

Jews not wanted-- if you've gone through the main exhibit, you would see that on benches here. And I would stand on those lines because all the stores had lines already that you had to queue up on for rare items, like coffee. And coffee was hard to get. And they were selling it with an eighth or a quarter pound. And I would stand on enough different lines on any afternoon to come home with a pound of coffee because I had an ill grandmother. And the only thing she enjoyed was a pound-- a cup of coffee.

So to get a pound, you go to four different places at least.

At least.

At least, yeah.

At least. And my mother never knew where I was. But I did get home every night.

But you were out procuring, as you put it, during that time. So after all this time, your mother is making these preparations. On June 9, 1939, which was seven months after Kristallnacht in November of '38, your family boards a train, and you begin your journey to Kenya. Tell us what you can about-- not only about the trip, but what you recall yourself or from what you learned later from your parents, what that trip was like, to leave Germany and head for an entirely new world, literally.

To the children, to me, I just followed the crowd. I had very little emotional attachment to anything other than a family. We were not allowed to have friends. We couldn't have friends because that was dangerous. So we know that the departure from the railroad station in Cologne was a very, very sad situation because we had to leave all my mother's aunts and uncles, to whom we were very attached.

It was a pretty large extended family.

Yes. We had to leave them behind. My grandparents and my other sick grandmother was carried onto the train. She went with us. But we couldn't take all the aunts and uncles. And it was very, very sad.

We traveled by train. And we were petrified. We were not allowed to speak because there were Nazis on the train. But once we crossed the border into Switzerland, my mother said, now you can speak a little. And we went from Cologne, via Switzerland, to Italy. And we boarded the German boat in Genoa. And it took two weeks to get to Kenya on a German boat on--

It is amazing. On that German boat, they served us kosher food.

But it was a German boat?

It was a German boat that was going to Tanganyika, which was a German colony at that time. And some of the passengers on that boat were carrier pigeons that were going to Africa.

To be used for what purpose?

To fly back for information.

For Information, a communications form during the war.

Yeah.

Your mother-- you had a grandmother with you who had the broken ankle. But you also had a grandmother who was very ill.

Very ill, yes.

Very ill.

She had cancer. And we left Germany in '39. I think she lived until '41 in Kenya.

So she made it to Kenya?

Yes. And we had an aunt and uncle, my mother's sister and brother, who lived in Holland, who walked onto a boat to Kenya on May 10, 1940. That's when Hitler walked into Holland.

Right.

And had they not gotten on that boat, they would never have gotten out. We had no idea where they were until about two weeks later. They showed up on the farm in Kenya. They just got out and got onto that boat and were lucky to get out.

What about your father? Your mother's taken your grandparents, you, your sister. You've gone to Genoa. You're now boarding the ship to go to Kenya. Your father, where was he at this point?

He was in Kenya already.

So he'd already made it by then?

He'd already-- we followed in June. He got there at the end of May. He found a house for us to live. And he had prepared everything for us for when we arrived. And he had to find accommodations for 17 people, old and young.

And we're going to come back to that in a minute. Jill had a very interesting-- your sister had a very interesting experience on the boat that was quite frightening in its own right. And tell us a-- you know what I'm asking about.

About her singing.

About her singing-- tell us about this.

My sister has a good voice. And she always-- she was always singing. And the sailors on the boat asked her to sing, and the captain heard it.

The German captain.

The German captain heard it. And he asked her to sing. And my mother was terrified that she would start singing Hebrew songs. She was five years old, and you couldn't tell her what to sing. She sang what she knew. But she didn't. She sang German songs. And we were saved.

So the captain and the crew, they loved hearing her sing these German.

She was singing for them all the time.

Inge, there is a Torah at a synagogue in Silver Spring that has particular meaning to you. Will you share that with us?

That is a Torah that my mother's uncles bought somewhere in Germany after Crystal Night. And he said to us, you're going into Africa. We don't know whether they have synagogues or not. But you need a Torah. And he said, take this along. And we took it along.

We used it in Africa. We had services on the farm. And we brought it to America. We found out that it's about 150 years

old. But they could date it, but we still have not found out where it originated from.

But it has traveled with you through that whole time.

It's travelled with us the entire time. We had it in Kenya. We had it in Vineland, where we lived. And we brought it here. And now it's in the Kemp Mill synagogue.

Inge, you and your family arrived in June of 1939 in Kenya to begin what would be almost a 10 year-- eight year stay, I believe, in Kenya. In September of 1939, of course, is when Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. So soon after you got to Kenya, war broke out in Europe. And you would spend those war years in Kenya living in a British colony.

So you have fled the Nazis to go to a British colony. How were you treated? What was the greeting for you in Kenya as Jewish refugees from Germany?

Enemy aliens.

You were regarded as enemy aliens.

We were considered enemy aliens.

Because you were German.

Because we were German. That we were Jewish and that we were driven out of Germany didn't mean anything.

You were German citizens.

And we were interned on the farm. The men of the family had to volunteer their time as managers of the farms or plantations of the British colonials, who, of course, were called up to go to war. And the men had to go, not only manage their own farm, they had to take care of those too. So my father and uncles all had a farm to take care of. That was their-- that was their internment.

Taking care of the British farms for them, managing them while they were off at war.

Yeah.

What was life like for you there?

Well, we went-- I think within the first week, we were put to school.

Of course, you didn't speak English. And this is an English speaking colony.

Not a word. And most of these schools were boarding schools, and we were day students. And I was nine years old, 10 by now, and I must have been in fourth grade. And it was very, very degrading to me to go to school because they put me back in first grade.

I didn't understand a word of English. And I was determined to get back to my grade level. So within a few months, any time I-- the more I understood, the more they stepped me up. I went into second grade and to third grade, and then finally, I ended up at my grade level because by then-- children learn English very quickly if they have to.

And you had to.

We had to. We had no choice.

And how did those English school children treat you?

Oh, they hated us. They were mean. They were nasty. I really have to say that I really did not form any friendships until I reached the United States. I was never anywhere where children were friends. The British children were nasty, mean, and cruel. And we were not border-- we did not go to boarding school, so we were outsiders.

Just coming as day students.

Yes, coming as day students. But again, the law said we had to go to school, and we went to school.

I remember you telling me that soon after you arrived here, you speak nothing but German, quickly had to memorize-- you were forced to memorize Wadsworth's poem, "The Daffodils" and, I think, learn to sing God Save the Queen at the same time. So your father, of course, is managing not only the British farm, he's trying to build his own farm. But that's not where you were going to school. You were in Nairobi, in the capital.

We went to school in Nairobi. First, when the family moved onto the farm, I think my parents thought they would get us a tutor. And we tortured the tutor. She left after four weeks.

[LAUGHTER]

And so my parents said we had to go to school. So my mother moved close to a school, where we went for a little while. And then she moved to town with us, where we went. And my father stayed on the farm. And we went as-- we went as day students all the time we were in Kenya.

And while you were learning English, you were also learning to speak Swahili.

Yes.

Tell us about that.

That was an easy language to learn. It had no grammar. You just spoke it. And we were in the company of a lot of the local people.

Mostly in the farm?

Oh, on the farm. The farm was miles away from anything else except the local people that lived on the farm in their native huts.

The Kikuyu people.

The Kikuyu. And they had children. And they had-- and that's who we talked to. And little girls were never allowed to walk alone any distance. And we always had Kikuyu children trailing along with us. And of course, we learned their language.

Knowing that life for you was tough in the school, particularly because both your status as enemy aliens, Jewish on top of that, being mistreated by many of the school children, when you got to the farm, was that more like a refuge to you? What was that like on the farm? Because it was very rustic, no indoor plumbing.

Lonely.

Lonely, yep.

Lonely.

And you'd come from a place where, you described earlier, a very large home, a pretty well-to-do life. Life changed so dramatically for you.

Very. Very. But children adjust. I had books, and I had a lot-- my mother was wise enough to buy a lot of books. So I did a tremendous amount of reading. And somehow we managed.

Do you know, with war raging in Europe and, of course, the Holocaust underway, did your family know? Were they able to communicate at all with people in Germany, the family? Or did they know what was happening to Jews in Europe?

They knew that something was happening to Jews in Europe because of the news that was coming out. We also had relatives there and-- some uncles. And we would get occasional Red Cross telegrams or Red Cross letters. But they were far and few between, and then they stopped.

And if I remember right, one of your uncles or somebody in the family had a hand-cranked radio?

Yes. No, my uncle had a modern radio that worked on a car battery only. And it was a beautiful thing. But we weren't allowed to use it because we needed the juice from the battery to hear the war news. So we could never turn it on.

Except when he wanted to hear the war news.

At night, to hear the news.

So that kept you somewhat informed about what was going on. And you would, of course, remain in Kenya through the war. And then after the war-- I'm going to jump ahead a little bit because of time. But the risk that you had left behind, the danger, what you went through, you really didn't leave all that behind because then trouble began in Kenya.

In Kenya, yes. Right before we left, it was started as the Mau Mau uprising, where the local residents went up against the European oppressors and--

And principally the British?

The British. The British. And we were living in the Kenya Highlands, which was a beautiful area. And we could see Mount Kilimanjaro from our porch. And that's where the uprising started, where the natives would come in and kill all the Europeans. They'd just slaughter them.

And somehow we were lucky enough to leave Kenya about six months before the Mau Mau uprising. So we were actually twice blessed to be able to survive.

Inge, from the time when the war ended in April of 1945 to when you came to the US, was your family trying to get out of Kenya at that time? What made the decision to leave Kenya and come to the US, and how was that possible?

Well, we had relatives in the US--

You did? OK.

--who were willing to send us affidavits before. And they then sent us affidavits after the war. And there was definitely, at that time, no German quota. When the war broke out in '39, Kenya declared us enemy aliens. And when we left Kenya in '47, we left on a piece of paper, which was a passport, a plain piece of white paper, that stated we were stateless, but we were leaving Kenya under the German quota.

Considered stateless, not German, but on their quota.

Stateless, not German. Germany declared us stateless.

Right.

But we were entering America under the German quota. There were not many Germans that were coming to America then.

Right. So what was the trip to the United States like? You were 17 or 18 at the time.

Yeah. That took seven weeks. I've been up and down the coast of Africa from Cairo to Cape Town, with an intermission halfway in Mombasa for seven years. We continued on down south. We came on a cargo boat that stopped in every port. And it had 10 passengers. We were four of them.

And we went on land in every port. My parents were worried whether we would get back to the boat. We went with the sailors. And we'd become family.

Seven weeks of traveling.

Yes. And it took four weeks down the coast of Africa to-- laid cargo in every port. And it took three weeks from Cape Town to Boston, up through the Atlantic in February. And outside of Boston we hit a monster of a storm. The ship was leaning 42 degrees. At 45 it tilts. And we were walking on the walls.

And all the china and everything was smashed on the ship. So when we reached-- we were supposed to go to New York. So when we reached Boston, they said, this is the end of the line. We're not going any further. So we had to get off in Boston, and we took the train to New York.

Who greeted you when you got to New York? The relatives that had--

All the relatives--

All the relatives here.

--that were here were at Grand Central Station and then took us to our first subway ride in New York. Can you imagine, coming from the wilds of Africa onto the metro--

The subway in New York.

--onto the subway of New York.

There's a cultural shock.

Inge, the four of you came over, of all the family members, I think 17 or so, maybe more, that had ended up in Kenya. Did any stay behind in Kenya?

No.

No. Everybody got out.

Everybody left. Everybody left. We went there together and came out together.

We have just a few minutes. If you don't mind, we can turn to our audience for just a couple of questions. Can we do that? And Inge, after the program ends, can you stay behind for a couple of moments.

Sure.

If anybody wants to come and chat with Inge when she steps off the stage. We'll wrap up in just a few minutes. But I think we have time for a few questions. So a couple of brave hands have gone up quickly, several. Please, ask your question as succinctly as you can. I will repeat it so everybody in the room hears it, including Inge. So I'll start first with you.

Thank you, by the way. And you're suffering, even though it may not seem to be quite as brutal as what we've just walked through, concerns me, and I applaud you. But what happened? Do you know what happened to the relatives that you left in Cologne?

The question is, what happened to your relatives that stayed behind in Germany?

Even though everything-- the museum has recorded everything to the smallest details, and their names are in the museum. But it says-- it just simply says "disappeared." We have no-- we have an assumption that they were put on a train to Riga but that they did not reach there. That's what we assume.

I think hand went up in the back. Yes, sir, I think. Somebody had a question back in the-- OK, I'll go with you, sir.

Thank you. Did any of these folks that you talked about, did any of them eventually end up in Israel?

Did any of your family members or others end up going to Israel?

No.

No.

No.

OK. Yes, ma'am.

You have a way of adapting everywhere you went. And when you came to the United States, you mentioned that to come here you had to have a sponsor. So your family sponsored you. Did you-- how did you fit in here?

I'm glad you've asked that question because I didn't to get to that. The question is, you were obviously very adaptive in your changes. How did you do when you came to the United States? How did you fit in here? What was the change like for you?

It was-- it's always easy to go to something that's better. And even though it was hard, it was better. I was able to make friends. I was able to go where I wanted to. I went to night school. And I found jobs. And I got acquaintances. And it was a much better life. It was not such a lonesome or singular life.

Although, you noticed in the early comments, I said her dad gave her \$100 and said, go forth and create a life. And you did.

I did.

Inge, I'm going to ask-- well, one more question here, then I have one before we close up. Yes, sir.

In Kenya, were there other Jewish families living close to where you lived.

Oh, close to where we lived, no. But there were a lot of Jewish refugees from Europe.

Did they form a community or did they have a synagogue or was there--

There is a synagogue.

Did you organize?

There is a synagogue in Kenya. There was one when we came because there were many Jewish people there before us. But the country was so big and we were dispersed all over the country, on farms.

Plus managing the British farms.

Plus managing the British farms. Only when you lived in Nairobi were you able to have some type of life.

A sense of community with other Jews that were from Europe.

Yes. Yes.

Question-- the last question for you, Inge, before we wrap up-- and I'm to turn back to Inge after this question, after I do a couple of closing remarks, to finish our program. Just very recently, you got an email from the museum that put you in touch with somebody from your life in Kenya. Will you tell us about that?

When we lived in Kenya, we had a young man stay with us that came from Aden-- Yemen today. And he came to Kenya and kind of adopted us. He became part of our family. We were very good friends. He was on the farm with us when my grandparents were still living.

He later joined the British Army. After that he went into the Israeli Army. And he ended up in England. During the first years we corresponded. And then as life got busier, we lost touch. And not long ago, my sister and I were talking and said, we wonder whatever happened to Jack. And my sister said, oh, he was old. He must have died.

So we get an email from the museum that there had been an inquiry about a girl named Inge and her sister Jill because someone in England had told them his life story, that they lived on a farm in Kenya with, and they were children with our names. And this man went to Google, found our history on the museum website and sent an inquiry to the museum, which the museum then forwarded to us.

And it was Jack. And we called him. And we now speak weekly. It's amazing how we found each other again through the website. And we get many-- I didn't-- my husband got a letter from people in Texas who found his correspondence to their parents.