daughter lives in-- my younger daughter lives in Glen Ellen in Sonoma, near Sonoma. And she has two children, who I don't see often enough. And then my older daughter lives in Los Angeles, so I go down there for a day.

And the odd thing is that my son has twins, and my daughter has twins, and there are no twins in our family. [LAUGHS] But we're all very close.

Do they know your story, Lily?

Yeah. I think maybe not enough because, really, for years and years and years, I didn't talk about it at all.

When did you start?

Maybe after we were in Vienna. When they got older, I didn't-- it's hard to talk about it even now.

Did they start asking you about it at some point in their lives?

The wonderful thing was it really struck me that my daughter, when she was eight years old-- [CRYING] it was so funny-- thought that everybody was Jewish. And it was such a revelation to her that she said, you mean George Washington and Abraham Lincoln weren't Jewish? I said, how wonderful. [LAUGHS]

Do you know what started you to talking to about it? What opened the door for you?

I don't think it was any single event. It just sort of came gradually. And--

What about going back to Vienna might have helped to open the door?

Just-- I didn't really talk to them until afterwards because well, number one, they were still pretty young, nine and seven and--

When you were there, did they know that you had lived there as a child?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. They knew.

But they were really too young to be asking what happened?

Yeah. Well, they had an idea that it was bad for the Jews to live and that we had to leave. But I can't really pinpoint any time when I started telling them. It was some years after. It was too hard to talk about it.

And also maybe I wanted them to ask questions. I don't know. Maybe I was waiting for them to ask the question. And then actually quite recently my son wanted to make a videotape of my brother and me talking about the past. But we talked mostly about the good things, not too much about the bad things, about the past before it all happened.

And they were really-- I mean, we had a happy life. We had a really good life before. So we talked a lot about that. But I'm writing. I'm going to write things down for them.

For you son?

Huh?

For your son?

Yeah. There is a woman-- I don't know-- you know about Evy Eisen by any chance? Well, she became interested in survivors of the Holocaust through a project her son was doing in school. And I guess by word of mouth she finds out-- is interviewing-- she takes pictures. She had an exhibit at the Magnes Museum.

We saw it.

OK.

The name didn't ring a bell. But-- yes.

Yeah. She was the one. And she takes pictures of survivors and your story. And so she contacted me through my friend that I met in school in Chicago and who now lives in Marin County. She had found her, and my friend gave her my name.

And so she came and took my picture. And so I wrote a short biography for-- I think that is also going to go to the museum in Washington.

Do you think you're going to do another tape with your brother where you talk about the hard thing?

Well, we probably should do that. It's kind of hard to get together because he lives in New Jersey. But I think my son would want it, want to do that. But it's just hard to do.

Now you'll have this tape for your son to see also.

Oh, yeah.

But my children have all done well. He's a doctor, and he's married to a doctor. My daughter in Los Angeles is a law librarian, and she's married to a lawyer. My daughter in Glen Ellen is a high school teacher. She's married to a sculptor who's doing well. [LAUGHS]

A very rare breed.

Well, he's able to combine it with construction somehow. He makes very interesting gates and things like that. And he's had a big spread in Sunset magazine and that sort of thing. I unfortunately have one retarded grandson. That's my son's son. But everything else is OK. So how long have I talked?

I think the tape's been running--

Yeah, we should actually stop it.

Is it almost two hours?

Yeah.

Huh?

Yeah.