

One question I wanted to ask you was, what do you think that your early experiences in Germany and having to leave have played in your life? What influence?

I think it's had a great impact. This-- I think it has a lot to do with my now having that anxiety attacks because this uncertainty-- what's going to happen? What's going to happen? And I think that has troubled me all my life.

When you say, what's going to happen, what do you mean now?

No, I mean at then. And now, too, like I say, I think I've had so much stress in my life. I think it had to do with my unwise marriage decisions, getting married to the wrong men.

Well, the first one wasn't necessarily unwise. You didn't know his family at the time.

No, that's true.

There was no way to judge how they would receive you.

Right. And then the second one-- well, he was-- I only knew him a week, and then when I got married-- I'd never been around heavy drinkers, and he would get drunk and get kind of moody when he was drunk and things like this. And that was all foreign to me. I'd never been around that.

But outside of that, yeah, I think then the uncertainty-- until I remarried-- I think until I-- maybe I should say--

What were you going to say?

I'm trying to figure out when this uncertainty went away for a while, and I think that was with my last marriage.

You last marriage. And those 10 years in Las Vegas?

Especially the eight years in Lake County when we bought our house. It was the most beautiful setting and tranquil. I could sit at night--

And peaceful for you?

--on my bedroom veranda that overhang the creek and listen to the creek and the occasional frog croaking and playing golf. And I did work as head bookkeeper at [PLACE NAME] Harbor inn. But it was a pleasure. I overlooked the lake.

And so those were beautiful years, and we had beautiful company. We entertained. We were entertained. We belonged to the country club.

Now, if I had known you as a little girl, say in 1938, 1939, and I would ask you, how are you doing, how are things going in your life-- were you aware of anxiety?

Oh, yeah. I was afraid, always afraid. I was afraid to go out the door, that I'd be called names or worse. I was afraid that they'd take my mother away. I had this fixation that they would be taking my mother away.

Well, she was the last vestige you had of [INAUDIBLE] Did they actually come to your door on Crystal Night?

They came-- yeah, in the house-- you see, these big houses in Germany-- you went up these great big staircases. We had these heavy stairs and these heavy banisters that I used to like to slide down. And there were people in there. They dragged some people out that were upstairs. That's what I heard. That's what I'm saying in that poem.

You could hear that?

Yes.

You didn't see it, but you could hear it?

No. I had my covers over me.

So you were aware that you were scared at that time?

And I was afraid they'd come to our door.

Were you afraid that you wouldn't get out in time?

Yeah, we were-- that we were all afraid of, yeah.

Did you have fear in Shanghai other than when the bombing started?

Yeah, a little bit because we didn't know what's going to happen next. We felt reasonably-- during that time it-- I just can't believe that it was actually so many years that we spent in that kind of a ghetto. How we survived I don't know.

Not only just the hardships but the terrible heat, no air conditioning. Before we were confined we could get relief going to the movies. There was air conditioning. As a matter of fact, I'd sit in the movies and knit in the dark. It used to be cool.

And the heat with the humidity-- and it made our bodies so-- we were all skin and bones, and then when the winter came it was actually-- you would not consider it that cold here, but there were people who would actually die in the street from the cold because your body didn't have the resistance, felt the cold more because from the terrible summers.

And you had no heating?

Yeah. So I don't know it was just getting from one day to the next. I mean I think this is how somebody in prison must have felt, just serving your time.

And you don't know when you're getting out.

Yeah.

Yeah. Would it be fair to say that you lived in a period of uncertainty from 1933 to 1947?

Yes, definitely.

OK. And you think that has had an effect on you and your emotional life?

Oh, yeah.

The way you look at the world?

Yes, definitely.

The way you feel about people?

And my worrying. I worry constantly. Now that I-- I worry probably less now because right now I worry more about my illness. But it's just--

It's a different kind of worry.

It's a different kind of worry, yes. But it's just-- and when I first got to New York-- and you know how you hear the sirens constantly there. I would just-- oh, I would just fall apart because I remember the air raids. And that really got to me.

How do you feel about your Jewishness now?

I feel that I-- like I lost-- I feel like a ship that lost its rudder. I don't seem to have an anchor. You know what I'm talking about? Not having much contact with anybody.

You feel rudderless.

Rudderless, yeah. I felt better when I had my Jewish friends in Las Vegas than I do now because here I just--

Have you ever consider going back there?

I can't because I can't financially.

You can't afford it.

If I could afford it and it wasn't for the medical coverage and everything, I'd be there in a minute.

I see.

But then, too, my friends are getting old. They're getting sick. They're having their health problems. So it's just like when I came here. I was very dependent on my husband's kids, and see, I was nine years younger than my husband. And he met-- and his son married a woman seven years older than he was, so my-- daughter-in-law I call her. She's great to me.

She's only four years younger than I am, and he is in his late 60s, and he's now having health problems. Well, they moved up into the mountains, and I go up there. And he loves it up there. He doesn't like the two-and-a-half-hour ride. But it's in the mountains, and I feel wonderful up there when I go up there.

He's in the mountains with a heart problem?

No, he doesn't have a heart problem. He has diabetes and stuff. He's getting-- but he was really feeling all the effects when they moved-- they moved up there here about a couple of years ago, and I have spent-- I go there sometimes for two weeks at a time. Week at a time they wait on me the hand and foot. Right now they're sick. He's got Bell's palsy, and she's got her kidney stones removed again.

So they wanted me to come up, but I don't want to because when I go up there they don't let me do anything. They wait on me hand and food. But I know from experience when you're feeling sick you don't need anybody else at all. So I said, no, I'm not come up until they feel better.

So I came here. They lived in [PLACE NAME] when I came here, and I was also in touch with my son. They were both here in San Leandro. And I had a granddaughter, beautiful-- you saw that picture on the back there. And they have totally abandoned me. Like I said, my one son died, and the other one just can't be bothered. And he only lives about four blocks away.

So it's been a disappointment all the way around, and then when they moved up to-- it's hard. It's just--

Have you ever thought of giving up your religion?

No, not really. I do-- I will say this. Yes, I did at one time when my husband was so sick, and I had a lot of people praying for us, and we went to Las Vegas for his sake, we went to the church, we went to the First Presbyterian Church-- but I have not-- I haven't found a place-- I haven't found a synagogue. I haven't found a church. I'm kind of in between.

And I would like to-- I did talk to somebody, and they're sending me letters from the Hasidic--

[INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah. But I just-- and like I say, the transportation and stuff-- I just don't know.

What holidays do you observe now?

All of them.

All of them? From every--

Because that's how I was raised. Well, of course, the years in Shanghai we didn't celebrate any Christmas or anything. That I had to do again when my kids-- for my kids' sake. So naturally with my-- in laws, in other words, with my husband's family, I celebrate Christmas with them.

But I do keep to my-- I was-- let's face it. I was closer to it to the Jewish holidays when I was in Las Vegas because I had my Jewish friends. Now-- I tell you the truth-- every day, unless I go up there to be with them, every day, every holiday is just like another day, whether it's a Jewish holiday or a Christian holiday. It's just another day.

I feel that if I probably had something it would give me fulfillment, but how do you go about it? You know what I'm saying?

Did you observe Jewish holidays with your mother and grandmother?

Oh, yes, yes. We went to the synagogue every Friday, and I remember-- and on the high holidays.

You're talking about in Germany or in--

In Germany.

And in America?

And then in--

What about in America?

As a matter of fact, they belonged to the Jewish Community Center, and-- oh God-- they almost got kicked out. She used to take the grandchildren, and she took my daughter that's in Indiana. She's always been some kind of fanatic.

And they went to Sunday school. So she told one little girl at the Jewish Center that she's going to go to hell because she didn't believe it. [LAUGHTER] My mother was so embarrassed.

It's hard. It's very difficult to-- because I raised my kids that they could, when they grew up, to choose their own religion because I don't feel like cramming it down them. I enjoyed the Jewish [INAUDIBLE], and I like Simchas Torah. That's my favorite. Oh, I love that holiday. And so it's just been difficult.

So do any of your children feel Jewish?

Yes, my daughter is-- this is a funny thing. Like I say, she is so involved with the church, but she's also hanging on to a

lot of the Judaism. She wears the Star of David with a cross.

This is the San Diego daughter?

Yeah. And then the other one that is such a fanatic-- she cooks. She can put on a seder that you wouldn't believe. She has done it for her church.

She put on a seder for her church?

[INAUDIBLE]

As a matter of fact, she called long distance one time to ask my friend how to make chopped-- for my sister, the liver dish for--

[? Chicken ?] liver.

Chopped liver?

Yeah, and she was going to cook that because I didn't do-- I never prepared that. My grandmother took care of that. And then in Las Vegas we went-- I went a couple years with my one friend to-- in one of the hotels they had a seder. That was beautiful.

Then in Shanghai do you remember if you had--

Yeah, they had synagogue, yes.

--Jewish life? And you were a part of that?

And I was-- yeah, and I was married in the temple, yeah. Yeah, we used to go to temple whenever we could when circumstances allowed it. Sometimes it wasn't safe to go out or-- you know. But before things got bad, yes, we went every Friday.

How did you feel about being interviewed?

Fine. It brings back some memories.

Good ones, bad ones?

Both, both. But somehow the good things seemed to overshadow the bad ones.

Has that always been true for you?

No. Sometimes when I'm writing-- that's when I have to stop. Sometimes I become more depressed because I always think, what if? If things had--

What if it had been different?

Yeah.

What would my life have been like?

Yeah. Because there were a lot of mistakes I made, too. Like I say, I think, having lived-- I would say, if you ask me to put it down, ever since 1933 I was in a state of utter confusion. I think that's the best I can say it, and that has helped really--

And uncertainty, I think.

Yeah. And that has really stayed with me Now, you see my most stable life was with my husband, my last husband. But then, of course, there was always a worry about his health. I was always afraid because he was so sick with that emphysema.

But he did very well then we were in Lake County because in the summer he would play golf, and he was fine. It was just the winters when it rained so much, and he'd get pneumonia every day.

Is this your country? Do you feel American?

Oh, yeah. Like I said, when I came back from Germany I felt like kissing the ground when I got back here. I couldn't wait to get there. I can't even-- I can't even remember most of my German. I have a hard time-- I talked to somebody in German the other day, and I couldn't remember some of the words. I had to substitute.

Do you remember when you went to Shanghai? Did you still dream in German?

In Shanghai? Did I then?

When you went to Shanghai, did you still dream in German?

Well, when I went to Shanghai I only spoke German.

OK, so your dreams would be in German. When did that stop, when the dreams became, what, English, American?

I think when I came over here.

Yeah. Did it took a while?

I don't think so because I was-- no, at that time I was around so much the military, the Americans and the English after the war, so my English was getting pretty good at the time. And, well, I had learned it in-- the only problem I had when I came to-- I have this in my book. When I came to San Francisco we went to a cafeteria, and the waitress showed us a table there.

And I said, thank you, and she said, you're welcome. And then I asked somebody for something else, and I said, thank you. And they said, you're welcome. After the third "welcome" I went in the ladies room, and I looked in the mirror. And to see I wore American clothes, I couldn't see-- how could they tell I had just come here? Why did they say "you're welcome"? I never so that's when I had a few problems.

But otherwise, no, because, like I say, when I went to-- I spoke some English when I came to Shanghai, but then when I went to school I learned what they called at that time the King's English. Then that's what I spoke when I came to America.

How do you feel about the state of the world? Do you feel optimistic about it?

No.

No? Tell me what you think.

I'm glad that I'm old. I'm glad that I'm old, not going to be around.

You don't want to live through whatever it is.

No, no. I think it's--

What do you think it's going to be?

Well, I don't know unless we get-- I don't know. I don't want to go into politics, but until we get relationships going again with other countries that we have so badly alienated it's going to be bad because America is going to stand alone.

So we're isolating ourselves [INAUDIBLE]

Yes, and that's bad. Like they say, no man is an Island, and I think that's bad. We need somebody to take up diplomatic relationships again with the other countries.

How about the Holocaust? Could there be another Holocaust?

Yes.

Yes?

Well, do you see it really-- look what happened all over. It's just in other names, but I think the Jewish people, yes, there is going to be-- I read a lot. My friend in Las Vegas-- she sent me a lot of the newspaper articles about the antisemitism that's rising, especially in France. I see it's right-- in Europe it's going to be bad again, I think.

So you're not too optimistic about that?

No, unless it depends on if it can be reproached. But I'm afraid it's going to happen again.

How about in America? Have you had any experiences here of antisemitism?

Not really.

No? Never?

I can't-- I can't really-- I don't think so. No, I've never had-- I really don't think so. I can't-- maybe I didn't recognize it. Maybe some people didn't like me because of it. I don't know.

So it wasn't apparent to you.

No.

Did you talk to your children as they were growing up about your early experiences, about Shanghai?

A little bit, yes, and my mother and my grandmother. They were very involved with the girls, especially my oldest daughter. When we came over here my oldest daughter could only speak German, and then when I remarried--

How old was she?

She was six when my other girl was born, so she must have been-- well, she was about three or four when I-- let's see now. Wait a minute. I got married in '48. She was two and a half when I remarried, and then we taught her English. But she was so much with my mother and grandmother that she kept speaking-- so you could see-- when she would speak English you could tell she was thinking in German and then translating it because instead of "Where are we going now?" she would say "Where going we now?"

And so a lot of things. But then when she went to school then, of course, she was fluent. And then when she went to school she took-- in high school she took German, and of course she was good at it. And the teacher wouldn't give her--

the -- well, you should have an A, but I can't give you an A because you have it at home. And that was very unfair, I felt, so she dropped it like a hot potato. So that was it.

But then, like I say, she met this Jewish guy, and she was going to marry him. And everything was fine. And then they broke up, and then she met the other guy. And he was quite a bit older, and the family really didn't approve of it. But then she ran off and got married, nothing I could do about it.

Do you have a message that you would like to leave to society, to the world?

Yes, that they should never forget what happened, and I think that's why it's important to tell the people about it, and the kids in school should learn about it. And I'm very happy I have a grandson. He is my youngest son, and he is-- he lives with his mother. He lives in Las Vegas now, and he comes and sees me.

Every time he comes here to see his father I have some time with him. He's 14, and he says they are just learning about the Holocaust in school. And he is interested in my book, so he is really-- and I think that they should learn about it so that it can never happen again.

And that's why we're doing what we're doing.

Yeah. Well, I think that's very important--

For your stories--

Because there's so many people that try to say, it never happened. Well, they haven't been there They should talk to people that have been there.

On behalf of the Holocaust Oral History Project, I want to thank you tremendously for your willingness to do this and for the energy and the effort that you put into--

Well, I enjoyed it.

--telling us your story.

And I'm happy that there are people like you that are doing this, very happy about that.

Yeah. Well, we want to thank you very much, and we'll put some photos [INAUDIBLE]

That's why I'm trying to write my book, so that it will be-- and I just hope I can do something with it. I have submitted the first chapter to-- I've entered a contest where I sent my poem in, and then I sent the first chapter in. It's called The Friends of the Sacramento Library. It's a contest.

That's very nice.

So I won't know until November.

That's great.

OK, do you want to tell us what we're seeing?

OK. This is my-- this is my grandmother, Paula [PERSONAL NAME] and this picture was taken when I was born. I guess I was just a few weeks old. And it took place at on the balcony of our house at Karlsruhe Strasse 12 in Charlottenburg, Berlin. You know what? If I take over there, I can see what you're showing.

Just a moment.

This is my mother, Elsa Eichelmann, with me. I guess I was just a few-- looks like I was just only a couple of weeks old.

She must be in her-- probably in her 20s.

So again, this is your grandmother?

Right, my grandmother, Paula [PERSONAL NAME] And at that time her name was Bernheld. She was Paula Bernheld. And this was taken as a young girl, I imagine in her early 20s. And she lived at home until she got married.

And she grew up in Berlin?

In Berlin, yes, and her father and her two brothers had all served in the Prussian army. That was in World War I for Germany.

This is my mother, Elsa Eichelmann, and this picture was taken in Germany. And that must have been in the '30s, and she must have been in her 30s. I would say she was probably 36 or something.

That is my first day at school when I was six years old, and I was holding two big-- bags that-- it was a custom to have these bags filled with candy for the first day of school.

So that would have been what year?

1930.

And that was a public school?

Public school, my first year in normal school, public school.

[INAUDIBLE]

I can't remember where it was located, but it was very close to where I lived.

OK. That's my first school. I don't remember what year it was, but there I am, my whole class.

All girls?

All girls.

So this again would have been 1936 about?

Well, yeah, it must have been. I would say-- let's see.

I'd say earlier, maybe.

Yeah, maybe a little earlier, 1935.

OK. This was taken on one of my birthday parties, and that was in Berlin when we lived on Sybelstrasse [INAUDIBLE]. Sybel is S-Y-B-E-L. And that was also in Charlottenburg, Berlin, and this was on the balcony. And I am closest to the wall, standing up.

Next to me is what I called my cousin. He was my grandmother's cousin's son. He was the one that went with us to Shanghai. He's a much taller. He was kind of sitting down. And next to him is my girl friend, Helga, and I can't remember her last name.

And in front of Helga is Ronny, the little grandson of the landlady, and next to him is somebody-- I can't remember who that was. And next to her is Wolfgang, W-O-L-F-G-A-N-G, and he was the son of the-- the husband-- my mother's fiancée that died. And I think he went on the-- he's the one that went on that Kindertransport to England.

What year was this? What birthday?

Oh, that was when his father was still alive, so it must have been-- oh dear. What do I look there. maybe my 12th birthday. That would have been then 1936.

--on the same balcony, and I think that was probably taken at the same time. That's my grandmother and my mother.

Yeah. This is Helga. This was my closest girl friend. We went through the last years of school together before we had to leave, and then we left Germany. She took my little [INAUDIBLE], and saying goodbye to her was really hard. I think she was about 14 at the time, and I don't know what became of her.

I'm trying to see. Is that as clear as it can get? I'm trying to see where they were. This is not the entrance to the house. I don't know where that was taken. But this is my mother and her fiancée, Burt, who was also the father of that little boy on the balcony. His name is Wolfgang. He died soon thereafter, after this picture was taken.

My mother in Germany at a New Year's Eve party, and I don't know many of the people except the one lady in the very front on the right. I guess this was-- well, it was before things got bad in Germany, when everybody was still happy.

Sometime in the '30s?

Yeah, I think it was when my mother was still working. I think they were people she worked with.

This picture was taken just about the time I got married again in 1965. I was 41 years old. And I had that hair.

And where were you living then?

I was living in San Leandro. I was-- and then when I-- yeah, I was living in San Leandro, and then we got married. When we got married we lived right down the street here at the St. Moritz until we bought our house in Lake County.

And this was my husband, Bill Peebles, and that picture was taken before I met him when he was younger, probably in his 30s or so.

OK. . This was my wedding picture when I married Bill, Bill Peebles, and we went to Carson City because we didn't want to get married in Reno. And we took my mother and his mother, and we had-- the name of the chapel was called Wildwood Chapel. And we had a lady minister marry us. It was a very nice ceremony.

That's my grandmother again-- I think she was in her 80s then-- all gussied-up with her [INAUDIBLE] or did she have-- a little hat on.

And this is in California?

Yeah, in Oakland. Yeah.

This is my mother and my grandmother in San Francisco, and I think that's soon after they came to this country.

Again, on behalf of the Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project we want to thank you very much for sharing your story, and we wanted to be sure to say goodbye with Cuddles here in the picture. Thank you.

Thank you. I enjoyed this very

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