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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
***FIRST PERSON* SERIES**
ESTHER STAROBIN

REMOTE CART

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 15th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Esther Starobin, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2014 season of *First Person* is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful to them for their generosity.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The Museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. Anyone interested in keeping touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater when the program ends today. In doing so you will receive an electronic copy of Esther Starobin's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave today.

Esther will share with us her *First Person* account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time at the end of our program, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Esther a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Esther is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief

slide presentation to help with her introduction.

We begin with this photograph of a very young Esther Starobin, born Esther Rosenfeld. Esther was born in Germany to where the arrow on this map of Europe points.

She was born in Adelsheim, a town north of Stuttgart, to where the arrow points. Esther was the youngest of five children. In this photograph we see her brother, Herman, her mother, Katie Rosenfeld, Esther, on her mother's lap, her older sisters, Bertle and Edith, her father, Adolph Rosenfeld, and her sister, Ruth.

On November 9 and 10, 1938, a violent anti-Jewish Pogrom, known as Kristallnacht or Night of the Broken Glass instigated by Nazi party officials and Nazi Storm Troopers took place. The Pogrom took place throughout parts of Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. In the photograph Germans passed by the shop window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht.

Concerned about the safety of their family, the Rosenfelds registered their children for a Kindertransport, the informal name of a rescue effort that brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1940. Esther wore this tag attached to her clothing as she traveled from her hometown of Adelsheim, Germany, to Thorpe to join her foster family, the Harrisons.

We close our slide presentation with this picture of Esther with her English Foster family: Alan, Dorothy, and Harry Harrison.

In 1947, Esther came to the United States, settling in Washington, D.C. She attended the University of Illinois and had a teaching career specializing in world studies in

Montgomery County, Maryland. Esther's husband Fred passed away in April, 2011.

Esther and Fred have two daughters. Judy is an attorney, and daughter Debra founded the Handmade Afghans Project to, quote, bring comfort and warmth to our wounded service members. Initially most of the afghans went to Walter Reed Army Hospital but then also were sent to other military installations including Fort Sam Houston in Texas, Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, and Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. Their goal of making 10,000 afghans was met in 2013, and, in fact, they exceeded that with 10,845 afghans and this amazing project came to a close. About 1,600 people nationwide were ultimately involved in making afghans for this effort. Esther was deeply involved with this project.

Esther and Fred have two grandchildren. John is in his sophomore year of college. And Drew is a high school junior. Our audience today includes Esther's daughter, Debra, as well as nieces Renee and Tamar, and Tamar's sons Nathaniel and Solomon. I think we have them all here in the front row down here.

Thanks for joining us, everybody.

Esther's volunteer work at the museum has involved helping to expand the Museum's collections of documents, photographs, and other items. Esther also is a contributor to the writing projects which produces "Echoes of Memory," a collection of writings by survivors associated with this museum. Following today's program, Esther will be available to sign copies of "Echoes of Memory."

And with that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming with our *First Person* Mrs. Esther Starobin.

[Applause]

Esther, thank you so much for joining us today and for your willingness to be our *First Person*. We're glad to have you with us.

>> Esther Starobin: I'm glad to be here.

>> Bill Benson: You have so much to share with us. We just have a short time, so we'll just jump right into it and get started.

You were very young when your parents sent you to England. And although you were too young to be able to tell us firsthand about all that you went through and what life was like in Germany for your family, perhaps we could begin to the extent that you can, give us a sense of your family, your parents, your extended family, what the hometown was like and what their community was like in the years before the war and certainly before you were sent away.

>> Esther Starobin: Well, I have to tell you, everything I know I know because I have been told by my siblings or because I've looked it up. I really don't remember.

But, first of all, Adelsheim is this really small place. It still only has one traffic light. And I was there this summer with one of my nieces. We tried to find souvenirs. They didn't have them, so that gives you an idea how small this place is.

My parents -- there were five of us, as you know from the picture. My father sold grain to farmers and occasionally would negotiate a trade of a cow or horse or something like that. He had lost one leg in the First World War, so my mother helped him; especially if the weather was bad because he had trouble manipulating the cart and getting on that.

There was a small Jewish community there. There was a synagogue; about 10, 12 families. It was really a small community. We had one uncle who lived there, but my uncle came to this country in 1937, right before I was born. So I didn't know him then.

My sister said they had a very happy childhood until the Nazis came. They went to school. They visited family. They had family in the next little town. They went there, too. In fact, I went back in 1960 with my sister -- 80, with my sister. She met people she had gone to school with. They would talk about somebody had died when they were in first grade, so here they were talking away about what had the kid died of. I don't speak German. I took German in high school, in college. It didn't stick too well. I'm not very good at languages. And I really don't know German. My sister translated when we first went, and then she stopped.

>> Bill Benson: How large was your extended family?

>> Esther Starobin: Well, my parents each had nine siblings. So it was pretty large. Several of my father's siblings had come to the United States. Two had come very early in the century. Then my other two uncles had come in the 30s. My mother had one sister who had gone to England, about 1934 I think. The rest of them were killed in the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: And clearly many, many cousins and uncles and aunts.

What was the age range of your siblings?

>> Esther Starobin: I'm the youngest. My oldest sister is 12 years older than I am. The other three were in the middle. Working it out. Solomon's mother was the middle of the middle. Renee's father was next to me in age. And then I had one other sister who was close to my oldest sister in age. So there was a big spread in our ages.

>> Bill Benson: Kristallnacht, November 9, 10, 1938, convinced many German Jews, including your parents, that life under the Nazis had become intolerable and could get worse. Do you know anything from what you've learned about the impact of Kristallnacht on your family?

>> Esther Starobin: I do. According to what I found out, there was a man who lives in Adelsheim; he's done a lot of research on the Jewish families and what happened during the Holocaust. Whenever I don't know anything; in other words, when Bill asks me a question, I send an e-mail and find out the answer.

He said what happened, people came -- they came from other towns. They traveled through Germany. And each town a few people would join them. And in Adelsheim, they did break the Jewish shop windows. They dragged books out of the synagogue. But my parents' house was off the main beaten path so nothing happened to them on Kristallnacht.

My sisters were in Aachen by then. They couldn't go to school. Jewish kids were not allowed in the public schools. So my three older sisters had been sent to Manheim to live with an aunt. I guess that school closed. So they were in Aachen. Unlike today there wasn't instant news, so they had started to walk to school the next day and saw the synagogue burning. Somebody said, you know, go home. Go back. So they never saw my parents again. They were living in Aachen at the time.

>> Bill Benson: I imagine at least Bertle remembers that.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. She does remember it.

When I was growing up -- we came to this country when I was 10. At first we didn't talk about our experiences at all. Then in the 80s, when this started -- when there started to be

a lot of information on television and the stories about the Holocaust, my sister Bertle said, "Oh, I have some letters that my mother had written when she was in camps." So my husband worked for a law firm where somebody knew German. They translated them. So basically what I know about my mother, a little bit about my father because he basically wrote two lines on each letter, is what I've learned from these letters, what my mother was like.

My parents had been living in Adelsheim after I went to England in 1939. My mother had written these letters from Gurs, camp in France, because they were deported in October of 1940, my parents and my brother Herman. We don't know why they didn't send Herman on the Kindertransport. They didn't. So they were in France.

The first couple of letters my mother was very optimistic that she was going to get out. But she wrote like all mothers, you know, make sure you listen to the people you're living with, thank them, wash behind your ears, study well in school; all the things that any mother would write. But then the letters changed. She would say to my sister Bertle, "Save your clothes. I've lost so much weight. I can use the clothes." Or talking about how hard it was. The tone of the letters changed.

I mean, there are only five letters so I'm reading a lot into these letters. But at the beginning it was a very optimistic: We're going to be able to come and join you in England and we'll all be together. And then it was more to my sister who was in the very old -- she was a teenager: make sure you keep everybody together, stay together. You know, you stay a family. Talking about life being hard.

She certainly talked a little bit about what it was like. She talked about Herman,

Renee's father, but not bitter in the way that I think I would be bitter if I was there. Then again, the letters might have been --

>> Bill Benson: Censored?

>> Esther Starobin: I would think.

>> Bill Benson: We may come back to that, and I hope we will. At Kristallnacht in 1939, your parents made the extraordinary decision to send their daughters away to England as part of the Kindertransport. Tell us what the Kindertransport was and then to the extent that you know anything about the arrangements that were made for you or your sisters to go by Kindertransport.

>> Esther Starobin: In England the Quakers, basically, went to Parliament and tried to get Parliament to agree to accept children from Germany to save them. There were some stipulations. We weren't supposed to stay in England. You had to pay so much in Germany. I think it was 50 -- whatever was the equivalent of $50 I think. I don't really know that. And there, of course, were hundreds of people trying to get their kids out.

It passed Parliament. The Quakers found hostiles for people to live in England. My Aunt Hannah was in England. She worked as a domestic because it was the only thing she could do as an immigrant. So my three sisters went from Aachen and she found places for them from people that she knew from her work. They each went to three different places.

>> Bill Benson: A couple of questions before we get to that. Ultimately, do you know how many kids were saved by the Kindertransport?

>> Esther Starobin: 10,000.

>> Bill Benson: It was capped at that. Wasn't it?

>> Esther Starobin: Right. The war broke out. 10,000.

>> Bill Benson: And only really from Germany and Austria.

>> Esther Starobin: And Czechoslovakia.

>> Bill Benson: And Czechoslovakia. And your three sisters went separately from you and ahead of you a little bit. Was that because -- something to do with that they were in Aachen?

>> Esther Starobin: Right. We weren't in the same place. They really never talked about their actual trip. My sister, Edy, who loved to eat, remembers when they crossed the border into Holland getting chocolate and orange. My other sisters never talked about it, so I don't know what they remembered about it. And I was 2 years old. Clearly somebody looked after me.

>> Bill Benson: Some kind of chaperon or somebody was with you.

>> Esther Starobin: I have no idea. As much as I've tried to find that out, I haven't found that out. But I went from Germany to London. And then I was met by a woman, Mrs. Edmunds. And she took me from London to where my Foster family lived outside Norridge. I had a copy from my -- a copy of a letter, could they pick me up. We lived out in the country then. I did meet her one of the times that I was in England. But the Quakers were very involved in this because, as now, they were against war.

>> Bill Benson: They would make the arrangements to find different places. So you were beginning to tell us you had Aunt Hannah living in England, working as a domestic. So she was sort of instrumental in you getting posted.

>> Esther Starobin: I think so. My sister, Bertle, lived with a family in London. And then they

moved to Scotland. And she went to school in Scotland for a little bit. And after the war she found out that the man she was living with was actually a spy for the Germans. When they were in Scotland, he had been plane spotting or doing whatever but apparently not for the English but for the Germans.

>> Bill Benson: So an amazing cover as a spy, he's taken in a refugee Jewish child in his home and he's spying for the Germans.

>> Esther Starobin: When she was 16, she left and had to go to work. She lived with my aunt. And my aunt was rather temperamental. If Bertle got mad, my aunt would take her ration book so she couldn't leave. She lived in London.

My sister, Edy, lived originally with a family in London. And then as the war progressed, people were sent out of London. And she lived with a family out in the country. She felt they treated her like a slave. She didn't go to school after she was 14. She worked very hard. And then ultimately she joined the British Army. She was in the Army.

My sister, Ruth, Solomon's grandmother, lived with a doctor in London. And then she was sent to a hostile. And I think someplace else she lived with another family. And she also was not going to school anymore. But then when we came here in 47, she went to high school and ultimately to college.

>> Bill Benson: When you use the word hostile, what was that? We think of hostiles for people that are traveling on the cheap in this country, go -- they can keep their suitcase and stay in a San Francisco -- wherever it is. What was that like?

>> Esther Starobin: I think it was a way of taking care of children on the cheap, too. Often

they were summer camps that were used for this. So they weren't really warm in the winter. But they lived there. They went to school and did whatever. Ruth, to me, never talked about it much. Her children said that she talked about it.

>> Bill Benson: Before we return to your experience in England, let's go back to what you were telling us about with your mother and your father. Do you know at all why Herman stayed with them and why Herman didn't come with you? Have you learned anything?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: For those who couldn't hear, the family thought is possibly because he was the only son and with four sisters the parents didn't want to let the son go, possibly, until later. There's also some thought that there was difficulty getting him as a boy, to get to a transport, to actually get out of Germany.

The many, many, many times you've thought about that decision that your parents made, I imagine for everybody in this room trying to imagine that moment when you say we have to send them away, must have been extraordinary.

>> Esther Starobin: I can't imagine. There is a movie about the Kindertransport. And in that movie there's someone who talks about how angry she's always been at her parents for sending her away. And her parents were killed in the war. I think, to me, it showed such love. I can't be angry about it. I think it showed love.

And certainly when my kids were that age, I couldn't imagine. When my grandsons were that age, I couldn't imagine it. But you make sacrifices for your kids. But I think it was quite a sacrifice. Even if they did think they were going to get out, there must have been

something in the back of the mind thinking maybe I'm not going to get out.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely.

>> Esther Starobin: I just think it's absolutely amazing. Many of the people went on the Kindertransport never saw their parents again. We weren't unusual about that.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, Herman did eventually get out. What do you know about Herman's ability to leave Germany?

>> Esther Starobin: Herman, when my parents were sent to France in 1940, October 1940, he went with them. They were in two camps, Gurs and Rivesaltes.

>> Bill Benson: He was with them.

>> Esther Starobin: He was with them in the camps. It was kind of interesting. In the stuff you can get online now, you can find out lots of things. When he came to this country, it said he could read French and German. And I always wondered where did he learn to read. In 1940 he was 7. 7, I think. Did they have schools in the camps? How did he learn all of these things? And he would never talk about it.

But the United States took in 1,000 children in 1941. And Herman came to this country. And he landed in New York. He said -- he knew he had uncles. He didn't exactly know where they were. But my uncles -- there's a German Jewish newspaper. They saw the list of children. And somebody picked him up. And he lived with an aunt and uncle.

>> Bill Benson: So he was one of a group of 1,000 kids who were able to come over to the United States.

>> Esther Starobin: Right. My aunt and uncle brought him up. In fact, he considered them his

parents, his children, until one of the cousins told him otherwise. They were really their grandparents. He was very close. They had one other son. And they were a family.

It's pretty amazing. I didn't remember Herman at all. When we came to this country and I had this other brother, I had brother number two.

>> Bill Benson: You told us a little bit about the letters that you had from your mother. So it was not until the 1980s that you even have the opportunity to read those letters?

>> Esther Starobin: Right. When we first came to this country, I sort of thought, well, maybe my parents would show up. But Bertle knew they were dead. I don't know when I actually knew. There were lists and that. She knew. We never talked about it.

My best friend all through high school and junior high, I wrote something for this memoir writing thing about being on the Kindertransport and I sent it to her. And she said all the years she never knew that. I wrote that when I was in my 60s and I had known her since I was about 13. I didn't actually know the name of how I knew I had this family and I knew I went on the train and then I came here. But it's like separate parts of my life that weren't connected Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: Of course, eventually, you would learn that the date, August 14, would have particular significance.

>> Esther Starobin: Right. That was the day my parents were transported to Auschwitz and murdered there.

>> Bill Benson: When did you find that out?

>> Esther Starobin: There's a French book that lists all the people that were in the camps,

where they were from and how old they were, when they were transported and the number of the transported. I would say 15, 20 years. I think I knew it the first time I did this. It was fairly recently when you're as old as I am.

>> Bill Benson: Yes. That is recent.

What do you know about the camps they were sent to before they went to Auschwitz?

>> Esther Starobin: They were work camps. One of my aunts was also there because in one of the letters my mother mentions that Aunt Tony was working in the kitchen and she could get extra food for Herman who was always hungry, because they didn't get enough food.

Actually, when he first came here, my aunt told Bertle, when we came, that Herman used to hide food all over the house because he was hungry, which makes sense; he was a growing boy. He had a hell of a time, actually.

>> Bill Benson: You would live with the Harrison family as your Foster family in England from the time you were age 2 until 10.

>> Esther Starobin: Right.

>> Bill Benson: So until 1947, the eight of the first 10 years of your life. Tell us about the Harrisons and your life with them and then also having sisters in other parts of England and one even in Scotland.

>> Esther Starobin: Ok. Well, the Harrisons were very devout, fundamentalist Christians. And Uncle Harry -- I called them Auntie Dot and Uncle Harry, worked in a shoe factory owned by a Jewish man. He put a sign was anybody willing to take a child. So that's how I got to be

with them. They had wanted a boy because they had one son, Allen, who's seven years older than I am. But I came to live with them.

When I first got there, I had Scarlet Fever. So I was stuck in a bedroom. Allen used to play with me through the window. But I was very much afraid --

>> Bill Benson: Because you were quarantined.

>> Esther Starobin: I was quarantined. [Laughter]

So I was very much afraid of Uncle Harry who was very soft-spoken. In all the years I knew him, he never raised his voice, but I was petrified of him which I think must have been because I had heard loud voices. There must have been some connection between what had happened.

But Allen was so good to me. I think about it. He was 9 and I was 2. And I came and took over their family, kind of. And he didn't try to do me in or anything. He used to take me around with him. He made sure I got to school. He was a terrific big brother.

They belonged to a fundamentalist chapel. Mr. Ramsey, who owned the chapel, had helped them get some of the things they needed. Back then, when you were 2, you were still a baby; so they helped them get some of the things they needed because the Harrisons really didn't have a lot of money. And we went to the chapel there.

In many religions now the big thing is community, having community. Well, this chapel had community. It had a lot of activities. I went to chapel with them. I don't know if they tried to convert me. I don't think so but I didn't know much about being Jewish either. Mr. Ramsey knew Hebrew. He was supposed to teach me when I got older, but I am really

bad at languages; I didn't learn Hebrew.

There was a strong union. So after the war there were trips from the factory to the seaside. I would go on that. I loved school in England. I was just at the point -- they had an exam that you had to take, the 11-plus to go on to higher education. I was just at the point to take that when we came here. According to Allen, he said I was very competitive and liked to get good grades. But I don't remember that. He's making it up.

[Laughter]

I don't know.

I really had a pretty happy childhood there. And I guess I knew I wasn't going to be there forever, but I never asked questions. I'm not too good at questioning wherever I am, whatever is happening.

>> Bill Benson: Generally, it was a happy childhood.

>> Esther Starobin: It was very happy. I had a gas mask that I had to carry around with me. We had to get it checked. There were bombs. We had a bomb shelter we went into. That was the way it was. My sisters came to visit periodically.

>> Bill Benson: Each of them were able to do that?

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. I think it was mostly after the war that they came. My Aunt Hannah came once, but there was a certain tension between Auntie Dot and Aunt Hannah. I think they didn't gel too well.

One time -- my Aunt Hannah was very kosher. It was hard to get food during the war. And one time Bertle got a chicken, but she couldn't get it killed because it had to be killed

kosher. She took the chicken back on the train in a box.

And one time we went to London to visit. I remember Allen and I going up and down the escalators I guess in Harrah's or one of those stores because Norridge didn't have such things. It was a big excitement to do that. But the Harrisons always welcomed my sisters. I knew Aunt Hannah, but I didn't know any of the other people that my sisters lived with.

>> Bill Benson: As you had explained a little while ago, one of your sisters, at least one of them, did not have a particularly happy foster situation.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: What about the other sisters? Edith joined the British Army.

>> Esther Starobin: To escape where she was. And Ruth, I never talked about it much with Ruth. I don't know whether she thought of it as terrible or -- I don't know. If Tamar were here, she would know.

>> Bill Benson: You told me one time about Edith had an experience as a member of the British Army returning to Adelsheim.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. She went back to Germany after the war. She was walking down the street in Germany. Somebody came up to her and said, "Adolph's daughter." She knew exactly who she was. She looks, according to the picture, she looked a lot like my father. It's a small place.

In fact, when we went back -- when Bertle and I went in 2000, people came up and talked about helping my parents because they didn't get ration coupons and it was hard for them to get food. And one man talked about his father putting -- leaving food after dark on

their doorstep. He said his wife was very upset because if they had gotten caught, it would not have been good for their family. I said to Bertle, "Do you think that's true?"

>> Bill Benson: It would be easy to say.

>> Esther Starobin: After the war. She said yeah. There had been other letters, and my mother mentioned it.

Another person talked about my parents would exchange something that was in the house. Again, I said to Bertle, "Do you think it's true?" And she said yeah.

But I go back to when my parents were sent --

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely.

>> Esther Starobin: They were sent in 1940, as I said. When we went back to Adelsheim, Reinhart gave us a copy of the order telling us they had to vacate within an hour or so. The list that was in my house, it was so detailed it even listed the rags in the house. Unbelievable the details.

The house was sold supposedly to pay a debt. Well, in 1936, someone had sued my father saying that he had cheated them on -- something to do with a horse. But it was the beginning of when the Nazis were taking the businesses away from the Jews. It wasn't particularly true, but it got the business away.

>> Bill Benson: So they used a legal pretense to get his business.

>> Esther Starobin: Right.

>> Bill Benson: So you had a complete inventory of everything in the household.

>> Esther Starobin: Absolutely amazing.

The other interesting thing about this inventory, Bertle said they had a very fancy doll in one of the rooms that they weren't allowed to touch. But that doll wasn't on the inventory. So somebody had taken the doll.

When we went back, we walked by the house. We didn't go in, but I went back -- I had been back before then. But Reinhart arranged for us to go in the house. It's beautiful. It had been remodeled and this and that. But the thing that really got me -- my grandsons were about 8, 9. I forget how old. But upstairs where the son lived, exact same that my grandsons had but neat. Everything was in its place. Very German. Not the way my grandsons were.

>> Bill Benson: Which was very American.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. I was there with Renee's sister this summer. There's a program in Germany to put stepping stones in front of houses that were owned by Jews. And the people who are living there have to agree to it. And these people won't agree to it.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Esther Starobin: Could be. Yeah. When we went -- I forgot Renee was with us. She went, too.

>> Bill Benson: In 1947, two years after the war has ended, your sister Bertle, your oldest sister, arranges for you and your other sisters, except Edith who's in the Army, to leave England and come to the United States. Will you tell us what you know about the decision to do that, the arrangements, and what it was like for you to leave the Harrisons after eight years?

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. Well, my mother had told us we were all supposed to stay together

and come to the United States. There was something called Bloomsbury House.

>> Bill Benson: That was something she told Bertle?

>> Esther Starobin: In the letters.

>> Bill Benson: Take everybody when you can to the United States?

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Esther Starobin: So Bloomsbury has help with getting people on to ships. So Bertle got a call one day that we could leave the next day. The Harrisons did not have a phone. Bertle called the police in Norridge, and they came to the door of the Harrisons and told the Harrisons they had to take me to London the next day because I was leaving.

>> Bill Benson: Was that the first they knew that?

>> Esther Starobin: They knew --

>> Bill Benson: They knew eventually it was going to happen.

>> Esther Starobin: Whenever there was room on the ship.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Esther Starobin: So Uncle Harry, of course, couldn't leave work. Allen was supposed to get a big prize at school the next day, but he skips that. And Auntie Dot and they took me to London and handed me over like a package. I was very much a package in all of this stuff. We went to South Hampton to leave. We were on the Queen Mary, which had been used as a troop ship. And then it was for this.

There was a strike. Apparently, which I didn't know at the time, but somebody from

the royal family was on the ship. So this was a good time to strike. But my aunt had given my sister bread. And Bertle had a boyfriend who was a butcher, so we had sausage, food to eat. And eventually we took off.

Well, I was so seasick and so miserable. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay where I was.

>> Bill Benson: It had to be very painful for you.

>> Esther Starobin: It was awful. Allen tells me his mother's hair turned White overnight then. He hadn't had white hair. So I guess it was a shock to them. They knew I had to leave, too. But I had been there for a long time. I was very much a part of their family. They were my family.

So we came to the United States. Two uncles met us in New York. Bertle knew one of the uncles. The other was a married in American uncle.

>> Bill Benson: One of your relatives had left Germany in the mid 1930s. So it was part of that family.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. So we lived with an aunt and uncle when we first came. They had a big house. If you're a local person, North Capital Street has these big houses. We had one room. There was another refugee family in another room. My aunt, my uncle, my aunt's mother, two cousins. It was the worst experience I've had in my life. Most people when they talk about the Kindertransport, they talk about going to England and living with families who didn't love them and they had to work and do all of this stuff. Well, I had a great time in England compared to here. My uncle had a bad temper and threw furniture around. My aunt

was crazy. Nowadays they'd have medicine for her but they didn't then.

[Laughter]

It was before the time that they had for people who were really mentally ill.

>> Bill Benson: You're 10 years old. It was just a very difficult transition.

>> Esther Starobin: I moved from the country to the city. I changed religions. I changed schools. This school was very different. I had a really nasty teacher. And it was just totally different. I had never been to a movie. The Harrisons didn't do movies. They didn't listen to music. They didn't dance. They didn't wear makeup. And as an adult, some of that was because they didn't have the money but I didn't know that.

So we lived with my aunt and uncle. I remember my uncle dragging me out trying to make me go to the movies. I finally went to see "The Wizard of Oz" but I was here quite a while before I did that.

It was mean compared to where I had been in a loving family.

>> Bill Benson: What do you remember your education transition? There you were in the English schools.

>> Esther Starobin: I didn't learn anything new for quite a while other than grammar. In England, they didn't emphasize grammar. But I didn't learn anything new.

Then I went to junior high and had a marvelous teacher in junior high. That was ok. When my sister Edy got demarked from the British Army and came over, once she had a job, Bertle had a job, they got an apartment. So here were these two young women trying to make a new life in a new country. And they had me, my sister, Ruth, his mother, went to college.

And in those days she could work for room and board and tuition. She worked and paid for all of it. So it was really different. My sisters at times were dating people who were teaching in the school I went to.

>> Bill Benson: But you were living with your sisters at that point.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. We moved a lot, but we were living together. My sisters are pretty unusual. They never said -- I graduated from high school when I was 16 because I had gone to school in England. We were ahead. They never said to me when you graduate you have to go to work. They expected me to go to college. That would never have happened in Germany. It just wouldn't have.

>> Bill Benson: After you left England in 1947, were you able at that point to stay in touch with the Harrisons?

>> Esther Starobin: My sisters made sure I did. I did. I wouldn't say I wrote a lot, but I did write. They wrote back. So I did stay in touch with them.

>> Bill Benson: And you have continued a relationship with the family ever since.

>> Esther Starobin: I have. When my daughters were little, we went over to visit. I think it was 1964. And then Allen got a Fulbright teaching -- he taught here for a year. At the end of his year we brought his parents over for the summer. It was really interesting. They lived in this very quiet life. No telephone. They didn't get a refrigerator until we went over and they got this little thing which they unplugged as soon as we left. And they got on the airplane and came here. It was just -- when I think about it, it was gutsy for them; about a month or so here. Everybody visited them. We did a vacation in Toms River, New Jersey which Allen found for

us. It's the mosquito capital of the world. Don't go there.

It was really special to have the Harrisons here and to be able to repay them a little bit for what they had done for me. Auntie Dot died soon after that. Uncle Harry used to come over in the summer for about six weeks. He loved coming over. And he loved going to synagogue with us and to brotherhood. And what Allen found out since his father died, his grandfather was Jewish. He was from the Ukraine. And he was Jewish, which is kind of interesting; which kind of explains. Maybe there was something in his father's memory.

>> Bill Benson: And Allen still comes to this day. Right?

>> Esther Starobin: He does.

>> Bill Benson: You still stay in touch.

>> Esther Starobin: Very much so.

>> Bill Benson: You've mentioned, of course, that you went back to Adelsheim. Tell us a little more about your trips back to Adelsheim and what that's like for you to go back to the place where you left your parents.

>> Esther Starobin: The first time I went back was in the late 1980s. I needed to find out that I didn't come from a black hole; I came from a real place. And we went back. Originally Bertle and her husband were going to go, but Morris got sick and couldn't go. But Bertle had written to them because she still remembers some German.

We got there. We got to Adelsheim. And there's no one, absolute -- not a person anywhere. So we went to where we thought the town hall was. And it wasn't. -- it wasn't open. Apparently it closes for lunch. Then we found the town hall. When we got there, there was no

one who spoke English. I don't speak German. We got them to understand why we were there. They dug out the letter that Bertle had sent. They said that the wife of the assistant Burgermeister spoke English. We arranged to meet with them the next day. They said: you don't want to stay here overnight. You want to go somewhere, someplace else. I said, “No, you're not sending me away again. I'm staying overnight.” So we stayed overnight.

I don't know what we ate because it was all in German. Probably something I wouldn't have eaten if I had known what it was. That night, I had such a nightmare. I dreamt that Nazis were coming up the steps to get me. It was really scary.

But the next day we met the people. There was a man called Mr. Weterhan who had known my parents. He, at the time, was the man keeping track of the Jews and what had happened. We went to the house. He showed us where the synagogue had been. We went to the Jewish cemetery which was between that town and the next town. I had a lot of family members there. There's a museum, which is opened on Sundays but they opened it, and we saw that.

So I was glad to go there. I was also glad to leave there. But it didn't mean anything to me. My sisters had told me some places to look for. I found those places. But I didn't feel a connection. I felt like a tourist in a touristy place. It didn't mean much to me even though I knew this was where I had been born and where my sisters had grown up.

>> Bill Benson: Did Bertle go back to Adelsheim?

>> Esther Starobin: A few years later. She really liked it. She could react to it.

>> Bill Benson: 12 years older than you were. So she would have remembered many things.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. His grandmother, Ruth, went with his sister once. They went back once, too.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Esther Starobin: I can't see that far. [Laughter]

So they've been back. Quite a lot of us have actually been there. My kids haven't been there. And then I was back in 2000 with Renee and Bertle. This past summer I was there with Renee's sister just overnight.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit more about [Inaudible] who seems -- I mean Reinhart, I'm sorry, who is such -- why does he know so much?

>> Esther Starobin: Reinhart is really an interesting man. When Bertle first met him, when she went back the first time she met him. I figured I wasn't going to like him. He was German. Right? But then he came to visit. He's really a very charming man. But he taught at the local high school.

>> Bill Benson: In Adelsheim?

>> Esther Starobin: In Adelsheim. He said, “It's your turn. You take over.” He had an after school club. They did a lot of research. And just as I wanted to know things about Germany, the other people who left Germany had contacted him. So he has kept track of most of the people -- well, there weren't so many, but he has contact. Many people have been back. We discovered a cousin, a cousin five times removed, whose grandfather and our grandfather I think were brothers. Peter. Lives in Ireland. So we have contact with him. He wrote to Bertle and said I think I'm your cousin and this kind of thing.

But Reinhart has really gotten involved. He set up a museum in what used to be the synagogue. He knows a lot about Judaism. He visits the synagogue. And the Jewish tradition is to put a little stone on the grave if you visit. And he does that.

>> Bill Benson: So he's sort of become the keeper of the memories.

>> Esther Starobin: Definitely. Definitely.

And my mother came from Rexingen. There's somebody there -- Tamar just got here. There's someone in Rexingen that I've gotten some contact with. They have a cemetery where many of my mother's family were buried. It's really interesting. This man who's written a book about the Jewish cemetery, who all the people were totally cataloged, when he finished that, the rest of the cemetery is crusaders. He was going to do a thing on the crusaders and what different groups of people in that.

So Reinhart really cares a lot. He's done these family trees for each of the Jewish families. He probably knows more about our family than I do, actually. When we went back in 2000, they had a program to mark the commemoration. No government money in it. He had exhibits about each of the families, photocopies. It wasn't slick, but it was very informative, very complete. And they had a lovely program, most of which was in German so I didn't understand it. But I've had it translated since then. But there were police outside. They thought there might be skinheads there, which was a little unnerving. And there were a lot of people at the program. We went because we thought they should have some Jews there. So we were there. I found it very moving. There were various ages of people there.

Don't you think?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Esther Starobin: What Renee said, that Reinhart said he was very committed to keeping the story of the Jews alive and what happened to them. He is collecting all of this to write a book. In the meantime, he and someone else have collaborated on a book about the Jewish cemeteries. He is very committed. In the meantime, he's had some grandchildren, so he's not quite as committed.

>> Bill Benson: We have a little bit of time, Esther to turn to our audience to ask -- have them ask you a few questions if they wish. Are you ready for that?

>> Esther Starobin: As long as you repeat the question.

>> Bill Benson: We have a question right here. Try to make it as brief as you can. We have a microphone I think right here. Just in case we don't hear it or people in the back don't hear it I'll try my best to repeat the question.

>> Thank you for sharing your story. Have you been able to forgive the people who did this to you and your family?

>> Bill Benson: The question is, for those who might not have heard: Have you been able to forgive the people who did this to you and your family?

>> Esther Starobin: It doesn't help me to be angry at them. I think there were some very evil people. Am I still angry? No. Am I hurt? Yes. They're two different things.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Esther.

We're going to bring the mic down to you right here behind you. The people in the back might not. So that helps. There we go.

>> You said your father lost his leg during the First World War. Did he serve in the German Army?

>> Esther Starobin: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Did your father serve in the German Army in the First World War?

>> Esther Starobin: He did. He had been training to be a baker. Of course he couldn't do that because bakers have to stand up a lot and he couldn't do that anymore. He had a medal of some sort which he thought would help him. But, of course, it didn't.

>> Bill Benson: Do we have any other questions? While some may be thinking of another question, I was going to ask. You've learned more recently or at some point that there were other Kindertransport children I think in the same town of Norridge.

>> Esther Starobin: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Did you know any of that when you were young?

>> Esther Starobin: I didn't know any of that. Apparently there were about 200 in that general area, but part of not knowing was probably because the Harrisons weren't Jewish so they weren't connected into the Jewish community. And I don't know if there was any effort to help people to know other kinder in the area. But there's an organization now, Kindertransport organization. And one of the men who was president of it at one point was from Norridge. So at some point Allen said, well, maybe we could find who he lived with. I said we'll look in the phone book. So we did visit her. They also had a very close relationship. I kept up the relationship over the years. I don't know how true that is for most Kinder because a lot of them were pretty bitter about who they lived with.

>> Bill Benson: It's good to know that you had some folks that you've gotten to know that were in the same community as you.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. When I was a kid, I didn't know anybody else would have this experience. I think the first time my sisters and I went to a conference for the Kindertransport, it was like, oh, there are other people who had this kind of thing.

You didn't ask me this, but one of the things -- my sister Bertle doesn't think we're really survivors. And as I said to Bertle, we had to leave our country, my parents were killed, I don't even remember them, all of these things happened to me. It's not as terrible as people who were in camps or in hiding, but it certainly was something not to be repeated.

>> Bill Benson: I don't -- oh, there is. There we go. Back in the far --

>> Thank you for sharing your story with us. I'm a middle school principal. I'm here with 150 kids from the Cleveland area. I see a lot of kids from around the country. I have a question for you. What's the greatest message that you can give to these young people as they prepare to enter the world as young adults and as citizens of our country? Certainly the issue of bullying is prevalent in our schools. I think you really have something that you could share with them.

>> Bill Benson: You heard that ok?

>> Esther Starobin: I did hear that. I taught middle school. I love middle school.

I think for me the fact that you can help one person ripples off. I was so lucky because individual people helped me and loved me and did things. And I think most of us are not going to affect hundreds and thousands of people, but we can help one person. We can stand up to someone who is doing awful things to another person. And we can do it one

person at a time.

And I think as middle school kids, too, to know the history, to know the history of our country and the changes that have come about in our country is important, too. Because we just assumed life was like it was now. And I know some of the things I think are recent are ancient history to middle school kids. They need to know we still need to look out for everybody and to appreciate people who are different from us. And certainly as our country is changing and we're become a much more mixed country, it's important to do that.

>> Bill Benson: I think we have time for one more question. I think there was a hand up here. Yes. We're going to bring you the mic.

>> When you were -- when you were with the Harrisons, did you hear anything about the war?

>> Bill Benson: When you were with the Harrisons, did you hear anything about the war that was going on?

>> Esther Starobin: Not a lot because I never heard the radio. But on the other hand, I had a gas mask and we had to get it tested and there were planes flying over, dropping bombs. So yes and no. Not like now when you listen to the radio and you hear all the news. I didn't hear it that way. I lived it.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. Thank you all for really great questions. Thanks, everybody.

[Applause]

I'm going to turn back to Esther in a moment to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being with us today. I remind you that we will have *First Person* programs every Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. We hope you can come back at some

point if not this year in subsequent years. The website does include information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. Before I turn to Esther to do that, I want to remind you that when she finishes, she's going to step off the stage and head up toward the entrance where she will be available to sign copies of "Echoes of Memory" which she has made contributions to. That could be an opportunity also to say hi to her and meet her personally in that way.

With that I'd like to turn to Esther to close our program.

>> Esther Starobin: And I'd like to repeat what I said. I think the individual acts that we can do of kindness, of helping people to stand up for what's right, really are important and we need to continue to do that or to start doing it if we're not doing it.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Esther, very much.

[Applause]

[The First Person program ended at 11:58 a.m.]