

There are things you can start.

Five more seconds.

It's like a movie.

Anytime. Anytime.

My name is Constance Bernstein, and I'm speaking with Ilse Hertz. It's March 28, 1991. We were at the Beth Shalom Temple doing an interview for the Holocaust Oral History Project. All right.

OK, Ilse, I like to begin interviews asking you about your childhood, where you were born, and who your parents were, where they came from, and just all about what your childhood was like, and where it was, and your family.

Well, my childhood was a good one. It was generally, my parents, I mean I lived with my parents, naturally. And both of my parents were born in Germany. I was born in Germany. Do you want to know the town? The town of Aschaffenburg, A-S-C-H-E-N-B-U-R-G. And it was in northern Bavaria. And my parents both were born in Germany, in a different section, in West Germany, close to France, in that section.

And I had a very good childhood. There was no interference of anything. I mean we would, in fact, would you like to know about my grandparents?

[INAUDIBLE]

As I said, my parents were born in Germany. My grandfather on my father's side belonged to the army, but it's the Kaiser [NON-ENGLISH]. That's the emperor's private army, private guard. That was my grandfather. My great grandfather also belonged to it, and one before, I mean that as far as I know. It was the elite of the armies, and you had to have a certain weight, certain height, and looks, and it was very seldom that Jewish people were taken.

Even though my maiden name was Isaak, and their name was Isaak, but they were in that elite guard. And then when Hitler came, we weren't even Germans anymore. But my childhood was very nice. My parents were in business, and I have two brothers. And we were accepted by anybody in our town, and had a very good childhood.

All right. Well, tell me about your parents. And where they came, from and how they met.

Oh, well they met in Frankfurt. My father came from a little town, Lauterecken, Grumbach, near Lauterecken. It's G-R-U-M-B-A-C-H. And my mother came from the Laufersweiler, L-A-U-F-E-R-S-W-E-I-L-E-R. And that also was in the District of Trier, both my father. But they met in Frankfurt.

Were they going to school or--

No. They were working. My mother was a designer, and my father was also. Well, they met in Frankfurt through business, I think. And then they got married. And we lived in Aschaffenburg. And I was born there, and my brothers were born there.

And what kind of business did your father have?

It was a-- well, how should I say? We had suits, and work clothes, and linens, and for everything like this, like a store. But it wasn't a department store. It was a store. We only had one employee besides my mother and father, so--

A clothing store?

Yes, It was clothing and linen, and I don't know how you would call it.

Was it in a small neighborhood? Or--

It was in the neighborhood, but in the middle of town, with the whole town wasn't very big.

How big was the town?

At that time, it was about 40,000 people.

Oh, goodness, so a nice, small community.

Uh-huh.

And so they met in Frankfurt. But they moved to this small little--

My father-- they met in Frankfurt, but my father got a job with also more or less designer in Aschaffenburg. And so they moved there.

And your father's family before was from?

From Lauterecken.

And it was on his side that your grandfather was in the army?

Yes, on his side.

Do you know how it was that your grandfather--

No, I suppose they applied. And they were chosen, because they were all very tall. My father was not. But my grandfather and great grandfather, they were all very tall and broad. They had to be 6 foot tall, 5 foot 10, maybe 5 foot 10 tall, and a certain weight. And so they served in the town of Koblenz. That's where the elite was stationed, K-O-B-L-E-N-T-Z. It was a town.

And you said at that time, Jews were not normally--

I mean, normally-- no, it doesn't matter. But there weren't many people in that--

In the elite group.

Yes. And not-- I don't think many Jews, mostly the Jews were not that tall.

Did your father ever want to be in--

No, he was in the army, he was in the regular army in World War I.

And your mother's family, tell me about them.

My mother's family also came from Laufersweiler, which is in the Rhine country, near Moselle, Moselle country. And she had sisters and brothers. Two of her brothers went to America. One was 13, and one was 14 when they came to America.

And what year was that?

Oh, I have to figure out. My--

Well, it doesn't matter. Was it way before you were born? Or--

Yes, yes. I met them the first time when they came visiting.

I see. I see. So her brothers, two of them went to the States?

Yes. And they were taken to the States by their uncle. My mother had two uncles who were in the United States. And they came to visit, and they took the two boys along. And what did your mother's father do?

He was a [NON-ENGLISH]. He traded with animals, animal trader, cows and they went to places, to little towns, and they traded the animals. The animals weren't there. But they traded them. I think you would call that animal trader.

Some kind of broker for trading animals?

No. There were no brokers. There were just, there were people coming from here and there. And they met at all these towns, little towns. In fact, I had a cousin, he passed away near Chicago. And he was an animal trader. Only here it was much bigger. Here, you have to have for every piece of animal, I think you have to have so many acres. That wasn't the same there.

And how many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

My mother were nine, and my father were eight. And well they all went, two of my mother's brothers were in business, in the wholesale business in Mannheim. Two, as I said, went to America. And none of them-- none of the kids of my mother's family, went into the business of my grandfather.

In my father's family, my father's parents or my father's father, now they were more or less in-- what do say? They had flour, grains. They had a warehouse, and all the grains. And the people from the farmers came and they bought the grains, and they had-- I mean they had a lot of-- not in the town, a lot out-of-town customers, mostly farmers.

Who came to buy the grain. That was your father's father?

That was my father's father, and yeah, my father's father. And my uncle, my father's brother, took that business over. And my aunt had a little grocery store right there. And mostly what we like the best was chocolates. [LAUGHS]

Was your father's family very religious?

No. They were religious, like everybody. They didn't have a synagogue in town. They had to go to a small town, I don't know how many kilometers away. They would go before Shabbat started, go to Temple. They had friends, or synagogue had friends where they stayed overnight, my father and some of his sons, not the girls. And they would come home after Shabbat was over. And the little town they went to was I'll get it in a minute.

Offenbach. But it's not the Offenbach am Main. It's the Offenbach on the Glan. G-L-A-N. It's a little river. And that's where my father's family went to synagogue.

And my mother's family, they were religious. And they had a temple in the same, synagogue in the same town, in Laufersweiler.

So when you say they were religious, does that mean that they were Orthodox?

No. I wouldn't know. Like, we had a kosher house. But I wouldn't consider ourselves Orthodox. Because we had the business open on Shabbat. And we had naturally the food and everything was kosher.

So what year were you born?

7, 1917. I only tell you that. Don't tell anybody else.

No. And at that time, what was your father doing?

They were in business at the time. They had a store. And at the same time, he had some people, and he made suits. They had a very small factory where he made suits, but only by measuring.

Tailor made suits.

Tailor made, yeah. He had three or four fellows who did the sewing. And we had the business besides.

And your mother helped out in the business?

Yes.

And you had two brothers? Were they younger or older?

They used to be younger, they're now older. [LAUGHS]

How did that happen?

They got older, I didn't. [LAUGHS] No, I mean they're younger than I, but very close. In school, we were one year apart.

So tell me about the school you went to.

Well, I went to a Catholic school, to the School of the English ladies. It was based in England. And I went to it. It was a private school. And I went there. And in my class, for instance, there were no Jewish kids in my class. And there were two children, two girls, who were-- two? Or one girl who was Lutheran. And the rest was all Catholic. It was a convent.

But I wasn't in the convent. I went to the school of the convent.

And there were no Jews?

Not in my class.

In your class, but in the school were there?

Yes. There were others in the school.

And who are your friends?

Anybody. [LAUGHS]

And your brothers, what kind of school did they go to?

They went first to regular school, to a public school. I went to public school my first year of school. Then I came went to the convent. My brothers went to public school. And after a while, I went to a boys' school, to the Oberrealschule, which is a boys school. We were only about 40 girls, and a little over 1,000 boys. And my brothers went to the same school after the first four years of public school.

So how old were you when you went to this boys school?

13 or 14. I think 14, because I went to the Catholic school first, the first year of high school.

How did you find the Catholic school?

Fine.

Did you ever have any indication of antisemitism?

No. I didn't. Like for instance, a nun asked in the morning who went to church today. And some kids went to church. And then she said, Ilse, if you were Catholic, would you have gone to church. And I would say, probably. Because I went to synagogue on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. You know? And whoever was in church four or five times a week, would get a little Holy card. And when you had five Holy cards, you traded it in to go to church, to I don't know whether it was Sunday mass or whatever, and pump the organ.

That was a big, big honor. And I was a strong girl.

So they gave you credit for going to synagogue?

Oh, yes. Yes.

And then you got to go to church and pump the organ?

Uh-huh, but at the same time, once a week or twice a week, the Jewish teacher came and we were the kids from all the classes together, and gave us religious school.

So this was a part of the public education to allow this?

Oh, yeah. Well the other kids, the first hour of first class, they had religion. And I sat in with them. And I learned everything about--

Catholicism.

Yeah.

So how many were in the class, the religious class?

Oh, I would say 12, 15.

And they were all from that town?

Yeah, Yeah.

And this man, was he a rabbi who came?

No. In grammar school, it was a teacher, Jewish teacher. And in high school, the same thing happened, and he was a rabbi. The rabbi came.

Now where was the shul you went to? Was that in the town?

Oh, yeah. The synagogue was in town.

And how many members?

Oh, I should have brought-- I have some pictures from this.

How many members did the synagogue have?

We had a large member. We had at least 800 people.

That is large.

We had-- it was a very, very big Jewish compared-- most of it was Catholic.

Mm hm

Yeah. And we would have, well, maybe 700. I don't know. I can check that. And the rabbi was a very well-known rabbi, Rabbi Breuer. He had two brothers and they were very Orthodox. And they wrote books. And every rabbi here I had talked to knows of Rabbi Breuer. There was one in Frankfurt, one brother, and one in our town, and one I think was not a public rabbi, but he wrote. And our rabbi's son also became a rabbi. And he's in Israel now. He was in New York for a while. I met him a few years ago.

Obviously, with even with 800 people as members, there wasn't a Jewish school?

No.

So it was just the classes.

Yeah, while we were in grammar school, we went once or twice a week to the temple. They had a school there for the kids grades, you know.

Sunday school kind of?

No. Well, it was never on Sundays, but during the week. And then when we were like he came to-- why did he come to? No, while we were in grammar school, we went to the religious school. And it was in the afternoon. And then when we were in high school, the rabbi came. That's how it was. Or maybe I forgot really. Sometimes a teacher came to.

So in terms of the how religious were at home, you observed the Sabbath, and you went to shul on Saturday morning?

Yes.

You kept kosher?

Yeah.

But you wouldn't consider yourself Orthodox?

I wouldn't. No.

The store was open on Saturdays.

Yes.

We didn't carry any books when we were kids, on Saturdays. We had school only till 12:00 or 1 o'clock, while we were in high school. We didn't carry any books. But we didn't go to school on the holidays, on high-- even on the not so high holidays. Like, yeah.

So something like?

Like the first day of Pesach, and the first day of Sukkot. We would not go to.

You wouldn't go on holidays.

Yeah.

And in high school, what did you study?

High school, it wasn't like here. We had every day whatever they had, everybody took. English, French, physics, and chemistry, whatever. Naturally, it was not as good as here. Because it wasn't as concentrated. Here, you study math and all this. And that's the main thing you study. You don't have to study the other things which you don't want. There you studied everything. Some things were given every second day.

So what did you want to be when you finished--

I was in science. I wanted to become a chemist, or even go into physics. But I couldn't do that anymore, because there were six years of high school, four years of grammar school, six years of high school, and then three years of what you would call junior college in the same school. And I had one year of that two year college, and I was thrown out. That's when you more or less would get your major or something. But I was thrown out of school.

Tell me, when was the first-- do you remember the first time? I mean because you lived your whole life in this town. And you've lived it as a German among Germans, and had little feeling of antisemitism, I can understand. So when, as a child, when was the first time you experienced antisemitism?

Well, I didn't know it was antisemitism. So we played on the street, in our street. And everybody played. And there were always some, for instance, were some kids and they would say I don't know if I-- I can translate it. Jude. You know what Jude is, Jew. [NON-ENGLISH], that's a bag. And something in the bag would break.

Well we Jewish kids, my brothers and I mostly, there were maybe one or two more who would come to play. We would make a slogan about [NON-ENGLISH], you know grist go in the box, and you know.

So you identified each other as Jews--

Oh yes, we did. That's the only thing, till later, till we were, I would say almost teenagers. Well, as I said, 1933, we didn't notice anything yet hardly.

OK, 1933 you were in school?

Yes.

Which school were you in?

In high school.

In high school. All right.

And once in a while, then afterwards, somebody would call, Jude, Jew. Not dirty Jew, but just Jew. And there were a couple of boys who would try to get our goat. And that was only once. We had some very little streets in our town, narrow, about this narrow. And those boys who would do that, we watched that when they went into one of those little streets, and we went after him, and we beat him up, my two brothers and I. My brother and I.

Oh yeah, when they called you Jew, you mean?

Yes. And they would never, never, never say that we beat them up. They couldn't do that, because that would be very

degrading for them. But they wouldn't do it anymore.

So this was when you were in high school?

Yeah

How old were you by this time?

13, 14.

What about, I mean in 1933, what about your parents? Were they at all-- do you remember they're talking about what was going on?

They weren't talking much about it. But sometimes people stopped my father, and told him, boy, are you lucky you're Jewish. You can open your mouth at least. That was a little later, about '34 or '35. And because--

What did they mean by that?

By that, they meant they complained to my father about Hitler, about the Nazis, and about everything. And they said they're glad they can talk to somebody about it. And he said, see, I can't talk to anybody else, but I can talk to you about it. And the people came to the business. I mean even so by 1934 or 1935, they urged people not to go to buy at the Jewish stores.

Well, but they still came, you're saying?

Yeah.

Your father didn't lose business during that time?

Hardly.

So this wasn't a concern.

No, not that much, till later.

All right, and it wasn't a concern in your life in terms of--

No. So at what-- was this a gradual--

Yes. And don't forget it was a small town. Everybody knew everybody practically. Everybody knew my father, and they all liked him. And while I was in school, I never had any trouble, not in school, not in high school.

With any of your friends or anything?

No.

So when did the trouble start that you remember?

Well, for instance, when I didn't graduate, I was thrown out. But my the people didn't dare. And when they did dare, for instance, some of the boys when I saw them, and they stopped me on the street. I said, forget about it. Just go on. Because you'll get into trouble. They didn't--

What do you mean stop doing what?

To talk to me.

And they weren't allowed to?

They weren't supposed to.

And when was this? What year was this?

I would say 1936.

So you're about 16 years old.

Yeah.

And you're becoming--

No, 1936 I was-- 19. No it was earlier, 1935 about when it started, when people wouldn't-- some did, but some didn't dare to be seen with Jewish people. There was a lot of propaganda against being seen.

Now do you remember what went on in your mind at that time? You were used to--

In all of our minds, my father's mind, that can't go on. Next year, it will be over. Hitler will never get ahead with those ideas. That was mostly in our mind.

All right. So in 1935, you were subtracted from 1917 when you were born.

I was 19, 18 years old, wasn't I?

Yeah.

OK, good. Thanks.

Yeah.

All right, so you were 18.

Then I didn't stay home. I got a job in--

But they kicked you out of school?

Yes.

I mean what happened there?

Well, I was through with school, I was past high school.

But you were in a three-year program. You expected to go three years.

Yes, yeah. And I couldn't. But my brothers had no high school. And they were kicked out then too.

So tell me, how did they kick you out?

They just. It wasn't a law. They just said, we can't have you anymore next term. And we knew why. Or for instance, my brothers both were in the same school, and they both played in the orchestra. And before they played for any kind of an

affair, they played the Horst-Wessel song, the German song. And my brothers just sat down, and didn't play it.

And the head of the orchestra said, well, you have to play it. And they said, no. You can throw us out, but we do not play the Horst-Wessel song. So they had to leave school too. They weren't through with high school.

So one went to continuation school, and one got a job for a short time as an apprentice someplace, and then he came to America. He came in 1930-- my father died in 1936. And both of my brothers left early 1937, one to the United States, and one to Israel, Palestine.

So at this point, they were very politically aware.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

And you also?

Yes. But I didn't let it bother me. At that time, when I was young, nothing really bothered me.

And when they said you couldn't come back to school, you knew why.

I got a job.

And you said, well, that's OK.

Well, what could I say it was not a question. It was a fact that there were no more Jewish kids in our high school.

Now, you said your father died in 1936. Was he dead at this time when you had to leave school?

Yes.

What happened to your father?

He had-- I had a job in Braunschweig. You know, I had gone and worked in Braunschweig for a company. And I had a call from my mom that my father was very sick.

This is after you left school?

Yes, yes. And he had pneumonia. And he got over the pneumonia. At that time pneumonia was pretty serious. But he got over the pneumonia, but a blood clot from his lung started to travel. And today, he wouldn't have died, because with all the medication, and it went in his brain.

So we had some doctors from Frankfurt and all over. And it couldn't be helped. He was 51.

That was young. So you went home?

Yeah, but I went back to finish my job. Then they had somebody. And then I came back to Aschaffenburg, and my brothers were gone then. No. When my father died, my brothers were still there. He died in November. In January and February, my brothers left. And then I was with my mother, but I worked in an office in Aschaffenburg.

So you quit your job.

In Braunschweig, yes. And I came home.

And came home.

Yeah.

Well, then tell me what happened at that point in terms of--

You mean in my hometown?

Yes, to you.

To me? I mean it was still life was still going on fairly well. And I worked for a company who was the owners were Jewish. And, in fact, they had a daughter who was my girlfriend. And both of them, there were two owners, and both of them had a daughter who were friends of mine. And then I-- oh yeah, oh, I got engaged. I got engaged to a fellow in Brazil.

I knew him when I was a child. And he was related, but he was not related. He was my mother had an aunt who married a widower, and he was the grandson. And I was-- the other aunt, whatever, we met at family affairs, and at bar mitzvahs, and stuff like this. And he went to Brazil.

He went to Brazil without nobody knowing it. He was a biker, those six-day bike riders as a sport. And he was in France on that. And then he decided, he doesn't go back to Germany. And he went to--

When was this? Was it because of what was going on?

Yes, yes.

And well, it was, I don't know which year it was. And he was in Brazil. And he happened to meet somebody on the street who looked familiar to him. It was somebody from his town, where he came from, who left during World War I, not to have to go in the army. And he saw him. And he got a job with him right away.

And then after a while, I don't a year, two years, three years, I don't know when. He took over one of the factories which that man, he had a few, he married a Spanish woman and he-- I met him. We met in another town. In fact, we met in Wiesbaden, because he could not visit my fiancée's parents. They lived across the street from where his folks lived, because of the fact that he had left Germany. And he didn't want to get in touch with anybody Jewish. But we met in Wiesbaden, and had a nice talk.

And he urged me to come soon. And I never did. My idea was my brothers, one was in Palestine. One was in the United States. I knew my mother was going to go to the United States, because she had three brothers and two sisters here. And I said, if I go to Brazil, at that time the world was much bigger than it is now, naturally. And I didn't-- I really hesitated to go. And when I met my husband, then we got engaged, I was engaged to two Ottos at the same time.

[LAUGHS]

Well when did your mother decide she was going to go?

You see, when we were young, and my brothers were a little bit younger than me, and all their friends came to me to fill out an application for a quota number to come to the United States. And I said to my mother one day, why don't I fill out a quota number too? You know? Well, they-- these kids, all got a quota number of 5,000 or 6,000. And my mother and I had 13,000.

But that's nothing. My husband had 22,000 or so, which we found out later. So we decided maybe we can go to the United States. I mean there was no question that we could get an affidavit. Because my mother had so many relatives. And so anyway, after I met my husband, I met him actually my aunt and my mother came. And they said, you ought to learn something. You haven't got an idea about cooking, or having a household, or something. You ought to learn something.

I said, I can do all this. Well anyway, there was a Jewish paper. And there were people could not get any help in the house anymore, Jewish people, who were not Jewish. And somebody asked for help, because the lady was sick. And they needed somebody. So I wrote, oh, and I wrote that it was in Goch, G-O-C-H.

And my mother said, that's OK if you go there, because 10 minutes away was a town Kleve, which my mother had cousins which were not cousins, from the same aunt where my fiance, my first fiance was there. And she said, if you don't like it, you can always go there.

Well I went there, and with a return ticket. And I met my husband. He was Mrs. Hertz's son, who I was supposed to help. And she was well again by that time. So that's how I met my husband. And then came-- I got there October 26. I remember I got there. In 1939. 1939, yes.

And then on the 10th of November was the Holocaust night, the Crystal Night. And they picked up Otto, and they put him in jail there.

This is your fiance?

Yeah, well we weren't fiance at that time yet. Yeah. And I was still engaged to the other Otto. And they put him in jail. The whole bunch of people, there were maybe 10 men from Goch who were in jail. And I was with my mother-in-law. And I helped her. And we were burglarized on the night of the 10th of November.

When the girls came from the store, they had a store to get their money, we realized that the safe had been broken in, and there was no money, so I mean, we couldn't pay them right away till we got to the bank. And the police came, and they thought it was me who did that. Because I was new. So somebody in the neighborhood came and said that they saw some people in their neighborhood digging and putting stuff down, and all this. And they found them, the ones who burglarized.

And the money?

No money. They didn't find. I mean the money was gone. It was one mile from the Dutch border. And these people, they went across the Dutch border. That's what my husband wanted to do first, and the other Jewish people. And they were warned. They said, they're waiting on the border for the people to come over.

So anyway, they were in jail. And then one day they came to my husband in jail. I mean, he wasn't my husband. And said that his mother signed already to give, to sell the business, to one of the girls who worked there who was engaged to the biggest Nazi of that town. And they wanted to buy it. And so Otto said, well, if my mother signed, I sign too.

And then they talked about the down payment, and the down payment was supposed to be fixing the windows, which because it was a Crystal Night everything was fixing the windows. And my mother-in-law was supposed to get 100 marks a month. There was no money involved. It was just fixing up the windows, and all everything what was damaged, plus my mother-in-law was supposed to get \$100 a month. It was outrageous.

Well, my mother-in-law wasn't young anymore. She was at that time late 70s, I think. And I went to the next town. I told her that I'd go there because I don't believe that this is the right thing to do, that I go to the Chamber of Commerce.

So I went there, and I talked to that head of the Chamber of Commerce. And I explained to him. And I said there's no Jewish money supposed to be in business anymore.

Well, if Mrs. Hertz gets \$100 a month, she's still in business. Besides, that's Jewish money. Don't you think that they'll cut that out in two or three months, because of the Jewish money, Jewish owned money? And he thought for a while. And he said, you know, you're right. If it comes to my attention when they wanted to buy that, I will not let it go through. But it might not come to me. It might go directly to Krefeld where there was a bigger Chamber of Commerce.

If you want to do something, but please don't mention it to anybody, you can go to Krefeld. And you can go to a room--

I forgot, there is a Mr. so-and-so. And it says no admission on the door. You just walk in, he said, and explain to mister what you explain to me. He's a very decent man, and he probably will not allow it.

I said, OK, I'll do that. I said, by the way, is there-- at that time you didn't know where the-- what is it? The FBI in Germany? What is it called? I forget things. You know, where the head of the Nazis.

Gestapo?

Gestapo, if there is a Gestapo office here in this town. And he said, will you promise me not to tell anybody. I said, yes. He said, OK. It's in the castle. And you just go in if you want to get some information.

So I went there. And there were two guys. And they said, what do you want? And I said to them, well, I'd like to get some information how you can get somebody out of Dachau. In the meantime, they were all sent to Dachau, you know?

No, I didn't hear. Your future husband was sent, and those 10 men were sent to Dachau?

That's the only ones who were not. The younger ones. The ones who were over 70, I don't think they were-- they were let go after they were in jail in Kleve.

But your husband was sent to Dachau?

Yeah. Yes, and several others too. And I said to the guys there, I said, I'd like to get some information how you can get somebody out of Dachau. And they were so surprised. They said, where are you from? Every neighborhood in Germany has a different dialect. Are you from Frankfurt? I said, no, but close by.

Oh, one private word broke this, yes, a little. And I said, no. I'm not from there. And he said, who is in Dachau? I said, I work for a lady. And she's old and sick, and her son, we just heard that her son was in Dachau. And there is a business to be resolved and everything. And she can't do it without her son.

Oh, well what's his name? I gave him the name. And I informed him when did he get there. And I said, I don't know exactly when, but he was in Kleve and then he came to Dachau.

Oh, well, you know what you do, they said, go. Do you know Herr Monz? He was the head of the police in Goch. I said, yes. I happen to know him. I had met him because of the burglary thing. Go to him. And give him 20 or 30 marks, for an eventual trip home from Dachau. They told me.

So I went home. And I told Mrs. Hertz at the time that we have to go to the police office. And it was very close by. And we went there. And we talked to Mr. Monz and gave him the money. Oh, when I came home, I said to my mother-in-law, I think I Otto is going to come home from Dachau in two days.

She said, how can you say something like this? Nobody has come home from that. He did. He was home in two days.

You went to the police station and gave Mr. Monz?

Uh-huh, and he gave it back to us, because in the meantime, the Jewish in Munich, you know Dachau was near Munich. Anybody who was released, got the money. He sent it back afterwards to go home.

Who sent it back?

We sent the money back to the Jewish help in Munich. They gave the money to my husband to come back. They didn't have any money. They had nothing.

I see. And so then you sent the money to them?

Yeah, yeah.

Because Monz gave you the--

Gave us some money back too.

This is crazy.

Oh, I had more--

He made it a point to see that you got your money back.

Yes. It happened several times. The Germans, no matter how bad or no matter it was, but there's one thing. They are so correct in the things. That's how we know. They kept track of all the people who died and everything, only because of their bureaucracy or so.

Anyway, he came home then. He looked awful. He had no hair.

Why? What happened to his hair?

Oh, they shaved-- they shaved the heads. And--

How long had he been there?

Only 3 and 1/2 weeks, 3 weeks, 3 and 1/2, something like that. And he had a bad cold. But he was OK.

And who was it that you had gone to see? Was it the Gestapo?

Yes, I was at the Gestapo.

And I went to Krefeld to the Chamber of Commerce, and the deal did not go through. I talked to that man. It didn't go through.

So Mrs. Hertz didn't have to sell her business.

Yes, they did anyway. They sold the business, but under different--

Conditions.

Conditions. And she was supposed to get the money. Naturally, she didn't get the money. Like my parents, my mother sold the house. And the man who bought it was our neighbor, paid for it. But my mother didn't get any money.

Why not? What happened to the money?

The government took the money.

And what about your father's business? Was that sold too?

No. That was just-- we sold out.

To whom?

To customers who came. We had to sell.

Oh, you just sold all the merchandise?

Yeah.

When was that?

That was early 1937, I think it was still in 1936.

After your father died, you sold out?

Yeah.

So all right, so we are sometime in January then of 1939?

No. No we're still in 1939, when my husband, or my future husband at the time came back.

In December or something?

Yes.

And your mother is?

My mother was still in Aschaffenburg.

By herself?

Mm-hmm.

And how many miles away were you in Krefeld?

Well, the miles don't mean that much.

How long did it take?

Compared to here, you can compare it to New York to San Francisco, naturally not that far. But one was in northern Bavaria, and one was at the Dutch border. It was a mile from the Dutch border. How many kilometers could that be?

Well, that's not why -- It was pretty far away in terms of being able to get in touch. OK, so what did you decide to do at that point?

Well, when Otto came back, after a while, we got engaged. And then we got married in Goch. Naturally my mother came. There was no rabbi anymore in Krefeld. There was a Jewish teacher who married us. We had no minyan. We had only two? Were there one or two other men? Everything was women. And we got married, because after my husband came back, he had to go to the police every second day. And they told him, you better get out, or we'll have to take you back to Dachau.

So we got married, and then he left. He left the day before Ash Wednesday, which is this time of the year about.

In the spring of--

In March.

And where did he go?

To Cuba.

How did he get to Cuba? How did he get--

My-- his brother and wife were in Cuba, because they had to leave, because my brother-in-law was also in a different camp. And it was very early yet. When people didn't get to go to camp, he had to go to camp. He was sent to camp because supposedly he had a non-Jewish girlfriend. Many years before, I mean around 1933 or so, he was married by that time, and both of them went to Havana, to Cuba.

Was it difficult for them to get out?

Not at that time. You could get your own permit to go to Cuba at the time with money. So my husband was going to Cuba too. And he sent me-- oh--

Was it difficult for your husband to get the money to go?

No. No. At that time he didn't need the money, because he applied to the Cuban consulate, for I mean they gave a paper, and then he went to the Cuban Consul in Hamburg, and got his visa. When he came to Cuba, they wouldn't let him in, because 99% or 98% of all the people got a permit from Cuba, with money. You could buy a permit in Cuba for \$500 or so, and go to Cuba. He didn't need the money. He had a real legitimate entry visa to go to Havana, to Cuba.

When he came there they didn't like the real. They first wanted to send him back, and he got a lawyer, the Jewish help got him a lawyer, and he got in. But then instead of sending me the papers to go to the Cuban consulate, he sent me a permit. And he had to pay for it.

In the meantime, my sister-in-law and brother-in-law came to the United States directly to San Francisco. So when he had so much trouble, he thought, well, he'll get me a permit. And the President or whatever, all the permits were declared void.

By whom?

By the government, the Cuban government.

By the Cuban government.

I even sent him a telegram at the time, don't get a permit. Because there were too many people who had permits. Every second a person who wanted to get out of Germany got a permit.

From Cuba?

Mm-hmm. So anyway, I got the permit. And with a permit, maybe I skipped something. Anyway, I had to get a passage to Cuba. It was-- they even put an extra ship in, the St. Louis. You've heard of St. Louis. But the regular ships were the Orinoco, and I forgot the name of the other one, which went every two weeks. So I applied to get a passage and it was all sold out for a long time.

And that's why they put in the St. Louis who took instead of 300 or 400 people, took 900 people on one trip. And I don't know if you happen to know what happened to the St. Louis. They wouldn't let him in, in Cuba.

Were you on it?

No, no. I almost was on it. I was in Hamburg. And they said there were no passages for months. And I come to the Hamburg America Line. I walked along the hall. And there was a little man and he said, how are you? I mean in German, naturally, with broken German. How come you're still here?

And I said, well, I'm still here. How's your husband? Then I realized it was a vice counsel from the Cuban-- Embassy?

Embassy. And I had met him when my husband got his visa. And he said I thought you were gone a long time. And I said, no. I can't get passage. And I was here at the Cuban, where they had four Cuban ships, and they said there is no passage available, and I was on a waiting list. And they said we could call you and you could come. You didn't have to come to Hamburg. I just went to Hamburg to find out.

Oh, he said. Just a minute. So he went to that man who was in charge of the Cuban area, you know Hamburg Cuba. And he talked to him, Spanish only. And that man talked back in Spanish. And they argued for a few minutes. I even remember it was Herr Otto, you know. I don't forget. Because his last name was like my husband's first name.

And within five minutes, I had a passage. And I had the passage of one of the reserved cabins which was reserved for Cubans, or people who had to go there. So I got the first class passage to go to Cuba.

And naturally, I called my mother, and she would send my stuff to Belgium, would go with most of my staff to Belgium. And when we were in Belgium, I got my big overseas suitcase in my cabin. And we didn't go on. We had to wait. And they said because there was a fire on ship. There was. There was a little fire.

And we went into Antwerp in the evening, a few people. And there was the Patriot, that's another German ship waiting there to go to Hamburg. And when we came back, one of the fellows from Berlin called his father. And his father said, don't go back on the ship. Stay in Belgium. Don't go back on the ship. He didn't know. Everybody said it's crazy. Then when we came to the ship, the crew of the Patriot said, why do you go on that ship? Why don't you come on our ship, to the whole group? We go to the same place you go. It's strange talking like this.

And the next morning I had a note which said, come off the ship. Bring whatever, if you have a passport, bring it. I expect you on gate so-and-so.

Signed who? Who signed it?

A fellow whom I knew from Frankfurt, who was a friend, but not real. And I don't know. He was born in Poland. And he played soccer in Frankfurt. And I knew him. I knew all the people from the team.

How did he know you were on the--

How? The night before, when we were in Antwerp, he was together with some other people from the ship. And they got to talk. And they mentioned my name. And that I was going too, because he was from Frankfurt, and I was not too far from Frankfurt. He said, I know that girl. I didn't know it, but he was a smuggler in the meantime. He smuggled people. He lived in Belgium. And he smuggled people from Germany, from all over, where they had to go.

And he didn't tell me that. But later, those people told me. And it was about 12:15, and at 1 o'clock the ship was supposed to leave, and I didn't go. And I found out later, he wanted me to come and get off the ship. I happened to have my passport. I was the only one, because I was in that cabin where they didn't take the passports away. They took the passports away from all the passengers. I happened to have mine.

And so I didn't go.

So he sent you this note to get off that boat? And that's what you did.

No, I didn't.

You did go.

I didn't. I didn't.

Did you go on the ship?

Yeah, I was on the ship, the evening before we were on the ship. And then the next--

Did you stay of the ship?

Yeah.

So you didn't leave the ship--

No.

--as he suggested you do?

No. In the afternoon, I was on deck. There was an old guy. He must have been 50, which was old for me. And he shook his head and he said we're going the wrong direction. You didn't see anything but water. And I said, what do you mean the wrong direction?

He said over there is Holland.

I said, how far? He said maybe five kilometers over the water. You couldn't see that clear. I was tempted to jump ship. Because then I knew. To swim to Holland. I didn't. And in the evening at the dinner, before we had dinner, the captain said he has to make an announcement. And I didn't wait for the announcement. I went up to the tower to send a telegram to Cuba to my husband. I said, what should I do? We are on the way back from Germany.

Well, he knew it in Cuba. Everybody knew it. Everybody knew what? That the ship was going back to Hamburg, except the people on the ship.

How did everybody else know it?

Well, this one guy's father knew it in Berlin from I don't know. They knew the ship was going to Cuba, wouldn't let it-- my husband knew that Cuba wouldn't let the ship land. So we went back to Hamburg.

And this man who had tried to-- well, tell me what went on in your mind? What made you try--

It was very--

--to stay on the ship?

I didn't know him that well. And I thought if I get off the ship, I don't know anybody in Belgium except him. And I felt funny. Well, on the ship at least in the meantime, I knew all the people on the ship. So we got off in--

And he never told you why to get off?

No, he couldn't. He didn't. Nobody was supposed to know that he was a smuggler.

And did anybody else leave the ship?

No. The people he talked to before--

That evening, they left.

No, they stayed. And when we came back to Hamburg, we called him. We wanted to call him, to pick us up. Because he told these people any time he can have them smuggled out. I mean not them, but people they know. So, but he wasn't home. Maybe it was good. Otherwise, we would have gone to Belgium.

But the Hamburg America Line had a deal with the Gestapo that nothing was going to happen to anybody on that ship when we came back. What happened later, they couldn't do. Like I was lucky. I still had my mother. And I went back to my hometown. I stayed overnight in Hamburg first. And I don't know what happened to the other people, because when they went back to their hometowns, they were--

See, for instance, when in the Kristallnacht, I was in Goch. I didn't call my mother. I called my girlfriend across the street, who was not Jewish. And I asked her how everything was. And she said your mother is OK. And there are lots of people in your house, in your mother's house. But I think everything is OK, because my aunt and uncle from Frankfurt came to my mother, because there was no man in the house. So they wouldn't search all the houses, except where there were men.

So I was OK, because I could go back to my mother. But then I had to wait till my husband came to the United States. Because Cuba was closed. And I had all my papers, my affidavits, my papers to come to the United States. And I couldn't go to Cuba to get them. So I had to wait till my husband came.

But in the meantime, I tried to get his name on my waiting number. And they did it. I mean, the consul, the American Consul in Stuttgart changed his waiting number to my waiting number, so he didn't have to wait so long. People said, you can't do it. You can only do it for a wife on the husband's name. And it's not usually done. It's up to the consul, to the American Consul to do it. And he did it. I mean, we were lucky.

So he got his name--

Name earlier and he was in Cuba.

And he went to the United States from Cuba.

From Cuba, and then I had to wait, and I went directly to the United States with a little trouble too, because he had to send me a form for me to come to the United States, because I had no papers anymore. A preference quota form. And I never got it. At that time, there were some planes taken down over Bermuda by the British. And that was on that flight probably.

So we only corresponded by telegram. I told him to get the Washington-- to get telegram this particular paper. You can get it only twice, directly to the American consulate in Stuttgart. Well when my husband lived with my aunt. And one of my uncles was a lawyer. And one of my uncles was-- and they said they have never heard anything like it, that you can just tell Washington, which the-- I forgot the Department of something, that they would do it.

Well, he wrote a letter. And he told him the situation. And he said, if they send a telegram directly to Stuttgart to the American Consulate, he'll pay for the cost, and they did it. And they send him a bill for \$3 and something. And I had a telegram from the American Consulate in Stuttgart to come immediately. And I got my visa, and a preference quota.

Now when was this? What month and what year?

That was in 1940. I was still in Germany in 1940.

So you had left? You had started to leave from Hamburg when?

In 1939.

What month? It was in May I think. May, yeah. May or June. So in the meantime, my mother-in-law was still in Germany. But she moved to Krefeld to my sister-in-law's parents, and paid there for them. And she was sent to

Theresienstadt.

When was that?

Well, that was later in 1940. I was gone already.

Was she trying to get out?

Well, she was an old lady. But my husband wanted my brother-in-law and him to send papers. And it was too late. So, she was in Theresienstadt, but she died of a regular death. I mean, she died. We know that because we put an ad in the Jewish paper, a death--

[INAUDIBLE]

Yes. And that she was killed in Theresienstadt. And we had a letter from a lady who also was in Theresienstadt, telling us that she knew her, and she died of a natural death. She was there.

What about your mother?

My mother, as I said, our waiting numbers were 13,000 something. And one day, my mother got a note from the American Consulate to inform her, her guarantors, the people in America, to send her the papers.

And when it this? This is while you're still in Germany?

Yes, in 1940. The affidavit giver to get the papers to send to the consulate, because her number was about-- I had sent an affidavit for my mother to Stuttgart a half a year back, or whatever. And I got a receipt. And the envelope said file number 19,336, something like that. I said then, I went. And it was only a couple of days before I wanted to leave. I went to Stuttgart.

And it was just lunchtime. And everybody was leaving. And there was a young fellow. And I asked him if he could just hear me out for one minute. He said, I have a lunch date, but I'll listen to you. I said on the train when I looked through the papers, I saw file number 19,336. Her waiting number is 13,936. And I said, I am sure, and I showed him the letter from the consulate that she was supposed to send in. And I said, and I cannot wait till after lunch, because there you couldn't be out after 8 o'clock anymore. There was a curfew. And I told him, I am sure it's filed wrong.

But he said, you know what? He took the papers. He said, I will take care of it. It was an American young fellow at the consulate, an employee of the-- and I went home. In fact, I couldn't even make it home because before 8 o'clock. So I went to Mannheim, where I had an aunt and an uncle. And my mother was there visiting. And in the train, there were quite a few soldiers.

And there was one big shot from the Nazi, you know, and got to talk to them. And I couldn't tell him I was Jewish, because it was after 8 o'clock. And he said, where are you going? I said, to Mannheim. He said, oh, I'm going. I'm from Mannheim. Wherever you go-- I said I go to my aunt and uncle visiting. And he said, I have my chauffeur waiting, when we come back. I gladly give you a ride.

Oh, I said, that's very nice of you. And I didn't know what to do. I did like I was going with him to be driven. And we got out of the train, and I said, you have to excuse me. I have to go to the Ladies' room. I knew that station so well. I had another aunt and uncle who used to live across the street from the station. And I said, you have to excuse me. Oh, he said, sure.

So I went into the station again. And I knew my way all the way around and came out someplace else. And went to my aunt and uncle. But I couldn't tell him that I was Jewish. So those are all little things.

So, did the paper get filed?

Yes, yes. I went. I left April 1940. And when I came to America, my mother had just called us, or had written a letter, that she got the note, The date went to come to the American Consulate. And she came with the last ship which had gone. In the meantime, Italy went in the war. It was with the Axis. And she left from Genoa, where I had left too. They went through Gibraltar, and that was it. Italy was in the war. And no American ship went to Italy or to Europe anymore. She came the later part of May.

The last ship to go out.

Yeah.

So she lived with us in Chicago. We lived in Chicago, and our children were born in Chicago. And then when we came to San Francisco, she came with us too. So you lost your mother-in-law.

Yes, yes.

During the war, but everyone else, the rest of your family?

Oh, no. I had my mother's sisters. She had a sister and a brother-in-law. They were in Frankfurt, and they didn't get out. And an uncle of mine, or my cousin, also that's another thing. A day before-- one day or two days before I came to America, I had a cousin who was at hakhshara, some place in Germany. And one day, he and a couple of other boys were taken into custody. Supposedly, they said something against Hitler. But it wasn't.

They were up on a hill, and you know how the echo goes in. And people said they hollered something against Hitler. So he was taken. He was too young. He was taken to jail. And the jail was in Wittlich. It's also in Rhine country. And my uncle said, I would like you to go to the jail to tell Kurt that everything is ready. His papers are ready. Everything is ready for him to go to America.

And his day to be released was about a week or two later. So I went to Wittlich and he said, go to the Jewish head of the congregation. It was also a small town. And he might go with you, the man. So I came to Wittlich went to him, and he said certainly he's going with me to jail.

In the meantime, his wife said, well, come back here, and have a cup of coffee or something with us. I mean, it's no minor detail. But it happened to be funny. So we went to jail. I talked to my cousin, and I told him that everything is ready for him to leave. He was about a year or a year and a half younger than I.

And afterwards, we went to those people's houses. What was her name? [? Irman, ?] their name happened to be [? Irman. ?] And we were having a cup of coffee. And Mrs. [? Irman ?] said to me, you would be the right girl for my son. We have two sons in America. One is married, and you would be just perfect for-- I said, well, I'm sorry. I'm married.

So that was it, nothing, only later it came back again. So my cousin didn't come home, and didn't come home. And my uncle said in Frankfurt, he knew where the Gestapo was. He went to the Gestapo. And they told him that the Gestapo took him from-- or he called up, and they told him that he's now in charge of the Gestapo. And he went to the Gestapo, and asked him. And they said, oh, he'll be home soon. We had to take him into custody, and he was in one of the camps. I forgot which came he was.

So I think it was the day before I left, I went to Kassel, that's K-A-S-S-E-L. It was a very bad town, the Gestapo town. And I went in, and I told him that I'm a cousin of Kurt Strauss, and I wanted to know if they can give me an idea when he'll come home. The guy says to me, he'll come home very soon, when the war will be over. You know, it was in the war.

You know, I was so nervous, I started to laugh. He said, why do you laugh? And I said, because I'm glad when the war is over. He says, I'll take it. I don't think that's why you laughed. But forget about it. And he let me go. And I went the next day, I went to Italy to come here.

He was home a couple of weeks later. My uncle got the ashes, his ashes.

What do you mean he was home a couple of weeks later?

His ashes came home. He never came home. A couple of weeks later, or 10 days later, my uncle got my cousin's ashes.

So what I understand you're saying about your cousin, that the--

My uncle got the ashes.

They sent the ashes back?

Yeah, I don't know. As I said, I don't know if it was his ashes, or just--

But the Gestapo, they sent ashes back to--

Yes. Yes. They did.

-- to your uncle. Was there a letter with that?

That I don't know. He was a very-- my cousin, the reason why he didn't live, was he was a very fine mechanic. And I guess they couldn't have him live to-- he had picked up things in Germany. And well, he never made it.

Why do you think his being a mechanic would--

Because if it was somebody else, they would have let him in the camp or whatever. I don't even think he was in a camp.

What do you think happened?

He was probably with the Gestapo, and they wanted to see if he can be of any help to them. Because I know in my town were some people, and they were not sent to the camp. They were used for technicians and stuff like this.

Used for?

To try to help to get the knowledge, their knowledge, into the German-- to use their knowledge.

So you think that your cousin, they tried to--

Whatever happened--

-- have your cousin teach them.

Right, whatever happened, he wasn't alive anymore. Maybe he refused.

He didn't cooperate?

Maybe he didn't cooperate or something. So, anyway, I went then. Oh, this is important, I think. When I came back from the trip from Cuba. They took our passports away.

So when you came back from the aborted trip to Cuba?

Yes.

From Hamburg?

Yes. Yes. They took our passports away. And they told us that the passports can be had, if needed, in the local offices. So I went to our passport office in our town, and there were two men. And they said, yeah, we have your passport. If you need it, you can get it, or if you want to know anything. Very short, very-- so maybe a week later, so I went there. And found out if anything had to be done, I wanted to find out. There was only one man in there.

And the one man said, how's your mother? How are your brothers? And I hope you get to go soon. I told you. Everybody practically knew every-- not everybody. But they knew my parents. Very, very nice. If I can be any help, come here. And I'll help you. I had to go again after two or three weeks for something. The other guy was here, same friendly. How's your mother? How are your brothers doing? They knew that everybody-- it was in the papers. And same thing.

They knew what?

That my brothers had left Germany. And if I can be of any help, don't worry. I'm always here to help. When they were together, they were very short. They wouldn't show any familiarity. So, then I went there and told him that I need my passport pretty soon. I want to go. And then-- and I gave them a date. In the meantime, my girlfriend lived with us, because she was going to go to South America, and she had a non-Jewish maid who already was at her parents' and she lived with us too. And she did all the shopping. It was not too easy to go shopping when you were Jewish. Naturally.

No one would serve you?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They would serve us. But it was funny sometimes, because everything was short. You couldn't get any meat or anything without the cards. You had the coupons. But chicken, you could get without. But to stand in line, by that time everybody knew who was Jewish and who was not Jewish. And she did the shopping for us, was very great help.

And my girlfriend was going to South America to Cochabamba. She was going to Cochabamba. And she lived with us. And then when I left, I had to buy an extra ticket for my suitcases and stuff to go along. And everybody told me before I go to Italy, I have to stop at the Italian Consulate in Munich, to get my transit visa. And that's where something nice comes in.

I went. At that time you couldn't take a taxi when you could walk. I went to the Italian Consulate, and when I came out-- oh, and everybody told me, you have to stay overnight because you'll get your visa the next day. And the consulate, the Italian Consulate told me that I can pick up the visa at 5 o'clock that evening. And I got out of the Italian Consulate, and there was a taxi. And automatically, I hailed him. And he stopped, and he took me. And he said, you're going to Italy. I said, yes.

You stay in Italy? I said, no I want to go to the United States. He said, when are you going? And I said, tomorrow. He said, no. You go today. I said, well, I can't because I cannot get my visa till 5 o'clock, and the last train to Italy goes at 6:00, so I couldn't possibly make it. He said you'll make it. I let you out someplace, and I meet you there. He said, you know I really couldn't take you. But it was raining so hard, and I had no ride. I meet you, take you to the Italian Consulate, and take you back to the train.

Sure enough, I went there.

This is a cab driver you'd never met?

I never saw him before. That's what I want to say, is that some people were very nice. And he took me, he waited for me. I came out, he took me to the train station. I said, why do you want me to go today? He said, maybe tomorrow you can't go anymore. There's absolutely nothing in the paper. He said, and last night you know Hitler and Mussolini met at the Brenner Pass. And there's nothing in the paper. Maybe tomorrow the Brenner Pass is closed. You had to go over the Brenner Pass by train. And I want you to go today.

I made the train, and I went that day. The next day it was still open, but the idea of him pressing me to go that day, because maybe the next day it was closed. So I was in Italy for about three days. And because a guy where I got my passport said, go, don't stay any longer. Just go. So I sent back the extra ticket to my mother, because my girlfriend was going two or three days later to South America, and she also went from Genoa, from Italy. And she could use that extra ticket for her baggage.

But I mean I meant to say that some people were decent. If they all would have been that bad, not 6 million Jews would have been killed, but twice as much, twice as many.

Oh, and then I was in the train, and the German border patrol came, men. And he said, do you have any money? You could take 10 marks with you, no more than 10 marks. You have any money? Anything to pay custom? I said, no. Money, yes. He said, how much money do you have? And I said something like 35 marks or so. He said, you cannot take that along. You can only take 10 marks along.

I said, I know. He said, do you want me to give it to the [NON-ENGLISH]? That was a charity for the Nazis. So I said, no. What do you want to do with the money? I said I want to send it back to my mother, thinking she'll never get it. He said, all right. Give me had her address and everything. My mother got the money. That's how they are.

Amazing.

And then I had another which has really not too much to do, then the Italian border patrol came. Do you have anything to pay duty on? I said, for instance? He said for instance, cigarettes? And oh, I said I have cigarettes. I have plenty of cigarettes. But I don't have to pay duty for that. He said, why not? I said, I'm a heavy smoker. All I have is 10 marks. And I need the cigarettes. I'm not going to sell them. I use them for myself to smoke. I really was a heavy smoker.

He said that I have to go and find out. And he came back after about five minutes with two cups of coffee and a package of Italian cigarettes. And he said, with my compliments.

[INAUDIBLE]

So I was in Italy, in Genoa for about three days. And then I had a letter in Genoa. There was a letter waiting for me from my brother from the United States, telling me that my other brother who was in Palestine had volunteered, and was with the British Royal Air Force.

Now if the Germans would have known that, neither my mother I would have come out. But I learned it in Italy from my brother from the United States. They were in correspondence, my two brothers. And so he was already with the British Royal Air Force in 1940.

What's so amazing about your-- go ahead.

No, go ahead. And he was in the British Royal Air Force. My other brother was in the United States with the American Air Force. And they didn't know anything from each other. They hadn't seen each other since 1937, since January 1937. And didn't know where one or the other was.

And my brother in the American Air Force was in North Africa, in it starts with a T. It doesn't matter. And he walked with a British officer towards the end, and they introduced each other. And as I said, my maiden name--

OK.

I think that's where we were.

The tape's rolling.

OK, so I was talking that my brother had volunteered with the British Royal Air Force.

And your brothers didn't know where they were. Each was--

No, no, and the other one was not in the American Air Force till a year later. And one of my brothers in the American Air Force, he was with the paratroopers. And he was on different assignments. And he was in Tangier. He came down in Tangier, and there was a British officer. And they walked together and introduced each other. And my brother's name was Norbert Isaak. And the British officer said, that's funny. Our engine mechanic, my plane is Helmut Isaak.

He said, there won't be two Helmut Isaaks in the British Royal Air Force with a first German name and the second Jewish name. And it was. And they found out that there were only about 35 kilometers based on the base, and they both got a leave to meet. And they never met. Because Norbert was called to go to England again. They never met till after the war.

But your mother and your brothers survived?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. My one brother in the British Royal Air Force was the only-- well the plane capsized in the Mediterranean. And the pilot said, go away from the plane and swim, start swimming, and try to swim 2 by 2. And Helmut happened to swim with the pilot. And they all do the crawl. And Helmut swam the breaststroke. And he said, if you want to survive, it was all dark. Once in a while a blinking light, do the breaststroke. And they did, and in the morning when the fog comes over the water, that happened about 6:00 7 o'clock in the evening. And when the fog came over, they didn't know the direction anymore.

And so anyway, the British guy got very weak, and couldn't make it. So Helmut said just--

Tread water?

Yeah. And I try to make shore. And he did make shore to a few yards or something like this. And he couldn't go on, because it was too strong. And he hollered. He saw some fishermen. And he hollered, [NON-ENGLISH], or help. And they got him out, and then they informed the Marine patrol, and they found the other guy and he was still alive. But he died about a half an hour later from over-exhaustion. And so he was the only survivor.

I was going to say what's amazing about your story is how crazy everything was, and yet in that craziness mail was getting delivered, and the business aspects of things were going on, and you could talk to people, and the records were being kept. And it's just very strange.

There's another strange thing what happened. After the Rommel affair was over, my brother wrote me a letter in Chicago. And said, please send me Lotte's ] address. You never know when and where you're going to be. Now Lotte's address was a cousin. She wasn't a real cousin. She was a niece of my aunt. And I was a niece of my uncle. But we were very friendly. She was from France.

And so I wrote him a letter and wrote Lotte's address who had married into Casablanca. Her husband was from Casablanca. And my aunt was still in Chicago. Anyway, I got the address. And I wrote him a letter. And I wrote a letter to my other brother, too, who was in Fort Wayne at the time. Fort Wayne or Fort Benning at the time. And I wrote that letter. I wrote the two letters, and I sent them out. I made a mistake I sent Helmut's letter in Norbert's envelope, and Norbert's letter in Helmut's envelope.

And guess what. Norbert was transferred overseas the same day, still having the unopened letter in his pocket. And he arrived in Casablanca with Lotte's address, which was supposed to go to my other brother.

And we didn't know. There was a number. And we got a little letter from Norbert, and everything was blacked out. But my aunt had a letter from Lotte. Guess who is here? Norbert is here. He wasn't assigned to something yet. And he's having dinner with us, and all this in Casablanca. It's really sometimes--

Very strange.

Yeah.

Yes, so it sounds like there were a lot of people along the way in your story who came through for you.

Yes. Yes, there was. There were.

Was there something about you?

No, I don't think so. Like, for instance, our neighbors in my hometown, they were very good to us. They would bring us things. And now there is a thing, my girlfriend across the street, we were very close. She got married. And she married an SS man, Karl. She married Karl. And at the wedding she wanted me to be at the wedding. I said-- her name was Johanna, not Jewish.

I said, no, I'm not coming to the wedding. Your husband's wearing uniform, and all the other guy's uniform, and I wouldn't be seen at the wedding. You know that. She got married her husband was stationed in Wurzburg. And he would come home over weekends. And her bedroom and my bedroom were across the street. And we would say good morning to each other, and we would still get together all the time.

And one day, I said good morning to her. And she didn't answer. I thought, that's strange. I'm talking now about 1940. So she wouldn't talk to me. I thought, OK. If she doesn't want to talk to me, fine. By about Wednesday, she hollered, to come to the window, or she came to the door. I don't know. I said, what is the matter? Why didn't you talk to me Monday and Tuesday? She said because Carl missed his train. And I didn't hear from him. He usually would call.

I didn't hear from him. And I said, is that my fault? She said, well you know what they say about Jews. You shouldn't be so friendly with Jews, and all this. I said, you don't have to be friendly with me. But why do you talk to me now? She said, because I know it wasn't your fault that he didn't call me. I mean the idea of people, a lifelong friend. And once she thought, well, maybe the Jews.

Her parents were not Nazis. She had two sisters and two brothers. And the only one in the whole family, was a little one, and she went-- was I don't know. But they were not Nazis, the family.

But obviously, her husband--

He wasn't really-- he had that job. It was a good job. He was an officer.

So where would she get the idea? It's not a kind of poison?

Mental, mental. You blame somebody. You don't blame anybody. But then when there is a reason, you blame it on someone, not everybody, but some people.

How do you feel about it? Or how did you feel about that?

I thought it was stupid, because we were still friends.

And you were still friends with her afterwards?

Mm-hmm. She apologized.

Do you think you're a very forgiving person or understanding person?

I don't know.

Some people probably would never have spoken to her again.

Maybe not. But she was such a good friend before. We were always together. Her parents, I mean she was the one I talked to at the Kristallnacht, which was later. And she told me everything was OK in my house, my mother's house and all this. I mean, she was really a good friend. But there is an idea in her head. There was an idea in her head, maybe. Who knows?

Have you ever been back to Germany since?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Have you looked her up?

She's not living in the town anymore. But one of her brothers is. And he was so terrific with us. He loves music. They were all bakers, except one of her brothers is a professor. He wanted to become a priest. And when you became a priest, you could go to certain schools, the high school. And he changed his mind afterwards, and became a professor.

So did you see him when you went back?

Yeah.

Did you see other people that you knew?

Oh, not very many. People from my-- only one guy from my school, and he was a widower. And I had a friend who went to my brother's class. They were, the whole family went to Argentina. But one sister, the parents were born-- I mean their parents were born in Poland, and the kids were all born in Aschaffenburg.

One sister married a non-Jewish man in our town. She was in town all during the whole time, and she was never bothered. And one of her sisters also was in Argentina and she came back visiting the sister sometime. And she was back when we were back. The town had invited us. And when she was an apprentice, she worked for a company, for an engineering company as an apprentice. And there was another guy who was in school with me. He was an apprentice. And then they saw each other again. His wife had died, and he married her. She had never been married before, beautiful girl.

And she came, and lives in Aschaffenburg.

Well, tell me, when you look back at your story and you see the people who came through for you, how do you feel about that versus the atrocities that were going on?

Well, the atrocities naturally were worse. But not personally. I mean personally, physically nothing ever happened to me.

What about psychologically?

I always made it a point to not take it too tragic, because there were other things which came through. So when we were back in Germany, naturally, I went to see the people who bought our house. At that time, he was a little boy. The father had bought the house. And well, he has a beautiful store. He took the two houses, and made a beautiful store. I would say almost only in a bit smaller town, like Gump's, carries the most beautiful things from all over.

And he said, did your mother ever get the money for the house? And I said, no. He said I had to pay restitution. And I really hope that you, your mother, would get the money. I said no, we did not claim it. Because my mother said that these people, their name was Ruth, R-U-umlaut-T-H, were so good, they let us live after we sold them the house. They let us live in the house.

One apartment, another Jewish woman lived and my girlfriend and her companion lived with us. And he let us live there, and he was really very, very decent. So my mother didn't claim it. He said, well I had to pay anyway. But I think the money, if nobody claimed it, went to Israel. That's what he said. And it's really, he has a most beautiful store, of porcelain, and silvers, and crystal, and everything, and pictures, whatever.

And then there were some people. We were there when they made a park out of the area where the synagogue was. And where the schoolhouse was, they made that into a museum. And so we were invited, and they made a big plaque, as big as a wall, of all the people who vanished from our town.

Was it the town who invited you back?

Yes, yes. And so people came to me, and told me who they were. And I didn't remember them much anymore. I remembered that they were there. But there was one woman, we had a cup of coffee someplace. And I came down and there was one man from our town who lives in New York, a Jewish man. And he said, come here. He called, even 10 years ago he called me girl, because he's much older. I don't know if he's still alive. And she said, I want you to meet two ladies.

And he said, this is so, and this is so. And one of them said, what is your maiden name? And I said Isaak. [GASPS] And she got completely flabbergasted. She said I was in your store almost every day. I came in the afternoon. . She was a customer of ours. And your mother and I had a cup of coffee usually.

And I worked in a butcher shop around the corner from us. And I said, I remember you. She said, you can't. You were a child. You can't remember me. And I said to her, I remember you. You had all pimples over your forehead. . She said, you do remember me. They thought, and that I know from my mother, and they all thought it was a [? trichin ?] poisoning, you know [? trichin ?] which come in pork usually. And she worked in a butcher shop.

And she said, yes, that's what they said to me. But it wasn't it. I was an allergy. But now I know that you remember me.

What about the people who weren't nice to you? There

There were no people who weren't nice to me in our town. There were people who ignored you. But I don't know why. But probably because I was Jewish.

But there was no people who were not nice?

No. I wouldn't say that they were not nice to me.

I came home when I came, back from Hamburg our apartment was sealed. Because they were packing a lift van and it was sealed that nobody can take anything out or in. And it was in the middle of the night. So I knocked on the door of our neighbor there, the Jewish woman. And my mother was with her. And she explained that they came to pack everything in seal everything to send to Hamburg. You know? We paid the storage to Holland. We paid the storage and the transportation to the United States.

But I never got the lift van. I got a letter instead from the German consulate in Chicago, that they had noticed that my lift van was sent back to Germany and was divided amongst the people. They used-- it was a clearing system. They used the money, and they couldn't send it. But first, I wanted to send the money. I was at a company, a transport company, and they told me that if I pay \$1,000 they can send it. And they called me the next day, and they said, invasion in Holland. And that's when I got afterwards, when I got the letter that the lift van was-- they even wrote me where it was, in which town it was sent to, to which town was sent to.

And they just opened it up and give to the people.

Yeah, yeah.

Your things?

Mm-hmm. And I mean so what. But it was bad for my mother. She-- they had a whole in the van, living room, bedroom, all the porcelain, for milchig and fleishig. And everything, and even for Pesach, but it wasn't bad. I mean, I could get over. That didn't bother me.

What bothered you most about your experiences as a survivor?

Well, to be tied down. We couldn't go out in the evening. We couldn't, because 8 o'clock curfew. And you couldn't go places. I mean I was young, I would have liked to go places, and stuff, and couldn't.

So you feel that some of your youth was robbed at that time?

In a way. But so I mean it couldn't be helped.

Now, it seems like you were a very determined young woman though, who knew what she wanted. And when you--

Yeah, I was.

--went to these officials and you said, this is what I want. They'd do this. I mean this is--

Nobody dared usually.

To do the things you did.

Mm-hmm. So do you have children?

Yes. We have two daughters. They're twins.

Twins? And if I were to ask your children how they think that they have been affected by having a mother who is a survivor, what would they tell me?

I don't know. They tell me I was very strict. And they tell me that I wasn't-- well, I worked all the time. My mother really raised the children.

They were very shy, and I think it's due to my behavior. Very shy. That my children's doctor told me one day, have them have dancing lessons or whatever that they go out. So I took them to a dancing school, and about two months later, one of them came out with a mother's visiting, and said, mom, mommy, can I have a handkerchief? And the dancing teacher said, you mean she can talk?

I knew they could hear. But they were so-- and I think it was because of me.

Well, what did you do?

Well whatever came up I would try to help and do things for them, which-- and then my mother was there too. And they were very close to my mother, but she was strict too. They couldn't do certain things. For instance, cooking or doing anything like this, my mother didn't want them to.

And we were very protective what friends they had, and so on. And they had each other. I mean, they really didn't need that many friends. They're completely different now.

Oh, you mean very outgoing now?

Yeah.

But you think you were very-- you were overprotective of them?

Maybe. Yeah.

And if I ask your husband, how he thought being married to a survivor had?

Well, he was a survivor too.

Yes, but now I'm asking if I were to ask him, how he thinks being married to you as a survivor.

I don't think he ever thought of that.

Or how he's been affected as a husband, as a survivor?

I don't think--

Do you think it's affected your marriage in any way?

I don't think so.

Because you both shared the same experiences?

Uh-huh, more or less Our granddaughter, we have three granddaughters and two grandsons. Our granddaughters always were very-- they wanted me to tell things. And they even said, why don't you put it on tape? And I never thought of it. My grandsons, one of them is very Jewish minded. And the other one could care less. In fact, one of our grandsons was at that convention in Washington, now two weeks ago with the senators, and Feinstein, and Powell was there, and lots of big shots from Israel.

And he was a youth representative of, I think California, to that convention.

Jewish Youth Representative?

Yeah he's very active in quite a few. He's at Santa Cruz now. He was a year in Israel. He's in Santa Cruz. But he travels to Berkeley, and to all the various youth organizations.

Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your story, to make sure that you've--

I don't know. I really offhand for instance, naturally it was very hard when we first came to America, we came to Chicago. But we had relatives in Chicago. And my mother's and my father had relatives in Chicago too. So I think we got into the American life very fast. I think I did faster than my husband did.

I was wondering why you didn't go to Cuba with your husband.

I couldn't. When he went to Cuba, wait a minute. There was a reason. I didn't have the affidavit for Cuba at the time.

So you had to wait. Now, you must have some questions, or have you some questions?

Well, I was curious about what happened after you arrived.

Here?

Yes.

Well, we lived in Chicago and we got a small apartment. And then we were going to rent a bigger apartment. And one of my mother's cousins was a lawyer. And I called him for a reference. He said, I'm so glad that you called me because I tried to call you and couldn't reach you, because we are going away. They had a summer house in Indiana at the shore. And I wondered if you would move in our house while we are away. It's always better when a house is not empty. I am in town maybe one or two days a week. But the family is out there. So I wonder if you would do us a favor to move in our town, and you can always get an apartment later.

We said, sure. He didn't do it to do him a favor, because we found out afterwards that they had a guard during the night, a couple of the houses. It was a gorgeous house in a beautiful neighborhood. That they had a guard there. But he wanted us to save the rent, or all this. My brother was in Chicago too. And so we all lived in that house for three months. That helped us. Because we could save the money we made from our jobs. And they were terrific.

What kind of job did you get?

I worked-- I never was a day without work. And I had a job sometimes every week, a different one every two weeks. To start out with, what did I do to start out with? I worked in a factory. Well they made electronic things for fence, electric fence controllers, battery, fence controllers. And I started to work there packing little light bulbs which were extras to go into the unit. Terrible, terrible, monotonous.

But I talked to everybody because people came when they went to the ladies room, they came by. And they said don't work so hard. I took it for granted. I said, maybe I'm working too hard. Well, anyway, I worked there. And then I worked in the shipping department there. And somehow, when I wasn't busy, I learned all the things around there, coil winding, just for myself. And all that stuff I learned. And when summer came, my boss came to me and said, during summer we close. We only have one person in each department.

So if you want to work, and you are offered any other job, take it. Because it's only for about two more weeks. So a friend of mine worked someplace, in a hat factory. So she said, maybe we can use somebody. Come and apply. So I went there, and there were lots of people who applied. And then everybody was going down the elevator. And I didn't fit in anymore. So somebody said, we could use one person. And I was the only one there. So I got that job.

And there were two other girls, women, from Germany, and Jewish people. And we strained ourselves to talk English, and here were people who talked Yiddish, here were people who talked Italian. There were people who talked all kinds of languages. And I said to them, why do we strain ourselves? That was during lunch time or so. Why don't we talk German, because we were new in the country? And we didn't know English that well.

So we did. No sooner had we talked German, somebody comes and says, you're in America now. You have to talk English. I said, yes. As soon as you talk English, and they talk English, and they talk English, then we talk English too. And I worked there. It was OK.

And then one day when the summer was over, I worked with one girl who had a sister who was without work. And I told her have your sister go there, the place where I worked before. Have your sister go there, and see if they take people now. And her sister did go, and she got a job.

So she applied. Oh no, then I worked in a candy factory before. And that's where I met that one girl in the candy factory. On the running belt, packing candies and all this. It was a good job, I mean money wise. And piecework, and this girl, Rosemary, and I, even though we were the newest, we were faster than the older ones. And when they started to lay off after Easter, they laid quite a few people off, but not Rosemary and me. And people complained that they're there longer, but I guess we were young and we were the fastest.

So I said to Rose, and then they laid off Rosemary. And I said go there where your sister-- I told her about her sister. Go there. Maybe they give you a job. And then I quit and went there, and I got the job back. And how was it? What did my boss say once? That was before. Oh yeah, when I came or when I left, I forgot. They all came together, and how are you, and all these people. My boss came. And said, if anybody quits, that's no reason for everybody else to stop working.

And I was kind of angry. And I met one of these people. And he said, our boss is very angry at you. I said, why? And he said, because you didn't go to the office to say goodbye to him. Oh, I said, I didn't want to disturb his precious time, and I wrote him a letter about it. I didn't want to disturb him, and all this. And he wrote me a letter of apology and said, any time I want to come, I have a job. So I went there. And it was a nice job, because I became in charge of the shipping department.