

--10 seconds you can go for it.

My name is Maria Jensen. I'm interviewing Nina Menrath May 17, 1990 at the Northern California Holocaust Center. Professor Menrath, when were you born?

1928 in Austria, in Graz, which is close to the Yugoslav border.

What did your parents do?

My father, who we're talking about-- his name was Frank Pestle, and he was a consulting engineer. He had an office in Vienna, one in Hamburg, one in Paris, and one in Barcelona. So I was sort of raised like an army brat because wherever my father had two or three factories to build. that's where we would move to.

In his work as a consulting engineer you moved around a lot. What do you remember? What are your memories of your childhood moving around a lot? What kind of a life was it for you over there? People in and out--

Well, I was thinking the other day that I had a fairly blissful childhood until I was eight, and then from then on it became incredibly difficult because we were in Spain during the Civil War, and we fled from there. And we were in Austria during the Anschluss, and we fled from there. By this time I'm 10. It's 1938.

From Austria we went to France. By the time we got to France. My father's office was requisitioned by the Germans. He couldn't even go back into his office. So we got into the car, and we left for Spain. And by this time they're mobilizing, and all hell is breaking loose.

So my memories are of meadows in Austria and vacations at my grandfather's house, wherever we lived during the year. We would in summer go to Graz, which was my father's and my hometown, and I think of squirrels, and rowboats, and meadows, and Grandpa, who was a lawyer and a delightful, fun man.

I think of picking flowers, and blueberries, and mushrooms in the woods, and it's so much in contrast with the rest of my childhood. It's almost like I have a light childhood and a dark childhood. And the dark childhood actually started probably when I was five or six because that's when my father started to work as an activist against Hitler. Hitler came in '33, so I was five.

By '34, '35, my father was pretty clear that we were in the forces of evil, and he started to talk to his Jewish friends and say, aren't you listening to what that guy is saying? He wants to purify the German race. He's going to do you in. And a lot of his friends wouldn't believe him.

What was your father specifically-- how was your father active? You think starting in '33 he was active?

'33 is early. I think '35 probably was when he started. He had a connection through his business world with Schacht, who was Hitler's finance minister, and of course I don't know how he got to do this. But what I do know is that my father, once a month, had Schacht's car and chauffeur with a diplomatic number and diplomatic immunity.

And the Schacht said to my father, I'll give you the car once a month with my chauffeur. I never want to know what you did, and my chauffeur won't tell. And go do what you need to do.

And so my father would go back to Germany, to Hamburg, to Berlin, to different places in Germany where he had Jewish friends who had actually worked with him in his offices, and he would get them-- when he could get them to believe him, he'd get them into the car, and he'd bring them out of the-- through the border. If it was north it was to Belgium, or if it was south it was to France or it was to Italy.

A lot of the people he helped to come out to America. Some of them he took to Spain. Some of them went to Israel. And what I remember about that as a child is my father had always traveled a lot, and I wasn't scared when he traveled. But I

began to notice that there were times when he'd travel that were terrifying. The whole family was terrified because we never knew whether he would come back.

Now, nobody ever said that to me because I was the youngest in the family. My older brothers certainly understood. But little children feel things, and I started to feel-- whenever I heard my father was going to Germany, I was like, oh my God. Don't go. Don't go. And he'd say, it's all right, honey. I have an office there.

And it was like I didn't believe him. I knew he wasn't going to the office. Besides, his trips were very short. He would go like for two or three days.

You were about six or seven years old when you start being aware of changes going on in Europe. Do you remember any specific incidents as a child where you knew what was being said, and what was being talked about and was important and what they were saying?

The clearest memory I have of that is after the Anschluss when I was 10. Our doctor, our family doctor, was Jewish, and he lived three houses down from us. And one morning I got up to go to school, and it was just after the Anschluss. And there was an SS guard standing over the doctor, and he was on the sidewalk with a brush. And he was supposed to-- people had done the Kruckenkreuz in tar, made it out of the swastika. There's the Austrian cross.

So what they would do is when there was a swastika they would complete it and make a Kruckenkreuz, which was our symbol. Well they got him out of his house, and they had him on hands and knees to brush that down. I just ran over to him, and I put my arms around him. And I said, don't let him do that to you.

And the guard took the rifle, turned it around, and hit me over the head. And my mother was standing on the balcony, and she came running down. And she got me in the house. Now, what--

What did she-- do you remember what she said to the soldier or--

Yeah, well, what she said is what we talk about in the house and what we believe-- and you must never say in the outside world. And if you see something like that, you've got to walk by it. And I was saying, but you can't do that. You can't walk by and let that man be treated like that.

And she said, you have to for your father's sake or they'll kill him, or they'll kill me, or they'll kill us, or they'll kill you. But something terrible is going to happen.

The other side of that that's really amazing is I was learning English at the time, and my English teacher was Jewish. And my mother's hairdresser was Jewish. And then people started to call us up and said, we can't come to your house anymore, and we'd say, why? Are we Jewish? And they'd say, no, we are. A lot of the time you didn't know because all of a sudden you had to research up to your great-grandparents.

So anyway, I'm still in school, and the Anschluss has only been a month. And my father's figuring out how are we going to get out of there. And I'm still in school, and the schoolteacher says, now, in the morning and when we come in, instead of saying good morning we say Heil Hitler. And when you go home to your parents, you are to say highly Hitler to your parents, too.

And I noticed that I wasn't allowed to go to my English lessons and that the Jewish children in class weren't in class anymore. So anyway, I started to ponder this, and my mother and I had a difficult relationship. So one day I go home and I say, I think I'll try it.

And I ring the doorbell. My mother opens the door, and I say Heil Hitler. And she slaps me across the face, and slams the door, and says, you're not getting into this house until you greet me properly. And we used to say kusst du Hand, which means, I kiss your hand.

So I'm standing outside the door, and I'm thinking, well, I don't like that woman very well. I could now go to the police

and denounce her, and they take her away. And the danger of implanting these possibilities into a child's hands are just obvious and enormous. So anyway, thank God I didn't do it. I rang the bell again, and I went back in.

But there were-- for me, as a child, it was incredibly difficult to sort out what my father was doing, and what we were talking about at home. And my mother actually was accidentally born in GualeguaychÃ°, in a little town in South America. Her father lived like my father. He worked for Liebig, and he traveled all over the world.

So my mother had an Argentine passport besides having an Austrian one, so she went to the Jewish hairdresser. And there was a guard in front of the door. And my mother was so obviously blond and blue-eyed, and the guard said, you can't go in there.

And she said, yes, I can, and she took out her Argentine passport. The guard let her in. But he quickly read her name. He called my father in the office. She says, if you don't get your wife out of the hairdresser's you're going to be arrested. It went that quick.

How soon was that incident, for example, after the Anschluss?

Two months.

Within two months?

Two months. We left about three months after the Anschluss illegally, and my father had to make sure that we would be received along the way so that we could get out from-- Vienna to Paris is a long way, and I can't tell you how we got there. I don't know that.

I know we rode in cars at night, and I know we came to borders. And I know we were told to be quiet and we climbed over things. But I don't know the facts, or the route, or whatever that was. Then I remember we arrived in Paris.

And in Vienna we had a very big, beautiful house, and we had to leave everything there. And then the next thing I know is we're in Paris in a dinky little apartment. I'm saying, what happened? Well, that's the way it is now, and it'll be different again. We went through that also when we left Spain during the Civil War.

How many were there traveling? Your brothers-- you mentioned them. How many older brothers--

I have two brothers.

How old were they?

One was four years older than I and the other seven years older than I. And the one was four years older than I lived in Argentina, and he died of cancer about three years ago. The one who was seven years older than I is still alive in Brazil in Curitiba.

So their memories of-- do they-- their memories of-- did they ever share-- did they ever share their memories with you about that time, about leaving? Did you ever talk about it?

I became a psychologist probably because I was so traumatized in my childhood, and they did the reverse. They shut down. My brothers had a great deal of difficulty talking about feelings, talking about childhood. If I tried to talk childhood with them, they want to talk about the meadows in Austria, and Grandpa, and the happy times. They don't want to talk about the other stuff.

Let's go back to something you mentioned before. Your father's relationship with the finance minister, Schacht, who I believe was later deposed by Hitler-- how long do you-- do you know how long his relationship with him lasted?

It lasted for as long as we were in Europe. We landed in South America in 1940. And it's interesting that people who on

the one hand were loyal to Hitler and were doing things which I believe were pretty horrible on the other hand had allegiances, underground allegiances.

I've heard that from other people, too, where they've named names, and I thought, oh my. You knew him? I'm not talking Goebbels or Goering. I don't know anybody who knew them. But I did know people who knew lower down in the hierarchy and who said things like, yeah, he saved my life.

When do you think this relationship with Schacht started? Many, many years before 1933?

Probably, probably in my father's business world and totally unrelated to anything political originally.

When do you think he started making these monthly trips into Germany with the diplomatic-- Schacht's car?

I'm quite sure it was '36, '36 to '40.

So was he going in once a month to-- about once a month?

That's what Schacht had said to him originally, that he could have the car once a month. Now, I'm not sure that went on for all that time because two of those years we were in Spain. '36 to '38 we lived in Spain, and then the Civil War came. And then my father took people out of Spain who were being persecuted by Franco, and so he couldn't have gone back to Germany at that time.

You were very young then, eight years old, in 1936. Do you remember any discussion about the German aid that was going towards Franco's forces, the destruction of Guernica, for example and--

No, no.

You don't remember anything about--

No, that's--

So you went back to Vienna, and you were there until 1938?

Right.

And then three months after the Anschluss you fled to Paris. Do you remember how long it might have taken you to get to Paris?

No. No, it's like lost time. I remember the feelings. I remember sitting in places like this where that was the signal, and then you'd hear people walk. I have no idea how long that was. It seemed an eternity. It may have been six days or seven days. I'm not sure at all.

You were told that-- you do remember distinctly being told that you had to be quiet? You knew it was dangerous. The utmost gravity was--

And I was told so many times never to speak about what we spoke about at home, and that it was always like my father's life depended on our being able to keep secrets, including when we were in France, and when we went back to Spain, and when we got on the ship and went to South America.

They didn't-- my parents didn't feel safe until we had landed in Buenos Aires and had a place to live. So there were many years of not being able to speak like other kids do when other kids would say, where do you live, or what does your father do. Well, we move a lot. Well, what does your father do? Well, he's an engineer, and that's why we move a lot. And we weren't even allowed to say that we were fleeing because you never knew who you were talking to.

Do you think-- do you remember-- about that flight back-- just go back for a second. Was it-- do you think you might have been going through Germany? Do you remember any languages being spoken around here? Or did you travel just as a family by yourselves at night or during the day?

We traveled just as a family, and when we went to South America we were on that ship that was full of Jews. We were the only non-Jews on the ship. But when we left Austria we traveled as a family and we got to France. Wherever-- we stopped at night. We drove. We took trains, whatever.

When we-- I want to-- I'll tell you one story which I just-- that I remember really clearly. When we got to-- when we left France and we got to-- we were going to go back to Spain. We got to the border. The chain just closed in front of us, and the Frenchman said, mobilization has taken place. Everybody has to go back to their own country and has to go into the army, and so just turn back and go.

And my father had a gray Packard, and everybody just stopped dead. And the borders closed, and we don't know what to do and what's happening. And all of a sudden we see the-- the Spanish guard comes over to the French guard, and he's pointing at my father's car. And he's saying something, and my father says, this is probably it. That's the end. Somebody recognized me.

And the French guard comes up to our car, and he says, are you Mr. Pestle? Yeah. Is this is your family? Yeah? Get through. And my father's totally puzzled, and he was white as a sheet. I could just see him.

And we still don't know whether, if we get on the other side, we're going to be shot or what's going to happen. We get on the other side, and the Spanish guard says, well, you saved my life during the Civil War, and this is my turn to save your life. And my father looks at him and says, I don't even know you. And he says, yep, I am the brother of the guy who worked in your factory, and you came to get me at night, and you drove me over this very same border, and you risked your life.

My father had done that hundreds of times. He'd never even looked at the people he was taking over the border. This was during the Civil War, so he was going almost every night. And I remember that. And he'd get-- one guy would say to him, go over there, go to this house. It's my brother, and his wife, and their three children.

And my father had an Argentine flag and an Austrian flag over his old Packard, and he would drive people over the border. Well, this guy is one who he'd driven over the border, and he let us in, and that's how we got to Spain. And if it wasn't for that guy we'd all be dead.

You could [INAUDIBLE] all be dead because-- I'm curious about that because shortly after the Anschluss close to 80,000 people, within a few months, were rounded up in Austria, undesirables, political enemies, of which there were many. And your father managed to escape that. Why are you certain that you would have been dead? Because--

Because if we had gone back to France-- by this time the Anschluss had taken place. We were Germans. Everything would have been taken away from us or, if we were recognized as activists, we would have been sent back to Austria or Germany to a camp. So one way or the other we would have been dead.

And the reason we got out of Paris is because somebody from the German embassy called my father and said, get out of here. They're going to mobilize in two days. And that was supposedly from the enemy's side.

How did your father know this person at the embassy? Do you know?

I don't know, but it must have been somebody he helped one way or the other. He helped so many people. And besides, he had to have a guardian angel for us to get through all the things we got through. We get on this ship to go to South America. We're the only non-Jews on the ship. Just before we get to Brazil-- by this time it's the war-- a British U-boat surfaces and stops us and asks the captain to come on board.

And by this time my father is a German who would be captured by the British, right? Wherever he was he was the

enemy. So the British guy comes on board, and he says to the captain, give me all your passports. The captain gives him all the passports. By this time all the Jews have a J in their passport, and almost everybody on the boat was-- on the ship was Jews, German Jews, Austrian Jews.

So this is-- what do you call it-- a little transport ship. There was room like for 40 people, and we were 360. So we're sleeping everywhere, and he has 360 passports. So the Spanish captain gives the British guy the passports.

By this time my older brother is 17. He would have been taken, too. So the British guy starts going through the passports and says, well, these are all Jews. Don't you have any others? And the captain says, I don't make any difference. I don't know what you mean by others or by Jews.

So he looks through another-- I don't know-- 120 passports, and then he says, that's all you got? He says, that's all I got, gets off the ship. In the meantime, we're in our cabin saying, OK, two minutes before freedom they're going to get him. And they didn't.

After they didn't get your father-- it sounds like Franco's forces didn't get your father, and then the Nazis marching into Vienna didn't get your father, and then in France you managed to escape the new onslaught. But after the war did your father ever go back to Vienna and find out what happened to some of his colleagues or anything?

Yeah, my father went back to Germany and to Austria on business and to visit family. And what was so-- and he visited his Jewish friends who had either returned or his Jewish friends in America. He had some in New York, and he went to visit them a number of times in Chicago, and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and-- they just adored him-- in Los Angeles.

What was so amazing about him-- he was so much more forgiving than I am. Yeah, he would just go back, and he would visit his Jewish friends, and his friends who had been Nazis, and he would listen to their stories.

And eventually he would say, it doesn't matter very much on what side you were. It was horrible. It was painful. It was devastating. We all suffered. We all were hurt. We all were wounded. Yeah, more people were killed on one side than on the other, but then look at Leningrad and the millions of people who died in Leningrad who-- the Russians.

What was your father's background that made him take such extraordinary risks, you think, going into Germany--

What the psychology of the rescuer is is fascinating. He was raised a Catholic. We were raised Catholics. He was a deeply honorable, loving kind of man. We always had servants. He treated the servants with the greatest respect.

He would go to the kitchen, and compliment them after dinner, and thank them for the beautiful meal that they had made. I never, ever in my life saw my father put somebody down or even criticize somebody, which is why it was so incredibly shocking to me when Hitler came into Austria. We were in the street watching the parade, and my father said, why doesn't somebody shoot him?

And it was the only comment I ever heard my father make that was so devastating that it took me months, and months, and months to integrate how this father who was so loving to us, to his family, to his friends, and to everybody could say something like that.

And then as I began to understand more and more, even from accidental conversations when my father would come home and say to my mother, you know who they just deported, or something like that-- and then I'd say, was that Hitler? And he'd say, yeah. Little by little I got it.

Within in a few months-- within-- this is still in Vienna?

Yeah.

So you heard about deportations. You heard about people being taken away. Did you did you recognize the names as friends of the family?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Were you afraid for your friends, for your own childhood friends as well?

Yeah, yeah. And actually some of my cousins were taken into the German army by force. Like the SS would come into a high school classroom, and take all the boys, put them in SS uniforms, and send them to Russia. So I've had people on both sides who were fighting on that side and fighting on this side, which eventually also taught me that no matter where you were it was horrible. And it was cruel, and it was senseless. And yeah, Hitler initiated the whole debacle, but nobody won. The winners didn't win.

Do you remember-- do you remember if there was any kind of a discussion with your brothers about being part of Hitler Youth or anything like that? Do you remember any kind of-- you were only there a short time, but do you remember any kind of a conversion?

We were made to join the Hitler Youth.

So you were a member of Hitler Youth?

Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I remember three meetings of being in the Hitler Youth. Anybody who wasn't Jewish was forced from their school to go into the Hitler Youth, and I remember that the first time that they were there-- that we were there the teacher said with this friendly, phony smile, what do you children know about Hitler?

And I said I knew that he was a painter-- I mean he painted walls-- and that his father was a guard at a train station or something like that. Well, I obviously wasn't supposed to say those things. Those were not the heroic things, but interestingly to me that I had those facts. I must have been told at home that he was a kind of a nobody who came out of no education, no culture, no background that had any thinking, or value, or whatever, and amongst those things I heard those things.

Did you hear he was Austrian? Did your father ever tell you he was a--

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I also remember once-- the Russian Georgians were friendly toward the Germans because Hitler tried to help them stay independent from Russia, and when they couldn't-- from the Soviet Union, I should say. When they couldn't, the Germans helped Georgians to get out of the Soviet Union, and at some dinner with some bigwigs that I attended a Georgian said to me, you must be very proud that Hitler was Austrian.

And I said, oh, exactly as proud as you are that Stalin was Georgian, and oh boy did he shut up. He never talked to me again the whole evening.

When did you have to join the Hitler Youth?

From school.

Immediately after the-- how soon after the Anschluss in March--

Immediately, immediately.

So it was in March?

Maybe April. Maybe it was April, until things got--

You remember seeing the parade.

--organized. I remember seeing the parade. I remember the Jewish children leaving class. One morning they were in

class, and the next morning they weren't there. And of course--

Did anybody say anything?

Well, being who I was, I went right up to the teacher, and I said, good morning. Where are my friends? And she said, you didn't say Heil Hitler. And I said, OK, Heil Hitler. Where are my friends? And she said, well they are now going to special separate schools from you because they're not the same as you.

And then I went home, and I said, is this about the Jews again? Yeah. But of course they didn't say it. They didn't say they're Jewish. They said they're different.

I want to share one experience that was very important to me. I work in Europe in spring. Normally I'm not here. I'm in Europe. And I teach there all over the place, in different communities. And a friend of mine started a community in Northern Germany, and she asked me if I would come and do some teaching there. And I said, sure, I'll do anything for a friend.

And then I'm in Holland working, and all of a sudden I realized that I have made really sure, since the war, never to go to Northern Germany because that's where my father was persecuted. And so I went to Southern Germany. I went to Frankfurt, and I went to Munich, and I went to places in the south, close to Austria kind of, but not Northern Germany. Austrians have a prejudice against Northern Germans anyway.

But that's where my father went, Berlin and Hamburg. That's where he went when he was getting Jews out, so I never went there. So then I'm on the train going to Hamburg, and I think, oh my God, I wonder what's going to happen to me. I could get back into five-year-old and be terrified, and I'm supposed to lead a group of Northern Germans.

So I arrived there, and I said to my friend, this is where my terror comes from as a child. And I'm not sure I can do it, or I may do it and fall apart in the middle of it. And she said, well, I'm a pretty good group leader. If you have to fall apart, fall apart.

So one night-- this was a week workshop-- I worked with a woman my age a dream that she had, which was about the war, and I've had thousands of those dreams. As a matter of fact, I did a lot of therapy to get over my war dreams. And some things I dream that I never experienced but I heard, and I read, and I lived with.

So anyway, I worked with this woman's dream, and it was absolutely devastating. So then I go to bed, and all hell breaks loose. I start dreaming war dreams again. And I wake up, and I'm in tears.

And my friend comes in, and she says, well, you don't have to lead the group today. I'll lead it. And I said, oh, no. This is my opportunity. I'm going to lead the group, and I'm going to tell them. I share with them who I am, which I never do in Germany, and she said, OK.

So I went in, and I said, I'm just going to talk about my childhood for about 10 minutes. And it comes from the dream that you shared last night. And my childhood was as difficult as yours, and yours was no more and no less difficult than mine. And I have finally understood that we're all the same. But I need to talk about the terror.

So I did just a little bit. And then there was a Dutch woman there, and she-- this is the month of May, which is when the Dutch were liberated, and so she talks about her experience as a child, and she's my age.

And then somebody else talked, and then all of a sudden this one German woman with a voice like a general says, get up, everybody. It sounded like an air raid is happening. We all got up. And she says, put your arms around each. We put our arms around each other. She starts to sing "We Shall Overcome." And we're just all saying, "We Shall Overcome." It still makes me tearful.

And that was my real healing to be able to realize that we're all one and we've all gone through these atrocities. But we have to stop blaming, and we have to stop pointing fingers. And we have to learn to forgive, and we have to remember



so that it never happens again. I didn't know that's where I was going, but that's fine.

If you want to take a break, it's all right.

No, I'm OK. I always think tears are just fine.

There's some people who feel that strong people come out of difficult childhoods and that-- and many people who are strong and very successful in life will say, well, it's because I had a difficult childhood.

That's true.

But do you-- you've obviously reflected on what the war cost you and your family. What do you think it cost you in terms of your childhood? What would your childhood have been like, do you think-- do you think about or did you ever think about what your childhood would have been like if the war had not interceded?

No, I'm so much of a realist that wouldn't occur to me, but I see-- I have a very complicated and interesting family, and I think we've all suffered a great deal. And some of us are more able to look within and work with the suffering than others. My mother is 85, and she's a very bitter, sad old lady who is still pointing fingers.

Who's she pointing fingers at?

At the Germans, and at life, and at my father, and at-- the risks he took and how traumatized we were. And my father's dead. Everybody is at fault except her. That's how my mother deals with it, which is a total non-dealing with it.

She didn't approve of your father's actions?

She did, but it cost her.

Did you ever--

And it cost her much.

How did it cost her, him deciding to risk his safety and other families' by using--

Tremendous fear. My mother lived in terror a lot of the time. And sometimes she talks about it like he was a hero, and sometimes she talks about it like he was crazy and that he also endangered a lot of people who knew what he was doing.

And she's confused about it, and she's on all sides of it. And none of it had she digested or-- she's just not that kind of lady. My mother cares more about makeup, and hairdo, and about image. And when it's convenient, then the image is, he was a hero, and when it's not convenient, he was a crazy man.

It sounds like also that it was important, as a child, that you-- you had to adapt. You had to have several different images. At school you're a member of Hitler Youth, and at home you could be yourself and discuss the oppression going on around you.

Did your parents-- going back to the Hitler Youth, did your brothers and you ever discuss what you were being taught there? And what did you do at a Hitler Youth meeting as a little girl-- six or--

You sang songs. You saluted. You were told that you were of a privileged race. I was told that if I was very, very good during summer vacation I could go to Germany and live with a wonderful German family, stuff like that. And I wanted to go. I went home, and I said, hey, I can go to Germany this summer and live with a wonderful German family.

It's so confusing in a child's mind. Then my mother says, no, that's for poor children, children who have no means and they can probably go live on German farm where they will be well-fed. I didn't know what poor children were.

They were in class with me. They looked like me. I didn't know the difference. It's something really-- my father also built a glass factory for the Shah of Persia, the old Shah. We had Hindus, and Persians, and Japanese. Mitsubishi people were at our house when I was a little kid in Vienna. We had people from all over the world in our home. I didn't know what prejudice was. I didn't understand.

But do you think that-- but did you quickly-- do you think that you-- did you start to learn perhaps when you were--

Oh, sure.

You started to learn it. And did your parents-- do you feel, looking back, that maybe your parents were then making a conscious effort to stop this education that you were getting in the schools and in Hitler Youth and with your brothers as well? Were you aware of any--

My parents were just waiting to get us out of there, so by being truthful and honest when we were home they were counteracting everything that we were learning. And I guess part of my memory is how incredibly strong the family bond was and is. Still with my brother who lives in Brazil-- I just found him. It was his wife's birthday.

We're a closer family in many ways than many families who live in the same town because we've been so torn apart. And, yes, having such a difficult childhood makes you a strong person, or you go under. And I've seen some of my cousins after the war who stayed in Austria, who couldn't get out, and who experienced a lot of what I experienced and worse, and who are absolutely neurotic, who've never gotten over it, and with whom I can't talk because if I talk to them like I'm talking to you they go-- they go nuts.

They can't face it?

What are you talking about? You're crazy. How can you-- how can you work this through? What is there to work through? We were damaged forever and ever and ever. We're just damaged people.

And I say, hey, we were damaged people until we were 10, or 12, or 15. And what are you now, 62? And you're going to tell me you're a damaged person? And you've had 50 years to work on it, and what have you done? Oh, they go so-- they just go crazy.

They don't believe there's any possible healing--

No.

--for their psyches at all.

No.

It sounds like-- it sounds like-- you started to talk about the activities. There was singing these little-- it sounds almost like it was--

Singing, storytelling. Yeah, like Boy Scouts, Boy Scouts of America.

So was it--

But it probably--

Was it a fun activity? Do you remember any kind of-- was it fun? [CROSS TALK]

No, it was so conflicting for me that it wasn't fun because I was always afraid I'd get caught saying something I wasn't supposed to say. I was afraid to leave what they said. If I did believe it, and went home, and talked to my family, I

would be-- a couple of times I was ridiculed, which was very hurtful. How can you believe that?

What happened then? When were you ridiculed? What happened?

I don't remember what the story was I brought home, but it was something I said that my teacher had said with big eyes and wanting to know whether it was true or not. And I was laughed at. And I don't know what it is I said, but I do remember how hurt I was.

And they probably-- living in that much crisis, they probably expected much more maturity of me than a 10-year-old girl could muster, and they would forget.

That you were 10 years old?

Then I was 10 years old.

So when you left--

Actually, when you fled to France, did you go to school?

Yeah, I went back to school in France. I went to a-- I went to a Catholic nun school, and I was terrified, just terrified. It was so austere. It was in a castle, and there was a gate. And there was an old nun who opened the gate, and she had a cane. And if she didn't like the looks of you she'd just hit you one as you walk by.

It's funny. Then I get terrified by Catholic nuns who are supposed to be kind and loving and accept this traumatized child. I was probably more terrified in that school than in some of the times in Vienna or in Spain.

How long were you in school in France? Were you based in Paris?

One year. One year before we went to Spain.

And how long were you in--

1939. That was the year I was in school there.

In France. And then in Spain?

No, in Spain I wasn't in school anymore.

How long were you in Spain? And where did you go? And you went to-- where did you go?

We went back to Barcelona where we had lived and my father had associates, and we stayed there maybe two months before we got on the ship to get out.

You mention that even until you landed in Buenos Aires there was this silence that had to be kept about the family's beliefs, what did your father do. That pertained in Spain as well. Why was there-- were you told specifically why--

Well, in Spain-- oh, yeah, in Spain Franco was ruling, and so if it came out that my father was an anti-fascist-- and most of his friends at the time with whom he had the factory probably, by necessity, had become fascists or had bowed to Franco and his politics or whatever. So then we couldn't talk about it again.

And they actually-- I remember conversations where they were making pretty positive comments about Mussolini, and about Hitler, and Franco, and this big alliance that is forming.

What did your father say?

My father didn't say anything.

At that point he kept his mouth shut.

At that point he kept his mouth shut because he wanted us to get out of there, and there was no point. The purpose of going to Spain was to escape, to get out of Europe, and there was no point in starting anything at all. And that's when my mother went to the Argentine consulate and said, I was born in Argentina. I want to be repatriated.

And they said, fine. And she said, and I have a husband and three children. Oh, yeah, they can go with you. And it was an absolute miracle, and it was my mother's idea. My father didn't even think of it.

My father was working with his political connections to try to get us out, but my mother naively and innocently went to the Argentine embassy and came back and said, hey, we can get out legally. And my father said, what happened? And she told him.

Well, if your father-- so your mother still had her Argentine passport which enabled your legal passage to-- how soon after that do you remember boarding the ship to-- do you remember the name of the ship?

Cabo San Antonio.

Cabo San Antonio?

Uh-huh, out of Barcelona.

Oh, Barcelona. It really wasn't meant-- how many people did you think were all there, about 300?

360 people were on board. It was a cargo.

And this specific-- had this boat been chartered, or had it been-- was it just a run that was a scheduled run that was--

It was a run, and I think it was by the grace of the captain that all of those people were getting on board because we had also gotten out of Spain during the Civil War on a similar ship, and we had lots of-- at that time the Catholic nun the monks were being thrown into churches and lit on fire by the Rojos, whoever they were. They were Communists, but they weren't just communists. They were pretty-- well, the Spanish Civil War-- between the Rojos and Franco you didn't know which was going to be worse.

And so those are memories that I have of seeing a church go up in flames and hearing people scream and yell.

This was in Barcelona?

In Barcelona.

Where were you in Barcelona? Do you remember?

We lived on avenida del Tibidabo 22 You know Tibidabo, the mountain in Barcelona?

Near Parque Guell?

Yeah.

You lived in there. Do you remember the church that went up in--

No, but we also had a summer house in Castelldefels on the Costa Brava.

North of Barcelona?

Yeah. And we saw a church lit on fire there, and people burned alive.

Do you remember your parents-- you were really young there. You were--

Six, seven, eight.

What did your-- there was no way a parent would allow a child to see that. It was one of those situations, obviously, that you were there, there was no way they could have avoided that. Do you remember what-- do you remember their explanation of what was going on? Did you understand-- could you understand at all what was happening?

No. Certainly I couldn't understand what was happening. I do remember a childhood friend of mine who was Spanish run into a church and bring out a statue of the Virgin Mary. That was in Castelldefels, close to where we lived, where we went to mass on Sundays. And when I saw her I was absolutely horrified. I said, how can you do that? And she said, they're going to burn it. They're going to burn the church.

I couldn't believe it. Well, not only did they burn the church. We heard the screams from our house of the people that they put in the church. The Germans did the same thing with the French in Oradour. But very seldom does anybody talk about the atrocities that happened-- the same atrocities happened in Spain, horrendous.

It was so frightening. And when we got on the ship to get out--

To go back to Austria?

Well, actually they got us out to Italy. And then from Italy they put us on a train, and we went back to Austria. But when we got on there, the whole ship was full. It was just like the ship to South America, only this is '36. And the ship was full of monks and nuns, and they were all in just plain clothes.

And as we got out to sea they put on their helmets. And apparently I walked up to one of them, and I said, well, thank God they didn't kill you, which was a pretty wild comment for a little kid to make. But I didn't know how many of them had been killed and burned.

And yet despite the fact that your father was an anti-fascist he was helping-- and you had seen this? You knew about your father's activities.

Yeah. Yeah, but, you see--

You didn't see that-- you didn't see the-- how was a young child able to understand that what those Rojos were doing was wrong but what my father was doing was right and the other side of the Rojos--

--was wrong, too. I think what I got from that is that my father was just so deeply humanitarian that he was going to save anybody who wasn't torturing or hurting somebody else. If you were in danger because of whatever and you asked him to help, he would help.

But on this ship-- let's go back to Barcelona. And now you're going to leave for Argentina, and you're on the ship. You said primarily it was German Jews and Austrian Jews. Did you did your father know any of these people on the ship by any chance?

I don't know that. We got to know a lot of the people really well, and one of the reasons we got to know them well is they wouldn't let us land in Brazil. And a lot of these people were going to Brazil, and all of a sudden-- I don't remember for what political reason-- the Brazilians decided they didn't want them, probably some Nazi kind of group in Brazil. There were a lot of Germans there.

So we lay outside of Brazil for a long time, and a lot of these people were absolutely desperate. And the ship was running out of food, and my father consoled, and talked, and got the captain to wire people whom he knew, political people. It didn't work. We never got into Brazil.

Then we got into Argentina, and as soon as we got into Argentina he knew people there who had political influence. And he facilitated with the captain and the Brazilian authorities, and that ship did land in Brazil in small part due to my father's help. But that's just who he was. Where there was trouble and he had any idea of how he could help he did.

In Buenos Aires-- so you lived in Buenos Aires for the duration of the war.

Until '47.

And what were you aware of the war growing up in Buenos Aires?

News every day. My father made a-- in the paper there was-- in the Prensa in Buenos Aires there was a little square thing on the front page of the activity of the war. My father cut it out every day and had an album-- God knows where that might be-- had an album of the daily activities during the war.

He also kept communication. He sent two copies of every letter. There was always a second copy in case the first copy didn't arrive. He kept in contact with his parents, who were-- well, his father died at the beginning of the war, but he kept in contact with his mother as best he could.

I remember that sometimes he would call, and the only way you could call is make operator calls. And then you had to stay by the phone 24 hours because within the 24 hours any time the call might go through. We didn't forget the war one day of our lives, although we were in South America, not one day.

What kind of a community was growing up in Buenos Aires?

Well, my brothers went to French school, and I went to British school because of course we wouldn't go to German school. I would think 99% of my friends were Jewish.

Were any of your Jewish friends hearing about any family members or were able to get any family members out?

Yeah, oh, yeah, terrible. We had two German friends who had also been part of the underground, which-- very carefully my father and they started to-- when my father realized they weren't Nazis he very carefully started to initiate some conversations.

Were you afraid of being discovered in Buenos Aires?

No.

So to clarify, was that the first place that you were in--

The first place where we could breathe.

Speak openly?

Yeah.

So from 19--

But not with Germans.

Not with Germans.

And most of the kids who we associated with were either British or French. Then in the British school that I went to-- of course we all spoke foreign languages ever since we were born practically. In the British school that I went to all of a sudden-- it was a girls' school-- some girls got it into their heads that since I was Austrian I had to be Nazi.

And they started to ostracize me. And I went home. And I said, I don't know what's going on, but something is fundamentally wrong. And I want to go talk to the principal. And my mother said, I'll go with you.

So we went to the principal, and I told her some of the things that I was experiencing. By this time I'm 14 or something, 13. And so then the principal thanked me and said, I'd like to be alone with your mother, and I left.

And then my mother told her some of our history, and then one day I was told not to go to school. And she, at assembly, told some about our background and said, you are to be especially nice to her, and it immediately stopped, the harassment.

Do you remember what the girls did to you at all, what these other girls--

Yeah, yeah. They they'd-- I don't remember what the swear words were for Germans, but they'd use swear words for Germans, and Austrians, and Nazis. And I don't remember the--

There was a coolness of aloofness.

Yeah.

And they would--

Well, in France they called me Boche, which is the put-down for German, and they threw stones at me on the way to school.

At your brothers, too?

At my brothers, too.

Did you ever want to-- did you ever want to turn around and say, you don't understand, you don't understand what my father--

Mostly when children attack you they are so cruel that what you do is you survive, you run. And I remember whenever I came to the edge of that park that I had to cross to go to the Catholic school that I was scared of-- whenever I got to that park I'd kind of hold my breath, and I'd start walking. And if I saw any of those kids, I'd just start running.

How did they know you were Austrian. How did the children know you were Austrian?

We lived in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which is a suburb of Paris, small community. Pestle is an incredibly Austrian name. I'm sure we sometimes spoke German when we were in the street or if I went shopping with my mother. My mother never did learn French very well. I used to translate for her. And it was a marketplace. It was probably evident.

You went to Buenos Aires and you were friendly with a large Jewish community, growing Jewish community in Buenos Aires. Your family felt comfortable. And there were these two other German families that once your father determined they were not Nazi sympathizers you could be friendly with.

After the war, was there any-- did your family consider returning to Europe? Did your mother and father--

I did. I went back to Europe.

You did?

My parents did not and, I think, chose-- by this time my father must have been-- well, he was born in '98. He was 50, and he had a well-developed business, and offices, and home.

Actually, he moved to Brazil later when Peron was in Argentina. I always said Richard Nixon got elected here because I'm living here. Wherever we went the fascists came. So he moved to Brazil eventually, but I think it was like-- I wouldn't consider moving back to Europe.

He wasn't bitter about--

He was not bitter at all.

It sounded like you had quite a nice life in Vienna. You had servants.

Oh, we did.

You had [CROSS TALK]--

Oh, we had servants in South America.

And you had a wonderful [CROSS TALK]

We had them in Spain. We had them in France. My father lost everything four times and he made everything again.

Wherever he went he was able to give the family a very comfortable lifestyle.

Well, when we arrived in Argentina we didn't have a cent, and we lived in Buenos Aires in a boarding house that was owned by a German Jewish woman who was willing to let us live there until my father could make some money. And I remember his comment was, well, the first thing we'll buy is a bicycle, and I said, why a bicycle? And he said, so we can go to the bathroom at night without stepping on the cockroaches. We were that poor.

And within a month we had a car, and within two months we rented a house, and within two years we bought a house with a pool, and we had all the servants again. And he was never bitter about anything when he lost everything.

What about your mother, though?

I think my mother had a much harder time with it.

And your brothers? Because they were a little older. They probably-- were they more set in their ways? Did they have more established friends in Vienna, more established friendships, or were they like you?

My brothers became-- and I say that with some sorrow-- became very materialistic in the sense that they had suffered from losing everything they had that they were going to make really sure that it never happened to them again.

And I think I'm the one who preserved the spiritual values much more deeply than they did. My brothers don't go to church. My brothers don't talk about religion, don't talk about spiritual life. My oldest brother's oldest son is like the next generation, is a guy who has some spiritual values with whom I have deep and wonderful conversations which I can't have with my brothers or with my mother.

My mother thinks that the measure of your love is how much money you spend on her when you're with her. So she went into that mode. I went into the mode that money doesn't matter. What's important is that you're happy, and healthy, and you love one another.



But she still-- so she was bitter about--

My mother is very bitter.

Still to this day is bitter?

Oh, very bitter.

Because she lost a life, she lost a nice life in Vienna, being forced to flee so many times.

I have about six or seven more minutes. How about you ask me a final question.

Well, I'm also curious about after the war, too. And after the war there were a lot of German refugees to Argentina, some of whom were pretty unsavory characters. Do you remember that part of history occurring, being cognizant of the fact that now were arriving people who still felt that, once again, Germany had been cheated of its destiny?

I was horrified, absolutely horrified to see the influx of ex-Nazis coming into Argentina. We had a house in Bariloche, which is a place in the Andes which is absolutely beautiful, and from one summer to the next the whole town was German-speaking. And I could tell by the accent and by the way they talked those are the guys, and now they're all here.

And they weren't Austrian?

And one of the very difficult things for me when I went to Hamburg that time when I did that workshop was I remember a lot of the places that my father spoke of, and one of them was the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten. And I went there. And there were men my father's age, and I found myself in the lobby looking at them and thinking, I wonder which of these guys would have tried to kill my father or something like that. And then all of a sudden this influx of influx of Germans into Argentina was absolutely horrifying.

And Peron, later Peron.

And Peron and Evita and the whole--

And junta later.

Yeah.

Today what are your-- what are your thoughts today regarding Germany in light of its reunification?

I have no worries about that at all. Like I have been to the Soviet Union, and I have absolutely no worries that the Soviets would ever attack anybody in their lives again. The Russians I mean. And although the situation right now is very complicated, the unrest comes from the sub-nationalities that live within the Soviet Union, like the Azerbaijani, and the Georgians, and the Latvians, and all of those people.

That's a very complicated story, and I wouldn't attempt to try to understand or clarify that. But I now have worked in Germany for six, seven years in northern Germany, and I have German friends come and visit me here. I know East Germans. I have Russian friends who are coming from Moscow on the 1st of July to my house. All of those people are so seasoned by their history that they would never initiate a war again.

What if they pass that on to their children? Have they taught their children?

Even more so.

Even more so.

Even more so. The generation of people that I work with now are between-- in Germany everywhere are between 30 and 65, and the 30, 35-year-olds are so wise and so concerned about what their parents might have done during the war. And some of their parents won't answer their questions, which makes them doubly concerned, and aware, and wary.

I'm really impressed with the young people in the Soviet Union, in Germany, in France, in Belgium, in Scotland. Wherever I work I am-- that's my hope, that the work that I do has an effect. But the quality of the people who come to me to work is extraordinary.

You mentioned-- I guess a final question I would have would be-- you said that you think one of the reasons you became a psychologist was to understand this trauma that the war inflicted on your childhood.

Perpetrated on all of us.

--and specifically in your childhood. What have you learned as a psychologist and from your perspective as a survivor, somebody who did live, was able to survive-- do you have any notion about why it happened in the first place, what gave rise to this madness?

I think the person who has been the most helpful in helping me understand that has been Alice Miller, who's a German psychologist who wrote a number of books, one of them called *For Your Own Good*. And in that book she describes how children were raised in Germany between the First World War and the Second World War and the incredible brutality that was perpetrated on these children, including-- she has three case histories in the book, and one of them is Hitler's life as a child.

And the other is about a young man who had a very famous trial that was on television who killed little boys, and then another one is of a woman who became a prostitute because she became a heroin addict at 14. And the first part of that book sort of a general overview, history, of the pedagogy by which children were raised and then these three case histories which are so horrifying that I could hardly read it. I'd find myself not breathing.

And what it reminded me of was that some of the children that I was raised in France, too, and in Germany would be beaten mercilessly by their fathers if we came home from school 10 minutes late. Like we played in the street. Nobody ever hit me in my life, not as a child and not as an adult, but I remember the terror-- and this was in Paris-- of walking in with my friend Jean-Claude 10 minutes late.

And his father was home, and he opened the closet where you hung your coats. And he took out a belt, and he started beating this kid in front of me. And I started to scream, turned around, ran out of the house, and ran home. But I also witnessed that in Vienna, and I witnessed that in-- I never witnessed it in Spain, but I did in France and in Austria, how brutally children were treated.

And this would set up a whole generation to be taken advantage of?

Of people who cowed and who bowed down to authority and who were so afraid to raise their voice. And that's one of the gifts that we got who were on the other side, that we were-- as soon as it was safe, we could speak the truth and live my own values.

It's almost like an alcoholic household where you can't talk about it.

Yeah, but we weren't a dysfunctional family.

It wasn't a dysfunctional family. It's a situation.

We were a functional family in a dysfunctional world.

Quickly, just as a psychologist, how-- what was the appeal of Hitler to these children who've been traumatized, do you

think?

The promises he made. Europe was in-- Germany and Austria was in a severe depression. People were poor. People were hungry. The savior-- I remember his words he used to say, [SPEAKING GERMAN], I, a nameless one, like I'm humble of the masses, I am going to save you.

He built roads, and he built housing. And he gave people some physical comfort. If you weren't a Jew you were better off. If you were poor and you weren't a Jew you were better off than you'd been in years. It didn't last very long, but the beginning was very promising.

And I remember little friends of mine saying, well, my parents say he's doing a lot of good. He's building a road from here to Linz and from here to Innsbruck, and some of my father's friends are getting to work and get money.

But you still knew that this was all wrong, despite-- that this was a big lie?

Yeah.

Do you have any children?

Yeah, I have two sons.

What did you tell them about the Holocaust? I guess that would be my final question. What did you tell your own children about the Holocaust and your own childhood? Did you spare them some of these stories that being--

Yes, certainly, certainly. I think if you asked my children, more than what I told them it's the values I lived by which are very much my father's. And, being a teacher, I've had the opportunity to help many, many people, and being a psychologist I've had that opportunity.

And I just got a wonderful Mother's Day card from my younger son which said something like, thank you for the marvelous childhood I've had and for the loving, caring, wonderful person that you are. I've often said to my children, I don't believe what people say. I believe what they do. And so I've done what I've learned, and so they've learned that.

But no, I didn't tell a lot of stories.

About your own life. Did you make an effort nonetheless to educate them about--

Politics? Oh, you bet. Oh, you bet. So I can't vote. I'm an Austrian citizen. And I've done everything to educate my students, and my children, and everybody I know, whether they want to hear it or not, to what power is. And voting is one of the powers we have, but we have many, many others. And I exert all of them except voting.

And the reason I'm not an American citizen is that I've never trusted an American leader, and if America got into trouble, as long as I'm Austrian I can take both my boys who were born here, take them to Austria as long as they haven't served in the army, and they can become Austrian citizens. Now, mind you, the leader of Austria isn't particularly trustworthy at this time, but anyway, that's another story.

I thank you. It was interesting for me to go back into some of those memories, and I accept them all, including the tears.

Well, thank you for gracing us with your time and your memories. I know some of them were not easy to recall, but it wasn't an easy time. They go with it. They're part and parcel of the story. Thank you very much.

Thank you. All right.

We didn't even take a break. We went right through that.

Great.

We did about an hour 15.

Well, some interviews last four hours.

Oh, yeah?

Oh, yeah.