

## Helga Milberg

Separate TC references to video (MOV) files and audio (WAV) files:

### MVI 0007

**Great. As I said, Helga, for my transcriber, if you can start by just giving me your name and spelling your name.**

00:00:20

My name is Helga, H-e-l-g-a, middle initial E., and the last name is M-i-l-b-e-r-g, pronounced Milberg, and my maiden name was Helga Esther Rachel Weisz, W-e-i-s-z or W-e-i-s-s.

**And Helga, tell me where and when you were born.**

I was born in Vienna, Austria, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

**Your birthday is one day before mine.**

Oh, we're Leo the lion.

**August 15<sup>th</sup>.**

Very romantic, yes. The romantic lion.

**Helga, I wanna start with some questions about your memories about your life and your family in Vienna, when you were a young girl, and mostly I'm interested in your direct memories. I realize that you were very young, but tell me what you do remember about your young girlhood in Vienna.**

00:01:32

Well, my life in Vienna was, uh, lovely. I, uh, was the darling of everyone. I was one of the youngest, uh, of the relatives at that, uh, time when I was born, uh, and, uh, so everyone doted on me. I remember something starting from around, I think I must have been about three years old when I really became aware of, uh, what was going on around me, and, uh, I remember that I suffered quite a bit from nightmares, uh, and, uh, I, uh, was very attached to my mother, uh, and, uh, but, uh, as I said, everyone doted on me, and, uh, so I was always

amongst, uh, adults, uh, and who were very loving, and always willing to take me out and babysit and do whatever they could for me. Uh, the only thing I didn't like was being separated from my mother.

00:02:26

I had, um, a wonderful father and a wonderful mother, uh, who, um, uh, were very kind, and, um, um, my father as a hobby enjoyed making children's toys, and he would, uh, take wood scraps and wood and...and make, um, uh, I remember he made me an electric, uh, a play oven once, and, uh, a dollhouse and a firehouse, and, uh, I was loaded with toys. I really lacked for nothing, and, uh, weekends my father would take me for long walks throughout the city of Vienna, and as I was growing up, um, I had all sorts of experiences of, uh, uh, culture, and, uh, of course the parks, and my favorite park from a very, very young age was a park that had the statue of Johann Strauss in it. Uh, I don't know if you had a chance to see it or not, and, uh, so, uh, uh, I had always, all my pictures were taken in front of Johann Strauss.

00:03:29

One of the nicest things that I enjoyed was being able to go through the city, and the various parks and orchestras where people were always playing, so I was, uh, certainly exposed to a lot of music. And, um, my favorite, uh, dessert was always stopping at one of the coffeehouses and having schlagel, which means, of course, whipped cream over, uh, something or other that I was allowed to drink, and, uh, uh, it was also the style at that time to have, uh, chubby babies, and so of course I was nice and chubby; I was well rounded.

00:04:02

So actually, my time was spent, uh, playing with toys. Um, I had dolls. I had an older sister who, uh, was very loving to me and, um, would play with me, and, um, she started me at a very early age into athletics, uh, and one of the things my dad did is, uh, in one of the door, uh, ways, uh, he hung the rings, uh, on the ropes, and so she taught me how to hang from the rings, and to do backward flips, and to do splits, and [laughs], uh, uh, she, and she also shared, um, some of her schoolbooks with me. She would let me look at the pictures and at the letters, so I remember that I was reading at a very, very early age. Um, one thing I was, I was very fearful, uh, because of all the stories you heard when you're sitting in the, amongst adults and they're telling stories and they're having coffee and tea, then...then you sort of get a feeling of what the world is really all about, and, uh, so, um, because Vienna also had gypsies who came around to repair pots and pans and sharpen your knives and scissors, and there were all sorts of stories told about them, uh, that they kidnapped children, and if you weren't a good child, you know, the gypsy would come and take you away, and don't walk away too far from me, and all that.

00:05:27

And so I was very fearful and I ha-, I always had nightmares, and, uh, um, I kept my poor

mother up most nights, uh, and I wouldn't fall asleep unless there was a light on, and I had to have my teddy bear on one side and a doll on the other side and a comfort blanket and all that sort of thing.

00:05:48

Uh, I, uh, I also started to sing at a very early age, and, uh, I remember, uh, one time being taken to a...a movie house, uh, and, uh, I was told that, uh, uh, they were interviewing children to be, uh, doubles for Shirley Temple. And, uh, so, uh, I was taken, because at that time I had curly hair, natural curly hair, and, um, my...my nickname at that time was Mopsi, which means "little mop," and, uh, so I, um, um, we went, uh, to the...to the movie, uh, house, and, uh, I was told to go up on the stage, but then somebody walked by and said, "Well, if you're going up on that stage, you better watch out for gypsies." Well, I immediately went into a fit and didn't go in, uh, refused to go up on the stage, so that killed any...any audition that, anything that would come up.

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Uh, so, um, that took care of the...the audition, so then I was au-, auditioned to sing in the auditorium, just sitting next to my mother and father, and that's all I remember of that, except, uh, I will get back to that before, uh, as the years go by, what happened because of that. So it was a, you know, you heard all sorts of fairy tales and...and things about people that really shouldn't have been said, uh, that was enough to...to control children, that was, um, the mode at that time, uh, to, um, to scare them into good behavior, you know, and, uh, so, uh, I was certainly exposed to that, and I always attempted to be good, but there was a limit for a little girl to be good.

00:07:29

Uh, my parents were very progressive, and, uh, my father was the only one that, uh, in the neighborhood that w-, people that we knew who had a radio, and, uh, it was a shortwave radio as well as a regular radio, so people would come and gather at our house to hear the news at night, and one of the things I remember always is that, uh, before the news came on from America, uh, there were two radio programs that, uh, we heard and one was, uh, something or other, I can't remember his name, he was a...a...a Mountie from Canada, and so you heard the music, and he's...he's riding his horse and he's going through the forests of Canada, you know, and that was the end of that...that program.

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The other program that I was annoyed was...was because it was The Lone Ranger, and the music that they played, it disturbed me because it sounded vaguely familiar, and, uh, there was something wrong about it. It wasn't until after I came here and really became involved in studying music seriously that I realized that it was "The Blue Danube" played backwards.

So, uh, [laughs] those things, uh, always stood out in my [laughs], in my mind. Uh, later on in years to come when I was studying music, I became very incensed at, uh, how dare people take somebody else's music and then, uh, you know, turn the notes around and call it their own composition, um, but that, then we're going into, uh, really technicalities about music.

00:09:02

But, um, uh, so actually I was as a child exposed to, um, to music, and, um, I was taken to the theater to see children's programs, and read a lot of books, and I...I got to a point where I was reading my father's, um, landscaping and gardening books, and I learned all the Latin names for the flowers and all that, and of course, as I said, on Saturdays and Sundays my dad would take us to a plot, um, it was called the Vasarisas (?), which was originally the king's woods in Vienna, the...the Vienna, the Vinavard, and, um, uh, he, uh, he had a plot of land there and, uh, the brothers and sisters also had plots of land that they inherited from their father. You...you didn't quite own it, but you did own it, and then it was sort of sit, ceded down to you. And, uh, he, um, his hobby was also, um, agriculture, and he was very well known for, uh, grafting trees and, uh, uh, fr-, fruits and vegetables and especially grapevines, so, uh, he also was, uh, asked to come around to different people who were culturing, uh, grapes for vie-, uh, making wine.

00:10:14

So I had a chance to go with him every Saturday and Sunday, and I met all these lovely people who doted on me, and [laughs] I got to taste some wine sometimes. And there was one lady who was very fascinating to me because in the middle of her, uh, her plot of land, she had, uh, an arbor for...for, just for birds, and she had hawks and, uh, in other words, birds of prey, and they just fascinated me to no end and I would just stand out there and just watch them while my dad was busy grafting [chuckles] the...the...the...the vines and all that. So th-, that was another thing that I...I, I remember very lovely experiences as well as frightening ones. Uh, the frightening ones at that particular time were always the, uh, you know, the stories you heard about if you don't behave, this and this will happen.

00:11:04

I also sucked my thumb, uh, for, up until I got to the age of eight, and, uh, they used to tell me that if I don't stop doing that, teeth will grow out of my thumb and all sorts of bubbamyses [sounds like].

Getting to the political side, uh, my fa--

**Let me interrupt you for a second, 'cause I want to make sure I know what your father's**

**occupation was.**

00:11:30

My father's occupation [laughs]...

**MVI 0008 – 00:0:01**

... It's complicated. It was varied, and the reason for that was because of the laws for what you were allowed to do, to...to work at. Uh, let me step back just a bit because the education of my father and mother were all through, uh, uh, Catholic schools. They were the ones that ran what was called the public school, so, um, and they all, most of his family, including himself were trained in business, uh, bookkeeping, and my father went into agriculture as well as, uh, his main business with his two sisters, uh, which, uh, my grandfather started, was, um, uh, the import and export of, uh, sausages, smoked meats, chickens, eggs, and dairy products, uh, and stuff like that. And his, um, their stall, as it was called, was in the Fleischmarkthalle, and, uh, there he had a, um, a stall [laughs], uh, where he, uh, where they sold, uh, and of course the business was shared between him and his two sisters.

00:12:38

My mother, on the other hand, had been a nurse. She was a nurse in the First World War, and after the First World War she was not only a nurse but a midwife, and being, of course, in Austria, uh, the custom was that the wife doesn't work after marriage, so she sort of did a little, uh, free nursing on the side, uh, for friends, and if there was an emergency, but mostly she stayed home. And, um, she sang [laughs].

**Helga, tell me what your memories were of things beginning to change after the Anschluss in March of 1938.**

**[MOV: 00:01:49]**

00:13:21

Well, actually, it was, um, uh, let's go back a little bit earlier, because I know that, uh, they...they were talking about politics in the house before then, 'cause I had, right around, as I said, I became aware of being a human being [chuckles], so to speak, right around the age of three and four, and, uh, there was always, politics were always spoken, of world politics and what was going on there in, uh, in Europe especially, and, uh, you could already feel the tension in the house, and the worry amongst the people that were talking, so that to me was also frightening. But I was always assured everything was, is okay, nothing's going to happen, and, uh, that sort of thing. Then after he, uh, ca-, uh, was voted in by the people, Hitler was voted in by the people in Germany, my father said, "Well, it can't last and it won't happen here. These people are too intelligent, and, uh, we're so advanced, you know, that

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somebody's gonna get hurt, but let's hope, you know, it isn't too many people."

00:14:20

And, uh, then after the, uh, when...when we come up to, um, the time, by the time he came into Austria, of course, it was too late because my father's feeling was that, well, it won't last, these people are...are [laughs] too intelligent, and, uh, so for...for my family it was already, uh, quite late. And, uh, then, of course, they, then it was really frightening and then, uh, it, um, uh, the, we were thrown out of our apartment, and, uh, our, what...what little we had was taken away from us. Uh, in...in...in some ways you could say that we, you know, they were blue collar workers, my father and his sisters, and, uh, uh, we were living in an apartment that had been built by the, um, state. It was, uh, um, sub-, subsidized, and it was supposed to have been a very, very modern apartment, uh, building, and in, uh, in many ways it was, because it had an indoor toilet in each apartment, so that was, uh, you know, the cold running water and, uh, with the [inaudible] oven to heat the house with, uh, the apartment with, and you went up to the attic where you boiled the clothing in the water, and...and stuff like that. And, um, uh, it was, uh, we had to, uh, we were thrown out, but before that, we had, um, uh, may I backtrack a bit, if I may.

00:15:43

Um, my mother was a very good, uh, uh, she was known also as a baker and candy maker, and so the people in the apartment building would ask her around Christmastime to bake the angels and the...and the candies and give the, uh, you know, different cellophane colored papers r-, to hang on their Christmas trees, and she made jams and jellies, uh, and baked cakes and things like that. And, um, that went, uh, very well. Uh, I mean, they were very, very nice until, uh, of course the Hitler era, and, uh, we had a, the, a nurse who lived directly below us, and her name was Kata Hinterwriter, and she was the, an associate of my mother's, they were both nurses, and [clears throat] if...if Katie wanted to – I'm giving her an English name – if she wanted, uh, help from my mother, she would knock on the ceiling with a broomstick, and if one of us was ill, you know, Mother was not allowed to quite come to conclusions on her own, she would bang with a broomstick on the floor, and then Katie would come up and take care of us and...and...and do things like that. And so, um, uh, that was a very, very nice relationship and I think we were the only Jewish family living in that apartment.

**[MOV: 00:05:30]**

00:17:01

When Hitler came into Austria and he was greeted with open arms and they were marching down the streets, the next thing we knew was that they decided to choose to hang the, uh, flag with the, uh, [inaudible], swastika, uh, all the way down from the roof of the apartment building, right across our balcony, and to tie it onto the, uh, the fence on our...our balcony,

which meant that we could peek out on either side of it, and that was it. Um, and we were told that if there was any dirt on that flag or any damage to it, we would be killed. Uh, we were threatened with our lives, uh, so we prayed every day that the birds wouldn't fly by and drop anything on the flag, and things like that.

00:17:45

Um, of course the next thing that happened was I was thrown out of school, uh, and my parents were thrown out of the apartment. So, uh, then, of course, the...the horrors really started, but fortunately for me, I think of having been treated and...and, um, almost as...as an adult, uh, along with childish things, uh, to face reality, I think, uh, that, uh, for me, it helped my survival at the time. And, uh, so, uh, when they used to come storming up the steps, the S.S., and, uh, the brown shirts and green shirts and the different shirts, with the motorcycles and all, come storming down the streets and the marching and, um, that, um, then getting thrown out of the apartment, of course, and having to move to, uh, the old neighborhood where we were, then designated one room to live in, and, um, uh, the, uh, one of the things before we were thrown out of the apartment was the fact that, uh, they were beginning to beat up, uh, the Jews on the street. And we were sitting on the balcony, and, uh, my father wanted to go down and help this one woman that was being beaten up across the street, and my mother just did everything she possibly could to restrain him from going, uh, that, um, he, you know, they would just beat him up, too, and, uh, so the, people were just getting beaten up right and left.

00:19:20

Well, then all of a sudden I came down with scarlet fever, and, uh, my, uh, mother being very progressive, I had gotten the first, uh, pediatrician to graduate in Vienna, and, uh, uh, usually kids, when they got scarlet fever or diphtheria, had to go off to the hospital, and I s-, I threatened that if I was separated from my mother, I would kill myself, and here I am, was seven, eight years old, I'm threatening to commit suicide, uh, you can't take me away from my mother. So then this th-, uh, pediatrician said, "No, it's no longer necessary for you to go to the hospital, but everybody has to move out," so my father, my sister had to move out. This was a very frightening, uh, experience for my parents, because at first they thought I had diphtheria, which is a little bit similar to the scarlet fever rashes and symptoms, and they had lost a boy to diphtheria before I was born, and I guess that was, it was, I was supposed to take his place. Uh, and, uh, so, uh, they moved out, and then, um, a sign was put on our apartment door that, uh, my dad could only leave the groceries in front of the door and my mother had to make sure that nobody was out in the hall before she could open up the door to get the groceries, and...and then the anti-Semitism began...began in the apartment building.

**MVI 0009**

**[logistics] Okay.**

I would like to go back to the, uh, the schooling, if I may.

**Yeah. I have a lot of material to cover, and I don't want to cut you off, but I want to make sure we.... Go ahead.**

00:21:38

Y-, when...when...when, um, the kindergarten was not part of the school system yet, and of course the school was run by the Catholic Church. It was still called public school, and the schools were six days a week and there was some question whether I should go on Saturday or not, or be excused, and my parents not being Orthodox, uh, decided I should, the schooling was very important, so I did go. The interesting thing was that if you attended the school and you were not of the faith of the school – I mean, Protestant, Lutheran, or any of these other denominations – they had catechism in the school, and the children that were not of that particular faith were taken to another room. But my mother had, uh, said bring in a note saying, yes, I was attending Hebrew classes, which I thought was very, you know, interesting at the time.

00:22:30

Uh, they did not have kindergarten in those areas, uh, and as I said, my parents were very progressive, and I had the good fortune to be enrolled, uh, in Maria Montessori's first kindergarten class that she started in Vienna, and she was my first teacher. And I had my first love in that...in that, uh, cl-, kindergarten [laughs], and my first romance with a young, uh, [laughs] man. Uh, to this day I can't even think of his name, uh, but that...that was, uh, the, having Maria Montessori was quite a...a wonderful intellectual experience for me, and by the time, of course, I came into first grade and into public school, I was reading away as through my father's books and my sister's schoolbooks, and...and that sorta stuff.

Well, when we were thrown out of school, uh, uh, school was, uh, was okay, I enjoyed it very much, uh, except that I couldn't, uh, they don't have lined paper in those days. They insisted you had a blank page and you had to write from left to right, in a straight line.

00:23:32

Well, I would start at the upper left and work my way down to the lower right, and this was a no-no, and so, um, for that reason I had to sit on a special bar – it looked like a bar chair, is the only way I can describe it – with a dunce hat on my head, uh, because I was a dunce because I couldn't write straight. So then, of course, those were minor things, uh, but I did love school. Uh, mathematics was always my...my weakest spot, because everybody in the family was very good in math, and so I was sort of, uh, how come you can't do this and how come you



can't, you know, that sort of stuff, so then, of course, I blocked completely, and that took care of my math. [laughs] So, uh, math grade was not very good.

**MOV: 00:02:55**

00:24:14

But, uh, when I was thrown out of school, my mother one day, we had absolutely no idea this was happening and I was thrown out of school, I came to school and they said, "I'm sorry, you can't come to school, you're a dirty Jew," and then the word "dirty" hit me, and I couldn't understand. Why am I dirty? I just had a bath, uh, s-, before I came, uh, to school this morning. And so then, of course, my mother was informed Jews were not allowed in school anymore, and the only thing, uh, that I do remember from that experience was that as we were standing in the hall getting ready to leave, uh, another teacher came out from another room and she walked up to us and she lifted up my chin, uh, so I could look at her eyes, and she said to me, "I'm very sorry this is happening to you. This is not right, but I do wish you good luck," and then she disappeared as fast as she had appeared. And I think that was the kindest word I heard from a stranger for quite a while after that. And then, of course, we were thrown out of the how-, the apartment, and we had to move into this, uh, sort of ghetto area after that.

**MVI 0010**

**Helga, do you remember how you and your parents learned about the possibility of you coming to the United States?**

00:25:30

Well, actually, my father was in, uh, after the, uh, Kristallnacht, and his business was broken into and he was beaten up and everything was stolen, and we still had to pay taxes with money that we didn't have, uh, he went out one night to sell his wedding band, to see if he could get a couple of dollars, I would say, in American money, uh, to buy food for us, and he never came home. So he was in Dachau, and we didn't find out until several months later. Uh, the way we, my aunt and uncle, my father's sister and her husband and, uh, her two children lived in the bedroom adjoining ours. Uh, the...the apartment that we were forced into in the old city of Vienna, uh, had, uh, uh, one, two, three rooms, actually. Uh, one was a bedroom, one was a combination sitting/dining room, and then there was a kitchen, and there was a family forced into each one of those rooms. So they lived in the back bedroom, we lived in the other room, and then there's a family living in the kitchen.

**MOV: 00:01:10**

00:26:37

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And my uncle, uh, somehow or other had heard on the street that there was word going around by mouth that, uh, there was somebody coming to, uh, Austria who, um, is anxious to find children; he wants to save fifty children, they want to save fifty children to go to the United States. So my uncle told my mother, he said, if...if, uh, she should put my name, uh, he's gonna try and find out to see whom to contact, and that's how we found out about it. Of course, at that time my father was in the concentration camp and there was very little way or possibility of communicating with him. There was, uh, a limit of communication. Well, by that time my sister had already gotten to, uh, what was then called Palestine. She went with a [inaudible] Yiddishin (?) [inaudible]. Uh, she had studied agriculture, and, uh, that's why she always had hoped to go there anyway, and they managed to get out at night one night and, uh, she was gone.

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So she never saw my father alive again after that and he never saw her again. They couldn't say goodbye. Um, so it was my mother who was doing two things: She was frantically running around trying to find out who was doing the saving, and two, where is my father and what's happened to him and how can she get him. So that's how we found out about, uh, about that, and that's the only information that I know. I have always wondered really what were the steps that had to be taken.

**Now, I understand from other things I've read about your experience that you did not want to leave your mother.**

**MVI 0011**

00:28:21

No. No, I was, uh, very, very attached to my mother and I told her, uh, I said that I, uh, did not want to leave and I wanted to stay with her, and she sat down...she sat down with me and she said, "If you leave, your life will be saved and then her, then I would have a better chance of saving my life...."

**Can we...?**

Sure.

**I'm sorry. I really want to get this. I'm gonna ask you to start over again.**

Okay. Okay. [clears throat] What was the first thing I...?

**Oh, well, I was asking about....**

Yeah, oh...

**...leaving your mother.**

Okay, yeah.

**MOV: 00:00:37**

00:28:58

Uh, no, I...I...I was very, very attached to my mother, and I was my mother's baby [chuckles], and, uh, I, uh, just, uh, I told my mother, uh, they...they said that they're gonna try to get me out of the country by myself, that was the first, uh, uh, that I knew about it. Uh, I wasn't asked did I want to go, or...or even told that there was a possibility. I was just suddenly told, uh, you're going to go. Evidently they had by then, uh, gotten, um, the opportunity to be one of so many who was going to be tested and all that...

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And, uh, when she told me, uh, uh, that I need you to go because, uh, that way I can...I can h-, save myself, perhaps, and save your father, and we'll meet you, uh, we'll get reunited again, you'll live in the United States, and it's paved with gold and it's wonderful, you'll have food to eat and you'll ride horses and go swimming and the, all this stuff. And I told her, no, I did not want to go, to leave her, that I would rather die with her if I have to die than, um, than to go, and she said, uh, "Don't you want to save your father, and so that I can save myself, and...and, uh, we'll...we'll have a...a...a good life afterwards?" So she's trying to convince me on that, and, uh, so I resigned myself, okay, uh, I, she made me look at it as saying that if I go, I'll be saving them. And, uh, so that was the, that is my responsibility to think like a big person and not like a little baby, uh, and, uh, to go, and so, uh, I...I cried. I mean, uh, we all cried [chuckles], but, uh, um, I...I accepted that as part of, uh, fate, and I would not have been able to do it if I had been babied all my life and not had the experiences that I had in my early childhood, of being treated with respect and told the facts as they were, and not being lied to.

**MVI 0012**

**What are your memories of meeting either one of the Krauses? What do you remember about them?**

00:31:16

We, my m other took me to a, uh, uh, a beautiful si-, it was a beautiful synagogue in, uh,

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Vienna, and I remember half a building standing; it had been burned out and demolished. The, uh, the temple itself had been destroyed, and on the left-hand side, I vividly remember, was this railing and a staircase going up to all the classrooms, uh, which were up on the upper floor, and, uh, just a...a big long line of people with children, all the way outside to the street with, uh, you know, all hoping to have their children taken. And, uh, the, uh, the, uh, Germans coming up, the people the, of the city, just coming around, standing, tossing stones and, uh, tomatoes and calling names and...and then, uh, the men in uniform and the motorcycles and, uh, with the guns and the German shepherds and, uh, and I happen to love dogs and I love German shepherds, and I suddenly realized that these dogs were biting, and, uh, so, uh, we were up on the stairwell, and, uh, the railing was off also, so you had to be careful that, uh, with the crowding and everything you wouldn't, you know, end up falling down.

**MOV: 00:01:37**

00:32:42

And, uh, then, uh, something started up and there was some shooting going on, and, uh, I remember Mr. Kraus coming out, and he hollered something in English and then all of a sudden everyone dispersed, you know, and it became quiet, and even though they were still there with the guns and the dogs, it, uh, it was under control, and some of the attacks and name calling and all that, uh, dissip-, stopped. And, uh, then my first, uh, trip was up the stairs. Eventually I got up there, and, um, my first experience, he was either a psychiatrist or psychologist, and he's giving me the ink blot test and the Rorschach test, uh, the Stanford [inaudible], and, uh, so he's showing me a picture and I said to him, "Well, that's the pelvic region," and [laughs] he patted me on the head – it was a butterfly.

00:33:38

So he patted me on the head [chuckles] and he said, "Okay." Of course I didn't know what he was saying, you know, and then the next thing I know, after having looked at all these pictures and given him my opinion [chuckles] of what I thought they were, there was the next room, and the next room, and the next room, and finally I ended up meeting Mr. Kraus. He shook my hand and he said something to me, and I smiled at him, and the only word I knew was "thank you," and that was it.

**Do you remember anything about him physically?**

N-, not, yeah, I do, but not until, uh, uh, I didn't really get to see him and to become attached to him until we were on the boat.

**And Mrs. Kraus?**

Mrs. Kraus I don't remember as much. Uh, I, she, uh, uh, he appeared more on the boat for my group than, uh, than she did.

**What do you remember about him physically?**

**MOV: 00:03:27**

00:34:33

Oh, physically I thought he was very, um, um, he was a very, uh, good-looking man and...and, uh, good stature. He looked n-, uh, healthy and robust, and, uh, very kind, uh, very, uh, he reminded me a lot of my father, and I just took to, uh, you know, I just felt, oh, here's a hew-, you know, you feel this...this is a human being, it has a heart, you know, and it's kind, it's, uh, it cares, and that...that sort of, uh, I don't, I can't explain it, but it was a feeling that I had gotten from the first meeting, uh, when I shook his hand, and I thought, and I said, gee, this is a nice man. But I didn't know who he was, and, uh, then, of course, um, I found out later on on the boat.

**I want to jump ahead just a little bit to when you were leaving Vienna.**

Mm-hmm.

**MVI 0013**

**This is in May of 1939. I gather your father's still in Dachau?**

00:35:35

No, my father was let out a week before I left, and, um, um, my mother's birthday was in May, and she was, uh, thirty-nine that May, and, uh, he was released out of Dachau with the understanding he would be out of the country in three weeks. And, um, so that...that, they imp-, I was, at least I was told, and this impressed me again, it sort of fortified or, uh, strengthened my understanding that if I left, life would be easier for them, and, uh, so now they can focus on getting him out of the country, and, uh, so he came out a week before and I have a picture in my album, uh, when he came out with the, uh, black eyes and the teeth missing, and they used him for, uh, medical experimentation without anesthetic and stuff like that.

MOV: 00:01:03

00:36:28

Uh, and, uh, that's when I found out that when I sang for the, uh, audition for Shirley Temple, that I was given a prize of what would amount at that time to twenty-five dollars in American

money, which was quite a bit, and that they had s-, had put it away for me in the bank, never touched it, even though we weren't eating or anything, 'cause that was, they considered it to be my money, and, uh, so, uh, uh, aside from...from both of them now working on getting me, uh, ready to go, that, uh, they...they managed to get some of that money out, and they asked me how do I want to spend it, and I said, well, I wanted to have some candy and then the rest should be flowers for my mother. Dumb me, I mean, I should have told them they should take the whole thing, you know, for food, but, uh, you know, hindsight [chuckles]. And, uh, the last thing we did, even though we weren't supposed to, was we took a long walk, my father and I, and we went to my favorite park and, of course, took a picture in front of you-know-who, Johann Strauss. [chuckles]

00:37:37

Uh, let me say this, though, if I may, going back to how we were chosen and it affected the rest of my life. Uh, we were told that we had to transcribe our school records by hand, in our own handwriting, so Mother and Da-, uh, actually Mother had to go out and get the paper to, um, that the schools used to write your reports on, uh, your...your grades and everything, and then stood behind me crying because it had cost money that they couldn't afford to buy the papers, and I was not the best handwritten person nor, we had those pens that you dipped into the inkwell and then made nice blots on your paper [chuckles] afterwards.

00:38:27

We were not allowed to have those, and we were not allowed to have our erasers, and every time I had an accident writing, transcribing my school papers and my birth certificate and this, and there were other papers I had to write, that, uh, she would stand in back of me and cry because that meant a, another, an pfenig, you know, to...to get another one of those papers, and then, of course, make sure that you don't fool around and that you're serious when you're asked questions, that you answer them properly. So this was quite a strain on me, and it left me, for the rest of my life, with the inability to take a test or to fill out a piece of paper, because for the rest of my life, even to this day, my life depends on it. So I can only tell you the first time I was tested with my dog, to see if we could pass the certification test, I had a heart attack. So that, uh, that didn't help, but that...that...that...that stayed with me for the rest of my life.

MOV: 00:03:55

00:39:25

But somehow or other, uh, through good fortune and guardian angels over my head, I was one of the fifty children.

**MVI 0014**

**Now unfortunately, and I so hate to ask this but I need to for purposes of this story, I know it turned out to be the last time you did see your mother,**

Mm-hmm.

**Your father, of course, did make it to the United States.**

Mm-hmm.

**Helga, tell me what your memories are of...**

The night we left?

**...leaving on that train.**

MOV: 00:00:15

00:39:58

It was raining, uh, and my mother, uh, as I kept, still kept saying that I would rather die with them than, you know, to leave, but, uh, you know, realistically we had an adult conversation that I need to leave to make it easier for them to focus on themselves to get out, and, um, I was asked, uh, what I would like to have, what...what...what she should pack me to eat, and I asked her, she used to make wonderful roast chicken, and I wanted to have, uh, some of her roast chicken, which she packed in a little old sort of a lunch box type affair, and I never, I mean, I don't know where they got the money for it, but they managed, and they packed me this little, uh, uh, thing with the, um, chicken, roast chicken and...and...and some candy, and a piece of fruit, and, um, I had the suitcase where I was, of course, limited in what I could take out, and I had my teddy bear in my arm, and, um, that's all I was allowed to bring as far as t-, toys were concerned. And we were told not to wave goodbye, because that would be the, uh, they may, they would think it was the Nazi's, uh, sign for heil, Hitler, and we were told to try and contain our tears as much as possible.

MOV: 00:01:34

00:41:17

So it was a very rainy night. I...I...I have the picture in front of me, I shall never forget it, and, um, [tearfully] it was raining. It was a very rainy night and very dark, and we...we were taken to the bahnhon and the...the train was there and the...the soldiers were there, and S.S., brown shirts, black shirts, brown boots, black boots, and Ge-, German shepherds and Dobermans and the Rottweilers were all on hand, and the guns were there.

00:41:51

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And, uh, we...we stood at the train and, um, [sighs] and she said to me [tearfully], "You be a good girl, and listen to your foster parents, and, uh, and make sure you get a good education, and before you know it we'll be there and we'll all be reunited, and I'll see you in America." And that was the last words she said to me.

MOV: 00:02:34

00:42:17

And she was able to hug me and I was able to give her a kiss, and the same thing with my father, and all of us kids had the same situation and we got on the train, and we were told, "Make sure you don't wave," and it as, as I said, it was dark, it was raining. I remember the darkness, and I never saw her again [tearfully]. I'm sorry. [pauses briefly]

### **MVI 0015**

00:43:00

Then we had the ride to Berlin, and there were taken to...to what to me seemed like a big hall, and, uh, bunk beds, and, uh, we were given to eat and I wanted to eat the chicken. They said no, you know, that it might have spoiled. Well, I couldn't see how it could spoil after such a short time, you know, and, uh, they took it away from me, what I had, except for the candy, which they said was, uh, okay. Excuse me, I have to....

**Yeah.**

MOV: 00:00:35

[wipes nose] And, uh, so I was very scared because I didn't want to l-, go ha-, I was hoping I wouldn't be assigned the top of the bunk bed, and the other thing that worried me was because I...I sucked my thumb and I needed my teddy bear with me in bed, and they'd make fun of me. Well, that didn't happen, and fortunately I was put on the lower bunk bed, and I remember that.

00:44:05

And, um, that was sort of a, the only thing I remember was bleakness and...and just feeling lost and not knowing what was going on, and don't understand the language, except for the German commands, and, uh, then next morning – I don't even remember what we ate for breakfast, to be honest with you, and we were taken, uh, to the boat. And then I worried about walking the plank into the boat, because there was the ocean below the plank, and, uh, I didn't know how to swim, and, uh, so then, uh, um, I got onto the boat. Couldn't understand it, it was an American boat, President Harding. Couldn't understand what was being said, and sort of looking to the other kids, who looked at me, we looked at each other. Those who knew English were absolutely at home, I mean, they had no problem, the older



children [coughs], excuse me, uh, so we...

00:44:58

We just followed hand motions, and, uh, what we thought were directions, and, um, we were led into the, um, into our rooms, uh, and I think there were four of us in a, into one of the staterooms, and, uh, I was blessed with the one next to all the machines and the motors and everything, so we had, uh, that...that, um, and then I was stuck with all the young ones, for some reason. Didn't have time to cry because I was busy with the younger ones, trying to comfort them in the...in the room, and again, fortunately I was not assigned to a...a bunk bed. I got the lower part, uh, rather than the upper part of the bunk bed. And then the next thing I know is we were, uh, some woman in white came in and, uh, took us into a bathroom and there we ended up, two of us in the bathtub at the same time, which was a new experience for me. I'm not used to taking a bath with someone else [chuckles], and, uh, then we were taken back to the stateroom and, uh, now you go to sleep, so...so that was it.

00:46:04

Um, um, our, then the next morning we s-, the same person came and took us to the bathroom and made sure we brushed our teeth and all that, and then we were taken up to the deck. Now that was a very interesting experience because I g-, I think they had three bells for eating, uh, purposes, and I guess I was third bell, because it seemed to me I was the only one taken to the dining room, and there were all these adults, and, uh, I was put on, uh, sit down on a chair, and here was all this lovely oranges and...and, uh, rolls and butter, and I had absolutely no idea that I could choose what I wanted to have for breakfast.

**We've got to take a quick break...**

That's fine.

**...to change the cards in the camera. Do you want a glass of water?**

Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, definitely [chuckles].

**MVI 0017**

**Helga, let's go back to the boat.**

Okay.

**You've mentioned a few of your memories, but let me ask you what other specific memories you have of the ocean crossing, and particularly, what do you remember about**

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## how you spent your days at sea?

00:47:34

Well, after we got on the boat, the next day, uh, we were taken out on deck some time or other, I f-, I...I think it must have been after breakfast, and, uh, the next thing I know is we're being put into life jackets, and I do have someone helping me so, of course, my, uh, pulse went up, and, uh, I became very frightened because I thought, oh, my God, the boat is sinking and I don't know how to swim. Well, it turned out that it was merely a, uh, practice, uh, to see how long it would take to get us into life jackets. And then that was over with and, of course, uh, by the somebody, one of the other children came and explained what had been going on. So that was fine, and then I don't recall if it was the same day or not, but the...but the next big episode was when they turned on the fire hoses and, uh, were hosing everything down, and we were told to be up on deck, and, uh, the fire hoses went, my God, the f-, the boat's on fire, and now what, and my life jacket isn't on yet, and, uh if it's on, I don't know how to close it and th-, and that sort of thing, so that was very exciting.

00:48:41

Uh, the, um, the trip itself, uh, was, uh, mainly, um, uh, going to bed at night, taking a bath with someone else in the bathtub, and coming up in the mornings, uh, ,uh, and as I said earlier, uh, that, um, uh, eating, uh, for me was, uh, not much because I had no idea that I was allowed to order anything I wanted, and so what I lived on was what was on the table, which was rolls and butter and fruit, and somebody always managed to bring me a glass of milk. And at lunchtime it was maybe a bowl of soup or something like that, and, uh, then I had fruit, and milk, and, uh, dinner the same thing, and I saw all these people eating all this wonderful food sitting around me, and I said, well, I guess that we children weren't supposed to have it. I had absolutely no idea, uh, that this was going, that you could order what you wanted, and then I heard the other kids talking about what wonderful food they've been eating and enjoying it and everything, and I thought, well, maybe there was a reason why I wasn't getting it, nobody was bringing me anything. So I just, uh, put, uh, did that, and, of course, the good part about that was, is that I was the only one, I think, that wasn't really seasick. I was never seasick.

MOV: 00:02:55

00:50:00

And then on the...on the...on the deck, we were told to come up on the deck and we would sit in the sun and we would be in little groups, and we'd have English lessons, and there was Mr. Kraus, and there was my good view of Mr. Kraus, uh, he, one time he...he was teaching my little group, and, um, then we would have teatime, and, oh, that was wonderful because there was cake and, uh, and, uh, something to drink, so if I was hungry, I filled up on...on the sweets, and, uh, um, then we would just sit down deck and play, and, uh, it was very

interesting 'cause the gypsies were the ones who were sleeping up on the deck. There was n-, the...the boat was crowded, it was full, and so the gypsies were very happy that they could, uh, at least be on deck and live on deck and all that.

00:50:49

And then one day the rumors went around amongst the kids saying that, uh, things had been stolen out of, uh, staterooms and out of suitcases and that, and, of course, immediately it was the gypsies' fault, and, uh, so then that...that was another taste of discrimination, and...and my feeling at that point was well, h-, well, unless they have proof, w-, you know, how can, I mean, we might as well as Jews be acc-, uh, also blamed for this.

00:51:17

Basically, uh, the...the...the...the life on boat, uh, except for the, uh, um, life jackets and the fire hoses, the next exci-, real big excitement was somewheres when we were out, on the outskirts, I believe, of Holland, and, uh, a German U-boat was sighted, and, uh, the boat became very, very silent and it seemed that they almost cut the engines, uh, to me, anyway, it seemed all of a sudden there was quiet. There was not the usual, uh, movement, sound, and, uh, uh, one of the youngsters, uh, who evidently understood English told the rest of the group that, uh, there was a German U-boat and we're going very quietly, and we hoped that we weren't going to get, uh, uh, [sighs] damaged, and, then, uh, after a while or so, uh, maybe an hour or so, I guess, everything was fine and thing started up and got noisy again, people started to be active, and we did, uh, mingle with the, uh, other people on the boat,

00:52:18

But, uh, and y-, it was, uh, uh, it was like, almost like the Tower of Babel because of all the languages, and for me it was sort of fun to see if I could listen and recognize anything that was being said in whatever language. And, uh, so I recognized a few things and there...there was quite a mixture, um, and, uh, but I did attune to English because my parents told me, "Be sure you listen to anything in English so that you learn English," and, uh, my...my, uh, my language skills at that time were "yes," "thank you," and "toilet," so [laughs], and th-, and, uh, of course then I was, as I said, we had English lessons on the boat, and we would sit around and, uh, have our English lessons and we've have free time, and then there'd be music, and I think there were movies; I'm not sure. And, uh, there was a specific bedtime for each age group.

MOV: 00:06:06

00:53:11

And, uh, then the next thing I...I remember, let's see, we passed Holland, and, uh, then we stopped in England, and, uh, but we were, we didn't get off the boat, we were kept on the

boat quietly, and, uh, I was very disappointed because, uh, I know there were some...some children whose, one or two parents were in England who came on board to...to visit, and I kept looking for my parents to come on...on board, and then some of them got mail, and of course I did not. Now, the funny thing is that, uh, being that we were coming over hush hush, so to speak, you know, without publicity or anything, supposedly the qu-, the Queen Mother of England was supposed to have come on the boat, because we were told, I was told that you curtsy and that's it, you know, when you see this specific woman. And all I remember is that a woman came on board, and I curtsied and I was given a doll, and the...the box on the...on the, name on the box for the doll was, uh, uh, Elizabeth. It was a doll with blonde hair, which I have given to my younger granddaughter. I have yet to find out from anyone else if they have any recollection of that. To me, that, uh, I, I'm...I'm...I'm not sure of it. This...this is not something that I can say, yes, that really happened. All I know is this woman came on board [laughs]. And then, uh, we were told also that they were putting on fresh water and fruit.

MOV:00:07:38

00:54:44

And then the next, uh, thing, uh, that I remember was getting into the harbor and seeing the Statue of Liberty, and if you look at the, uh, cover of the book, on which, of course, my picture is, but there we were, all running to the railing on one side to see the Statue of Liberty, which, uh, I cried, I mean, because my parents had told me all about the Statue of Liberty, and...and I just, uh, [sighs], I'm here, you know, that sort of feeling.

### MVI 0018

**I was gonna ask you, before you arrived, what you did know about the United States.**

00:55:19

Oh, well, first of all, I was very well versed on the globe of the world, and, uh, I...I knew all my countries and where they were and everything, and, of course, what I knew about the United States was that...that it was wonderful, you could make a, you can have good food to eat, and the people get along very well, and you'll be free, and, uh, that, uh, everything is very, very nice, and you...you have a lot of possibilities, you can go to school, you can make something of yourself, uh, you can follow your dream, in other words. If you have a goal, you...you work for it. And so, uh, uh, uh, most of the children who came over on the boat, I think, especially the older ones, were quite well versed about the world. I mean, they knew more about just Vienna [chuckles], they knew about the...the world, and, of course, being in Vienna, you had people from all over the world walking on the streets.

MOV: 00:00:58

00:56:14

So to me, uh, I knew that if I come to the United States, I would be seeing the Statue of Liberty, and, uh, that, uh, I would see buses and cars, and people actually owned cars, they didn't have to go on foot or public transportation, uh, the o-, and...and yes, they did have motorcycles, which I hate, and I hate them to this day, uh, and, uh, but, uh, but there would be freedom. And, uh, later on in life that was quite a shocker, because when I moved to Detroit and the signs were up, no Jews or...or colored allowed on this beach or this subdivision, you know, that was quite a shock. So, uh, I...I, it was not that I was not familiar with the United States. In fact, I even knew a little bit about their laws, but, uh, I, um, uh, I didn't speak English, I mean, and, uh, except what was taught to me on the...on the boat up to that time.

**Helga, while you were on the boat...**

Mm-hmm.

**...do you remember if you and the other kids were told where you would be going once you arrived in the United States?**

**MVI 0019**

00:57:23

I don't remember that. All I know is that when we got there, we were told to stay on boat, and, uh, then, uh, uh, we had to wait while everybody got off, and then we were told to get on buses. And there were two buses, and I was thrilled to get on the bus because public transportation, I mean, no one, very few owned cars, and transportation was your feet or public transportation, the streetcar, or, uh, you know, if somebody gave you a ride, that was, uh, or motorcycles and stuff like that. Well, we used feet and public transportation [chuckles]. So, uh, but I had absolutely no idea, but, uh, it was not until later on that I found out that there were two newspaper people there who had taken, and one of articles, uh, that I really found interesting, that they were clean [chuckles]. I don't know if you remember reading that little section.

**Right. It sounds like they didn't expect the kids to look...**

Yes, yes, exactly.

**...the way you kids looked.**

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Yes.

**Very interesting.**

Yeah.

**So let's move on to the summer camp. Oh, you know, there's one thing I meant to ask you earlier. Did you know any of the other children?**

00:58:41

No. No. I had absolutely no knowledge of them, and, uh, uh, really wasn't aware of what their backgrounds were either, uh, and when we were taken to the camp, uh, I was delighted because, uh, it, the...the surrounding area, uh, uh, around the camp was a lot like Vienna, grass and trees, and this is what I was used to, and, um, oh, I was used to pu-, uh, apartment building living, but, uh, you know, I...I was glad to see in my imagination that this is a continuation of having grass and trees on the avenues, and, uh, and I pictured the rest of America being like that. It was clean, it was green, the air smelled good, and it was a beautiful building, and, uh, uh, I got off the bus, and, uh, to my surprise there was my cousin greeting me there. She had come from wherever she was living at that time to greet me, and she was gonna spend some time with me, but it turned out that we were going to get a bus ride, to be taken around, uh, just as a treat, and dumb me, uh, I wanted the bus ride, and I left her there and she waited for me, poor thing, for several hours until the bus returned, and then she said, "Well, I have to go now, be-, to catch my bus to go home and, uh, uh, and goodbye," you know, uh, and that was it. Uh, but the bus ride, I loved it, it was wonderful, and I loved seeing the vicinity. It was very beautiful at that time.

**Did you know you had a cousin in America?**

01:00:19

Yes, um, uh, my cousin Eugene Lukas and my cousin Elizabeth, um, he was a...a theoretical mathematician, very well known all over, and she had written one of the textbooks for the schools in Vienna, and, uh, she was, uh, very well certified and also taught, uh, many subjects, and, um, uh, Einstein, uh, talked to, uh, the President and to the people in Washington, DC that Eugene, uh, would be a very valuable asset to the United States. And through him, uh, uh, Elizabeth and Eugene were married in 1935, and I think they left around 1936 or '37. He left first and then she came after him, and they lived in Washington, DC, not qu-, no, they lived afterwards in Washington, DC after I came here, but, uh, he taught, uh, and worked for the government all over the United States, also in California, um, I can't think of the place right now, and then she taught some of the soldiers, uh, certain subjects and, uh,

he also taught in [inaudible], Kentucky and then they landed up in the United St-, in, uh, Washington, DC, excuse me, uh, working for the government. So I knew she was here, and, um, the people that saved my father's life, who finally gave him an affidavit but wouldn't give one for my mother, were distant cousins, also Weiszses, who lived in New York, and, uh, so that's how my father managed to come out eventually.

**Right. And your father came through Italy, is that correct?**

**MVI 0020**

01:02:05

Yes, uh-huh. Now we have the Italian side of the family, which was his, uh, one of his brothers, uh, who had, uh, four children and the wife, and, um, uh, they were saved by the nuns. Uh, they went into hiding by becoming gardeners and, uh, laborers, uh, at the convent, and, uh, one of the daughters was saved by a friend. Uh, the nuns told 'em to put crosses on and to be sure to cross themselves when come to church, and so that they wouldn't get into trouble.

**Right. Now, going back to the summer camp again, once again let me ask you...**

Mm-hmm.

**...what memories you have of either of the Krauses at the camp.**

**MVI 0021**

01:02:57

Krauses at the camp, again, uh, very little of Eleanor to my knowledge, and when I did see her, I, uh, again, it was sort of a transfer of parental love, you know, and you couldn't help it because she just was so sweet, and, uh, she seemed to be sort of, uh, on the quiet side and, uh, very gentle, and, uh, uh, I enjoyed being near her whenever it was possible. Every so often she was with a group and I'd sort of wander over there, you know, and sort of, but she was...she was with a different group and I was not part of that group, you know, uh, there was too much in grouping [chuckles], grouping going on at that time, you know, age group. Uh, that bothered me quite a bit, uh, because I was a little bit more mature than my age group was at the time, so...

01:03:47

So Inga and I stuck together, and, uh, they both taught English. They took turns to, giving us English lessons in groups, you know, small groups, and, uh, so that's how I remember her. I

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remember her, she was there, I saw her frequently, but really not where I can say I.... I don't remember giving her a hug or shaking hands with her, and I know she did that, you know, uh, and, uh, they both made sure that everyone got attention. I'm, I really have to say that they were just fabulous. I don't think there was a child that they didn't know well. I mean, you felt that if you had a conversation with them, they knew you inside out, you know, they knew enough about it, and that's rare, you know, I mean, that's, uh, yeah, it...it...it was wonderful. I just couldn't help thinking, I'm gonna live with them until my parents come. This was my feeling. And Inga felt the same way.

**Now Inga, was she somebody you had gotten to know on the ship?**

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**She was your bunk mate?**

01:04:46

Uh, no, I don't know if she was my bunk mate or not. She was my bunk mate when we went to the camp, uh, even if she w-, uh, I don't know if she was even then, 'cause I think there were two of us to a room, but she might have been next door or near, anyway, but somehow or other we gravitated to each other. I guess we had similar feelings. Uh, the testing left us sort of, uh, on the numb side, uh, always fearing we're gonna have a test and then we'll flunk and we'll get sent back or something like that. So, um, uh, so, uh, uh, but we had no one to discuss that with, uh, you know, no one asked us.

**And I know that during the course of the summer, or as that summer came to an end...**

Mm-hmm.

**...a number of the kids were reunited with either parents or relatives.**

Mm-hmm.

**MVI 0022**

**Tell me about your memories of that period for you as that summer came to an end.**

01:05:44

Uh, w-, I jus-, for me the summer was just going on. I mean, I just felt this...this was it, there...there was the, it was the moment, I was, this was a moment; however, pretty soon my parents would be with me, I'd be reunited with 'em, and that's sort of as far as it went. And

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then, uh, um, all of a sudden, uh, towards, uh, July, uh, one or two kids seemed to...to go Uh, in my recollection, it didn't seem too many went, uh, qui-, it seemed that they all went almost at the same time, within the same week. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. And as I said, uh, there was no warning until the time came. It was quite sudden. I remember Inga crying and I was comforting her, and I gave her a letter and a picture of me, and...and she gave me something of hers, and that was the last time we saw each other until the reunion [chuckles], but we had s-, in many ways we had, uh, which I didn't find out until the reunion, that she had suffered from the same feelings with the testing and, uh, uh, some of the things that went on. Uh, we had similar feelings. We really could have used psychiatric counseling at that, but of course it wasn't done that much at that time, you know. But I...I think the people did the best that they could under the circumstances, and I'm grateful.

### **Helga, did you know during the summer that your father was okay?**

MOV:00:01:39

01:07:19

Yes, because he was, uh, I didn't know if he was o-, in Italy or not, uh, um, because I knew he was out o-, all...all I know is he was out of that concentration camp and to me, that was fine [chuckles], and, uh, I was assured that he would be getting out of Vienna and that he would be coming to the United States, and then once here, he would continue to work to get my mother out. So, um, as I said, everything was fine until the day came when we took photographs, and I thought, well, we're just being photographed, and, uh, the, uh, next thing I know, I'm...I'm...I'm off and running to, in a car [laughs], uh, to, uh, New York, with, uh, uh, Mr. and Mrs. Leshin.

### **And they were who?**

MOV: 00:02:28

01:08:07

Debbie and Abraham Leshin, L-e-s-h-i-n. And they lived in a, an apartment, and, um, they, uh, in my eyes they seemed old, but I'm sure they weren't more than perhaps forty or something like that. They were childless, and, um, uh, never had a child before so, uh, uh, they gave me good care, except that when I tried to tell them what happened, uh, to the family in Europe, they told me that I was making up stories, and that I should forget it, and that if my parents were punished, it's probably because they did something bad against the government, and I shouldn't talk about it any more, and I should, uh, concentrate on becoming an American. And I said, well, I did want to become an American, certainly we all did, because my father always said when in Rome, you do as the Romans do, you know, and you learn the language and you...you follow the laws and you do, and so th-, I think this was instilled in all fifty, at least all the ones that I spoke with after the reunion. Uh, we were all

anxious to become Americans and to learn the American ways as fast as possible.

01:09:21

And then I was enrolled in P.S. 80, and, um, I was told, uh, don't speak German and, uh, by my foster parents, who spoke only English, and, uh, learn to communicate by hand signals and body language, and [chuckles], and eventually, uh, English came fast to me afterwards, once I entered school. And, um, the thing that we all experienced, from what I understand after the reunion we had, that we were all put back a grade in school, that, and, uh, of course I was bored in school and I felt the kids were dumb [laughs]. I mean, you talk to some of them, they...they didn't know what was outside their city or their street, you know, and oh, there's another world? Oh, really? [laughs] And, uh, knew all about cars, which I didn't care about at all. I mean, I didn't think it was important to know whether it was a Dodge or a Plymouth, you know. And, uh, uh, they were interested in, uh, I thought a lot of foolishness and I was very serious, so I...I was the outsider throughout school.

**Do you remember at all, or did you ever find out later, how that couple in New York came to take you as their foster child?**

**MVI 0023**

01:10:40

I don't know. I think that the, it was advertised, uh, somehow, uh, in the Jewish papers. Uh, it was all done very quietly. I know everything had to be done very quietly. So I'm not sure. And I thought that perhaps it went out by word of mouth, you know, rabbis and...and clubs and things like that, and, uh, uh, I...I really, you know, I never paid much attention to that. Uh....

**And how long did you live with them?**

01:11:12

Well, let's see. They picked me up in August, uh, I think it was, of, uh, 1990, uh, 1939, and, um, my dad, hmm, must have arrived sometime towards the end of, um, [pauses] sometime in '40, uh, because I know we moved to Detroit, excuse me, in, uh, sometime in '40, la-, the end of '40, early '41, that we were then moved by, I don't know whether it was the [inaudible] or the [inaudible], one of the Jewish communities, because at that time Detroit was beginning to pick up from the, um, Depression, you know, things were beginning to move.

**So it's not as if you had relatives in Detroit. That's not the reason...?**

01:12:05

Helga Milberg

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Yes, I did. I mean, as a matter of fact, I did. My, uh, my father's sister and her family.... Oh, I'm sorry. You know, my father's sister and her family, the oldest sister, came, was, uh, rescued through some other relatives and were in New York, living in New York, but were not able to take me because they were living with a family. And then they were moved – I found this out later from my father – then they were moved by the, one of the Jewish groups to Detroit, but the reason really that we came to Detroit was that was a good opening to, there was more of a chance of finding employment. My dad wanted to find employment; he didn't care what it was, whether it was janitorial or anything. Uh, he wanted to save my mother. And so Detroit sounded good to him and it just so happened that his sister and her family were already in Detroit by that time.

**Now I know from looking at the documents that you...**

Mm-hmm.

**...donated...**

Mm-hmm.

**...to the museum in Philadelphia. I've seen some of the school reports and...**

Mm-hmm.

**...letters, and it seemed clear from one of those documents...**

Mm-hmm.

**...that the school knew about your mother. There's a reference, I believe, a very lovely note from a teacher who says to your father, I hope you're successful in bringing your wife over.**

**MVI 0024**

That must have been after we were in Detroit.

Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

**So I guess the question for you, Helga, is during that period, what did you know about your mother's status?**

Helga Milberg

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01:13:55

Well, unfortunately, my father, we, once we came to Detroit.... Okay, once we came to Detroit, uh, my father finally found employment as a caretaker in a Jewish cemetery, and it was a B'nai David cemetery, and it was c-, uh, a part of the B'nai David synagogue, um, and the synagogue association, and the deal that he had from them, well, what had happened is he...he met one of the board members, uh, there at that time and he promised to sign an affidavit for my mother, and the, he, they needed to have someone who knew, uh, agriculture and flora and fauna and stuff like that, and would he be interested in becoming a caretaker in the cemetery. They would give us a house to live in, and, uh, there would be a telephone in the house, but, uh, it was primarily to let him know he had to dig a grave, things like that, and so he accepted the job, and we moved into the cemetery with the understanding that this man was also going to give him an affidavit for my mother, and the way he was going to pay my father's, my...my father was gonna pay him for the affidavit – believe it or not, he wanted to pay for it – was that my father would come and landscape his home garden, and, uh, my father was very qualified in that, too. In fact, he has some medals from the Viennese government in that sort of stuff; I have there here. Uh, he made a...a beautiful rock garden for, uh, for...for him and it was a showcase of, uh, the neighborhood, and that was to repay him for offering to give my mother an affidavit. So my father kept telling me, “Well, it shouldn't be long now, it shouldn't be long now, all I have to do is save up the money for the ship's ticket.”

01:15:44

And so we lived in the cemetery, and I was surrounded by graves, uh, and, um, I ha-, I won't go into the details of the house itself because it was pretty dilapidated and rat-infested, but, uh, um, the, he...he did the gardening for this man as well as took care of the cemetery, and saved up, uh, his wages, and he tried to, he...he immediately also went to night school to...to be sure he knew English well, and got all his credentials and went about trying to improve his job, uh, situation, and he couldn't because he had the swastika on his passport so he was considered a German alien, uh, and he might be dangerous, you know, so they couldn't hire him, so we had to stay in the cemetery.

MOV: 00:02:55

01:16:31

But he kept telling me, “It won't be long now, it won't be long now, your mother's coming, your mother's coming,” and on a weekly basis he went and always sent a couple of dollars to Europe for her to.... Meanwhile, she was in hiding with a...a friend, and, um, uh, she w-, he kept telling her evidently the same thing from the letters that I'm reading now, and she says, “How come you're always telling me, you know, it's happening, it's happening?” Well, then the papers started to come. Well, the United States government and the German government

were in cahoots, because, uh, if the, she finally got the papers to suit the Germans, then the Americans decided they had to be changed to something else, and this kept going back and fo-, it was yo-yo. And, uh, finally, uh, uh, uh, we thought that she was really coming, and the man backed out and said he wouldn't sign the affidavit. And instead they gave me a concert grand piano. So the concert grand piano was my mother.

01:17:30

So, uh, then my dad had to find someone else to sign an affidavit, which he finally found, and he sent the a-, and so we sent everything off to the, uh, organization in New York. He sent a letter to my mother, a telegram, saying that the ticket is on its way, the money is on its way, it won't be long now, and he came home and he said to me, uh, um, you know, "It won't be long now, your mother'll be here," and this, you know, this is, I've been hearing this for so long, it was beginning to sound like a song, you know. So, uh, then he showed me the papers, uh, that he had, uh, gotten everything in order that's being sent to New York, and uh, um, and we're waiting and waiting and waiting and nothing's happening, and she's saying she isn't getting any papers and he evidently doesn't love her any more and probably found another one, which, of course, wasn't true, and before he could respond to that, Japan bombed, uh, Hawaii, and we were in the war, and that was the last thing.

01:18:30

Well, then it turned out, after the war, that, um, the person who was supposed to send my mother's, uh, ship's tickets to her had put the papers in her drawer and had gone on vacation and had forgotten all about them. So after the war he got back the two hundred dollar check for the ship ticket, and, uh, the papers, and, uh, that took care of my mother, and then that was it.

So that as far as I was concerned, I used to go to school every day and the teachers would say, "Well, have you heard from your mother and when is she coming?" and I would tell 'em the same story, you know, and then, uh, it...it, that was why, but not knowing it, you know, I took my father's word for it, so, uh, it was, uh, there was more involved which, you know, I won't go into, but...

**Did you not learn until after the war what had happened to your mother?**

MOV: 00:05:50

01:19:27

Well, uh, we, uh, we, uh, um, my dad, uh, uh, well, yeah, he got news from his brother in Italy that all the other relatives had been, uh, killed except for my mother's youngest brother, uh, who had survived the concentration camps, and, uh, the cousin who was the offspring of my father's brother and my mother's sister, and he and I were going to, we swore we would

get married. This was, uh, because he lived in Hungary and I was, we visited Hungary every summer, we spent together as children, and we were determined we were going to get married and this was my idea when I came over here, and when we corresponded. But, uh, when after the war my dad immediately contacted all the organizations in Europe, and he was told that she never registered in the f-, all of the people that came out of the con-, she did not, and they...they gave a concentration camp that they thought she was sent to, and th-, uh, and of course he kept trying to find out more information, which was never gotten.

MOV: 00:06:55

01:20:33

And I really did not find out her fate until, uh, I moved out here, and at the One Thousand Children first meeting, I met a woman from Germany, and I told her, I said, "You know, I...I have no closing. I don't know where to send my thoughts, and I...I have no, y-, would know, I'm speaking to the trees and to the stars in the sky, but I have no closing." And she said, uh, she gave me, uh, uh, an e-mail address in Germany, and, uh, I don't know, did you see the letter? Yeah. So you know what happened to her and where she was sent. So...so now I can't stand looking at railroad tracks. But, um, the, um, uh, that's when I found out, finally, really, I could send my thoughts to a certain area and, uh, I don't know if you can call it cl, uh, if it would be closure, but, you know, it's a place to...to send. And my father, who had many offers of marriage, th-, never, and of course he swore to me that he and I would never be separated again, except in death, of course. But by the time I was twenty-one, I was an orphan.

### MVI 0025

**Helga, once you had moved to Detroit and were growing up, did you have any ongoing contact with the Krauses?**

Yes, I did, because, uh....

**Tell me about that.**

01:22:04

...um, I think you have a l-, you probably saw a letter, one of the last letters he sent me. Um, I...I, um, corresponded, I would say, every one or two months, and he always answered. And, uh, uh, one of the most memorable letters was I was complaining to him that I was studying the piano, and I was al-, also had gotten a scholarship for voice, uh, at the Detroit Institute of Musical Arts. I was studying, uh, um, voice with Mr. Protheroe, who had been an opera star at that time and was willing to give me a partial scholarship, and, uh, I to-, told him that, uh, some of the songs that you hear on the radio, I can't stand them, and the music sounds like cat

wailing to me, uh, it was just awful, and, uh, how can they take these, uh, uh, Russian songs, because they have no, uh, trademark or, you know, in Russia, no protection, how can they take those songs and...and change the notes and change the beat and call it their own music, you know, uh, how come you can call a piece of music that you write folk music when it really isn't, you know, folk music is something that's passed down, uh, by mouth.

01:23:14

And, uh, so, uh, he was trying to encourage me, and he wrote me this lovely letter that you saw at the museum, and unfortunately, it's the only one that survived because, uh, in later years I had moved to a new home and all the stuff was in the basement. Um, I had just given birth to a second child at that time and we had a flood, and so everything in that basement, um, and unfortunately a lot of papers went thataway. But, um, uh, I would say I corresponded with him for about [smacks lips] a good five years...

MOV: 0:01:56

... and, um, one of the things I...I feel guilty about is that I never mentioned to him what a hard time my dad was having in trying to get my mother over, because I found out later at the first Fifty reunion that he had helped a number of other children get the, a parent out, you know, and so, of course, that was another thing that I carry around with me, the guilt of not having spoken out and, uh, my father said, "Don't complain, be glad with what you have and n-, so, you know, don't complain."

01:24:23

So [laughs], so that was the story of that, but the...the memories in general of...of Gilbert and Eleanor was, uh, almost a parent, uh, relationship for me, and, uh, what contact I had with her close up or even at a distance, I...I, it always gave me a good feeling, whether it was, uh, Gilbert or Eleanor. And, uh, I can still see them in front of me. I mean, I...I can look at you but I see them, you know, here, uh, and he smiled just like that, as a matter of fact [laughs], even though you're an in-law, [laughs] you know, sort of [laughs].

**I'm not related, though. There is a memory that some of the other kids have shared with me of her...**

Uh-huh.

**...her fingernails, her red polished fingernails.**

Really.

**Yeah. A couple of the women I've talked to have said, Henny mentioned this, I had never**

**seen red polish.**

Oh, my mother always had red polished nails [laughs].

**MVI 0026**

Interesting, because, uh, that...that...that, the last thing, uh, all throughout my life I've paid very little attention to what women were wearing, until I became older, nothing else to do, you know [laughs]. Once you retire, you know, [laughs] you look for things to keep you amused [laughs]. But, uh, that was, uh, something I never paid much attention to, you know, I was...I was always looking at faces and listening to what they had to say, uh, rather than what they were wearing at any particular time.

**You know, I only have a couple of more questions.**

Sure.

**But one thing I do want to ask you, and I've been asking this of the others, is as you were raising your kids, and then having grandchildren, is this a story that they have grown up with?**

01:26:18

Absolutely. Absolutely. There's a, uh, I want them to know because they have to cope in this world, and if you don't have the tools, you can't cope. And if you're always sheltered, and then the bubble breaks, you're at a loss. So, uh, I, uh, from a very young age, I told them, so they all know. And they all gave permission for me to contribute everything to the museum. They have no problems with that.

**And I guess related to that, and this is completely everyone's opinion, there's no right or wrong answer, but I'm gonna ask it. Why do you think the Krauses did what they did?**

01:27:09

They listened, and, uh, I think they were more worldly. They were know, more knowledgeable about the world, and, uh, what happened is that, uh, there was a situation here amongst our own people, make no waves. It was bad enough to have an anti-Semitic State Department, uh, and then we had Father Coughlin from, uh, Detroit, and, uh, uh, so, uh, I think that, uh, he was, uh, disgusted. Uh, they were disgusted. And I think that it was just the goodness of their heart and the knowledge of some, that something needs to be done other than saving the Lippizaner horses, you know, or the...the...the dogs from England, uh, that, uh, um, human lives are at stake. And, uh, of course you know the study, was it



Harvard that wanted the study to find out how many of us were dope addicts or got into crime and all that, what we all developed into [laughs]?

MOV: 00:02:40

01:28:10

This was their greatest concern, you know [laughs]. Yeah, I think...I think it was, um, I will use a German term, which is also Yiddish, menschen. They were humans, they were humanists, you know, they, uh, they...they were above the average, uh, in their, um, awareness of what's going on in the world. And they weren't afraid. A rare couple indeed. Wonderful, wonderful people. I owe them my life.

**I've asked you a lot of questions.**

That's all right.

**I'm wondering if there's anything that I haven't asked that has been on your mind about this incredible episode in your life that you'd like to add.**

01:29:15

Well, it's made me in many ways, uh, I swore, they were a good example for me, and I swore that if I survived and I was able to, that I would spend my life devoted to helping other people. Uh, and it was, it came partly from my own parents, and my own family, uh, my relatives, uh, those that lived and those that perished, uh, and then was, oh, I-, can I say supported by the example that, uh, Eleanor and Gilbert Kraus presented to me. Uh, as an adult I can, you know, I can see what an impact it made on me. The experience itself I could have done without, I think, uh, certainly the terrible parts of it.

01:30:07

Having lived in Vienna was a treat. Having, uh, Maria Montessori as my first teacher was certainly a blessing. Having the first Viennese pediatrician was a blessing. Having been grow, growing up in Vienna and having part education in Europe for me was a blessing. Uh, and, um, having come to this country, to me I look upon it as a melting pot of people, and I think it's so rich, and there's so much one can do really to really enjoy life. It's such a shame that, uh, we're all chewing at each other instead of really enjoying each other and getting to know each other, you know, 'cause everyone has something to offer, certainly. And, uh, again, my...my family, my...my parents and, uh, Gilbert and Eleanor are the ones that, uh, um, I admire [laughs]. That and, um, Lily Pons, who I had hoped I would in singing, you know. I don't know if you've ever heard Lily Pons, but, uh, her voice was heavenly [laughs].

**And you've got how many children and how many grandchildren?**

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Uh, uh, I originally had three boys, and I have two sons, and two wonderful daughter-in-laws, and I have four grandchildren and I just became a great-grandmother in, uh, May.

**Mazeltov.**

Thank you. [chuckles] I didn't think I was gonna live long enough for that, but evidently it was meant to be [chuckles]. So I intend to enjoy.

01:31:45

And the other thing I had is wonderful friends. I, uh, uh, right...right on from childhood here in the United States, I developed wonderful, wonderful friends, and it's a melting pot of friends. I mean, they come from all over, and all faiths, and, uh, they've stood by me and I've tried to stand by them, and now I'm most dependent on my friends, I'm mostly blessed to have 'em. So, it's...it's been a rich life, but it's also been a very sad life. Hope springs eternal. We keep hoping for the best.

**Well, I thank you for sharing it.**

Well, I thank you, uh, for taking an interest.

**[discussion about Helga possibly singing] We might ask her to sing? 2<sup>nd</sup> voice: Yeah.**

No, I can't. I don't have a voice left [laughs].

**No?**

No, no!

**2<sup>nd</sup> voice: But do you remember some of the lyrics of a beautiful song?**

**MVI 0027**

01:32:54

Well, the most, uh, wonderful for me is a romantic song, which is [speaks in German], and I really can't sing it, but it's, uh, in English it's called "Yours Is My Heart Alone," and it comes from an opera, uh, an operetta, I th-, eve-, no, it's an opera, actually, and, um, when my present husband proposed to me, um, I sang it for him, but, uh, that was forty-nine years ago, so...so I can't, uh – oh, I'm sorry, I thought the filming was off. Forgive me [laughs]. And, uh, uh, it was forty-nine years ago, so, uh, and, uh, and, uh, my seventieth birthday he made a

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recording of someone else singing it in English and in German. So that was one of my, uh, favorite songs, "Yours Is My Heart Alone."

**And repeat again some of the German that you remember from the song.**

01:33:50

[says "yours is my heart alone" in German] Of course, some of the, uh, I'm a romantic, I'm Leo the lion, and so, uh, my, the music that I, I mean, I teach everything, but, uh, and I learned to play most everything, uh, but my favorite were the romantic composers, uh, and, um, those are the ones that, uh, that and, of course, the light music, the operettas, Franz Lehar, Johann Strauss, and, uh, things like that. So....

**2<sup>nd</sup> voice: So you don't wanna take just a little crack at it?**

No, I...I really, no, I re-, I re-, I would love, to, I would, I would love to sing for you and I wish I had, uh, one of the recordings I made when I was, uh, twenty-three, but I think I gave that to one of my kids, so I no, I...I no longer have that one.

**There is a recording?**

Just one. I made a...I made a re-, one recording, uh....

**When you were in your twenties?**

Mm-hmm.

**And you think one of your kids has it?**

I...I think one of my kids has it or it got caught in the flood, I'm not sure.

**Okay.**

01:34:59

It was a, it was, uh, just made in one of these booths you step into and it's, I...I, um, and, uh, I did group singing. I belonged to several...

**Yeah.**

**MVI 0028**

...singing societies and I was very, I was the youngest soprano with the [chuckles], the ladies' singing society. I was twelve years old, I was the youngest soprano [laughs] at the time.

**Wow. Would you mind asking your kids?**

I will...I will ask, uh, my son to see if...if he has it and if it's, happens to be around, but I'm not sure whether the oldest boy has it or not or whether it's, uh, um, uh, gone with the flood [laughs].

**You mentioned to me how much you love Strauss.**

Mm-hmm.

**Do you have a favorite Strauss...?**

01:35:47

Oh, "The Blue Danube." I mean, how can you [laughs], and then "Artist's Life," and...and, um, uh, most of...most of his waltzes, uh, I...I enjoy. Of course, I lived near the, the [inaudible] wasn't too far away from, the bridge that goes over the blue Danube canal, and we used to walk the, um, the banks, you know, which were green at that time, and, uh, we used to, my dad showed me where the chamomile flowers grow, which gives you the chamomile tea, which at that time was safe to pick because it wasn't contaminated [laughs], you know.

MOV: 00:01:14

01:36:23

And, uh, we used to go to the Prater and, oh, and take lots of walks and I would fall and then I'd get bloody knees because the, uh, uh, the sidewalk was covered with, um, um, you know, it's left over when you burn the coal, uh, what do you call that, I forgot the name already, um, but anyhow, that's, uh, so both of my knees were always red, and he was tall, and took big steps, and there I'd be, holding my hand up, holding onto him and walking, and don't you know it, there I am, stumbling over one of those things, and, oh, there's a bloody knee and come home with bloody knees every time [laughs] we took a walk [laughs]. And, uh, at the, and then there was [inaudible], you know, the, you've been there, so....

**Was the ferris wheel already out there?**

01:37:12

Oh, yes, the Reisenrad. Yes. Oh, yes, but you know, uh, I didn't get to go on it until 1962 or '63, when, uh, my husband went for a scientific convention, uh, and, uh, we stopped in Vienna because I wanted to show him what Vienna looked like, which wasn't the same

Vienna, of course. And of course, I'm seeing it through children's eyes, and so I went on the [inaudible] with him and I said, oh, I remember that now, they must taken me because I remember se-, the view from the top, you know, and, uh, the [inaudible] was beautiful. I think it's been made into a subdivision now, I don't know. Haven't been there since then. That was enough for me, '62 and '63 was enough to visit, uh... He had been asked to come to Germany to give some lectures and, uh, uh, he refused and I did, too. I said, "You can go. I won't."

**He was a scientific researcher, yes?**

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**In what field?**

Chemistry, ec-, ec-, and glass.

**And you met where?**

Well, when I was teaching, uh, one of the parents of one of the children introduced me. It was a blind date. [chuckles] He was an associate of her husband's and they worked for Ford Motor Company. He was a senior research scientist there at the time.

**Okay.**

I will let the children know. I will...I will call them.

**Yeah, if there's a chance....**

And, um, if you don't get an e-mail from me or, feel free to e-mail me any time, by the way.

**We will.**

And, uh, I hope I didn't ramble too much for you.

**Oh, no. No. You were absolutely perfect.**

[end of recording]