

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON SUSAN WARSINGER
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>> Suzy Snyder: Hello, everybody. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Suzy Snyder and I work as a curator here in the Department of Acquisitions and Reference. I'm the host of today's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We're in our 18th season of *First Person*. And today you're going to meet Susan Warsinger, who we shall meet shortly, actually.

This is the 2017 season -- this 2017 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation With additional funding from the Arlene & Daniel Fisher Foundation and we're grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of 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 serves as a volunteer here at the museum. Our program will continue twice weekly through mid-August. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides additional information about each of the upcoming *First Person* guests. And anyone interested in keeping in touch with the museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in your program or speak with the museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so you will receive an electronic copy of Susan's biography so you can remember and share her testimony after you leave.

Susan 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, we will have an opportunity for you to ask her questions. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Susan is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We've prepared a brief slide show to begin with.

Susan Hilsenrath was born May 27, 1928, in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, the eldest of three children. In this photograph, Susan sits on a set of steps with her brother, Joseph.

On November 9 and 10, 1938, Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass, Nazi thugs smashed the windows and furnishings of the Hilsenrath home. Months later Susi and Joseph were smuggled into France.

In May 1940, the German Army invaded France. Susi and Joseph were evacuated from a children's home in Versailles where they were temporarily housed. Soon German

soldiers arrived and the children fled with their guardians to the unoccupied country under the Vichy government. It indicates where they were.

With the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS, Susi and Joseph received permission to enter into the United States. Information on this tag that Susi wrote identifies her name and states that she's sailing for the United States on the SS Serpa Pinto. After crossing the Pyrenees to Spain, the two children sailed to Lisbon, Portugal, and arrived in New York in September 1941. And that's Susi right there.

Please welcome Susi.

And is that Joseph? Yes? And that's Joseph. Excuse me.

Please welcome Susi to the stage.

>> [Applause]

>> Susan Warsinger: Hello, everybody. Can you hear me all right?
Good. Good.

>> Suzy Snyder: Thank you, Susi, for you being here today. I think your story is very interesting because it is very unusual. You were separated from your parents. We're going to talk about that. But I wonder if you would talk about what your prewar life in Germany was like.

>> Susan Warsinger: You saw the picture at the beginning. That was my mom and dad and my two brothers. And life was very good in 1933 when Hitler first came into power. My father had a nice store and he made a good living for us. And we lived in a nice house. But then all of a sudden things changed.

>> Suzy Snyder: What kind of store did he have?

>> Susan Warsinger: A linen store. It was a good linen store. And he made a good living for us but all of a sudden when Hitler came into power, the people collaborated with the Nazis and they boycotted lots of people's businesses. And so they boycotted my father's store. And after a while he didn't have any customers so he lost making a living and he had to close the store. So that's really the very first thing that I remember that happened.

The next thing that I remember, I was going to go to public school and I was really excited to go to public school. And I was going to go to first grade. I was so happy to be going to first grade but as soon as I started school, things started to change because the kids were making fun of me. I couldn't figure it out. I was a little kid. I didn't know about anti-Semitism, I didn't know about hatred and injustice. The teacher was reading a book to us called "Der Giftpilz," which means a poisoned mushroom. It was a picture storybook. She was teaching the kids in first grade that Jewish children were poisoned mushrooms.

So every day I told my mother I didn't want to go to school but she said you have to go to school. But one day I was really extremely happy. You know what happened? There was a law in Germany and it said that Jewish children aren't allowed to go to public school. And I tell you, I was really happy about that. So I didn't have to go to school anymore.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did you go to Jewish school after that?

>> Susan Warsinger: It wasn't really a Jewish school. All of the people in our town, all the Jewish people, they wanted their kids to have an education so they hired one Jewish teacher. Didn't teach us anything about religious or Judaism but this Jewish teacher had to teach all of the kids, all of the Jewish kids. So the first grade was in the first row, second grade in the second row, third grade in the third row, all the way to the 10th grade. And this teacher taught us everything, geometry, geology, how to write and how to read. And he had really a big job, but all the Jewish kids were happy because nobody called them a dirty Jew anymore.

>> Suzy Snyder: Backing up a little, did you have non-Jewish friends at this time or before this time and did they stick with you?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah, I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all. But I do want to tell you one story about a non-Jewish girl. I don't remember her being my friend. Can I just tell you that story?

My mother used to send me to the grocery store and she used to say to me to buy a loaf of bread or get some milk. And here I was this little kid. I was really very proud to be going to the grocery store.

So this is where we lived, like here. And at the very end of the auditorium is where the grocery store is. And where all of our audience is today is a park. So in order to get to the grocery store, I couldn't walk through the park and get to the other side of the grocery store.

So on one day I had my pfennige in my hands, Swiss and German money, and I walked down the stairs into the park and the gatekeeper started screaming at me. He said, "Hey, you girl, you can't go through the park anymore." And I was this little kid. I couldn't figure out why I couldn't go through the park. So I ran home. I was really scared and I ran home and told my mother. And she told me not to walk through the park anymore. Of course, she didn't tell me what was going on in Germany at that time because she wanted to spare me. And she probably figured that this whole thing was going to blow over, all of this hatred and anti-Semitism.

So the next time she sent me to the store, I got to the steps and I had to say if I wanted to go to the grocery store over there, I would have to go all the way down the street, all the way up, and all the way around. So the audience can probably guess already what I decided to do. I stood there and I said to myself, I'm really very tired. So I started to walk through the park. And the gatekeeper came out. And then he had a daughter. And in trying to answer your question, she was just about my age, maybe a drop older. Maybe she had gone to school with me. I just don't remember exactly. She saw her father throwing rocks at me because he was really angry because he had told me not to go through the park anymore. So he called me all kinds of horrible names. And he started to throw rocks at me. And she saw, this girl who had been my friend maybe but I'm not sure, this little girl was learning from her father about hatred and about anti-Semitism. He was her role model and I guess she figured if he's doing it, she would do it, too. So I remember this part, that girl. But honestly, I don't remember those little kids anymore.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did you recount this to your mother?

>> Susan Warsinger: Oh, yeah. And I tell you, I never waked through that park again.

>> Suzy Snyder: And so your mother, at this point -- your mother worked with your father. Is that correct? They ran the store together until they couldn't -- they had to sell the store or did they stay at home?

>> Susan Warsinger: She stayed at home and took care of us.

>> Suzy Snyder: How did your parents react to the anti-Semitism, to the sudden closing of their business, the fact that your father lost his livelihood. Do you remember?

>> Susan Warsinger: So I heard them talking at home and my mother always said let's get out of Germany. And the place she wanted to go to was the United States because she had heard this was the greatest country in the world. And my father, he wasn't in such a hurry but he thought maybe it was going to blow over.

And this was pretty much what was going on in Germany at the time. You know, a lot of German Jews, they didn't want to leave because they were German first and Jews second. They figured, well, maybe things are going to get better. But it didn't. It really didn't get better.

>> Suzy Snyder: Your father was originally born in Poland. Is that correct?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes.

>> Suzy Snyder: But he assimilated quite easily to German society..

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes, he did. We spoke only German in our house. I never learned anything about -- anything Polish. And I never did get to meet my grandparents that lived in Poland.

>> Suzy Snyder: So up until this point, the anti-Semitism is there then. In November of 1938, Kristallnacht happened. Can you describe that evening for me?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. My brother, the older one, not the baby but the older one, we slept in the same bedroom together. It was around 11:00. We were really very excited because the next day was going to be November 10, my mother's birthday. So we were still up at 11:00. We were talking. And just then some bricks and rocks were being thrown through our bedroom window. My brother, who was a year younger than I am, and still is a year younger than I am, he pulled himself up. He had to pull himself up to the window sill. I remember like he did a pushup and he looked outside to see what was happening and who was throwing the bricks and rocks through the window. And he told me, "Susi" -- that's how you pronounce it in German. "Susi, it is our neighbors" that are throwing the bricks and rocks through the window.

And there was a policeman on the side of the crowd. He was standing like this. And he didn't do anything to stop the crowd.

>> Suzy Snyder: And at this point your mom had another child, the baby.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes, Ernest, the one that you saw. He was in his crib. We were really scared when that happened so we ran across the hall to our parents' bedroom. And the rock had just fallen on top of the baby's, Ernest's, hand. But he was ok. So we were huddling there together trying to decide what to do.

Just then the crowd had uprooted a telephone pole and they smashed it through our front door. Their objective really was to get to the rabbi's apartment. We lived on first floor. The rabbi lived on the second floor. And a non-Jewish family lived on the third floor. And then on top was an attic.

So my father said, well, let's go and hide in the attic until this whole thing blows over. But in the meantime these people were going through our apartment with this pole and they ransacked some of our things. I don't remember exactly what they took or what they broke but their objective was to get to the rabbi's apartment. They destroyed most of his artifacts, his books. And I don't know what other things they destroyed. So anyway, we got up to the attic. And the rabbi's family was already there.

>> Suzy Snyder: Without the rabbi?

>> Susan Warsinger: Without the rabbi.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what about your father?

>> Susan Warsinger: Ok, let me just tell you, my father -- let me tell about the rabbi and tell you about my father for a second. Is that ok?

When we got up there, the rabbi wasn't there. And I looked out the window and the rabbi was standing on his veranda. He had a veranda because he was the rabbi of the town. So he had the veranda and he was standing on the veranda and two SS men were holding him

like this and a third one came and cut off his beard. So he wasn't up in the attic and my father wasn't up in the attic.

The reason he wasn't up in the attic because, later I found out, that they arrested all the Jewish men in our town and put them in jail. But my father came back -- the rabbi didn't come back but my father came back to the attic. At the time I was very happy but I wasn't quite sure why they let him out of jail. And later on I found out I really should have talked to my father when I was an adult to get all of the details. And I'm advising to you in the audience, if you have parents or grandparents, ask them all the things that you need to know because, you know, after they pass away, it's too late.

But anyway, the part that I know about my father -- my brother and I figured this out. Either my father got out of jail because he used to play chess with the mayor of the town and maybe the mayor had some kind of feeling for him, I'm not sure, or because my father was Polish and at that time Hitler said he was going to take over all of Europe, and at that time they hadn't taken over Poland yet. And he was Polish. And maybe because he was Polish they didn't put him in jail. But I'm not sure of the reason for it.

So anyway, he came up to the attic.

>> Suzy Snyder: So historically, October 1938, which precipitated Kristallnacht, German Jews of Polish origin were put out of Germany. It's amazing your father -- that he was not put out of Germany and back into Poland. My guess is the former and not the latter, that there was a relationship -- that the mayor took pity on him. Because my guess is that -- I'm surmising that it wouldn't have happened otherwise.

>> Susan Warsinger: Because I really wasn't ever sure. Yeah.

>> Suzy Snyder: I think it's hard to know. And we have this saying that we always try to -- there's no rhyme or reason to what the Nazis were thinking because it was never the same. They never did the same thing twice.

So you were in the attic. Described what happened in the attic.

>> Susan Warsinger: I'm not sure, maybe three or four days or something like that. It was November. The town, my father, I guess all of the people in the building had put apples in the attic because it was just right after the apple picking season so there were piles of apples on the floor, so we ate them. We played with the rabbi's kids and my brother and I, we played with them. We made abaci out of them. We were children. And we didn't realize the consequences of what was going to happen, you know, after that.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you think part of that is because your parents -- your mother and the rabbi's wife did the best thing they could, which is really keep you from understanding what was going on?

>> Susan Warsinger: Exactly. I remember this one thing -- maybe kids in the audience want to know about this. My father had all of his savings. And he didn't have it in the bank. He had it under the mattress. So before we ran up to the attic, he took the money out and he made me wear it in my underwear. I remember we couldn't go to the bathroom. So when we were up there, the money got really wet.

>> [Laughter]

>> Susan Warsinger: I'm telling you this for a reason, because the money came in very handy later on. We dried it all out. I'll tell you later on what happened to that money.

>> Suzy Snyder: So at one point you decide it's safe to go back downstairs. What condition did you find your apartment?

>> Susan Warsinger: This is the part I don't remember. I know historically that the Jews -- can you tell the audience what happened? I don't know because I was little. I don't remember. I don't remember. But we did go back to the apartment and they did the best that they could for us to live there. But my father and mother at that time, like all of the Jews in Germany, didn't want to stay in Germany anymore. That Kristallnacht broke everybody up. It was a get out, get out. That was what he said to everybody. So my father and mother like most of the people tried to get out.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did you have family living in the United States?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes, I did. My father had a cousin who had a pickle factory in Brooklyn. He tried to get in touch with her. She did everything she could to get papers and affidavits for him, for the family, but it wasn't enough.

>> Suzy Snyder: It was quite a difficult process. She had to really be able to support a family of four. Right?

>> Susan Warsinger: Five.

>> Suzy Snyder: Right, the baby. I forgot about the baby. So what did your parents do after Kristallnacht then?

>> Susan Warsinger: So my father had heard about this lady who lived in France and she was smuggling children across the border into France. And she was pretending that these children were her children. And she had these passports for her own children. And somehow I guess they took our picture and put it in the passport.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me just remind the audience that at this point Germany has not occupied France because it's still 1939.

>> Susan Warsinger: This was 1939. I'm trying to remember the month. I think it was August 1939.

>> Suzy Snyder: You were smuggled into Paris. What was that like, do you remember?

>> Susan Warsinger: We had a second cousin who had a nice little apartment in the Place de la Vendome. He was a young man, you know, a young guy. He had these two children in his little apartment. So he had to go to work, so he told us to stay in the apartment.

My brother, he was the curious one. He was like 7 1/2, and he decided he wasn't going to stay in the apartment all day and wait for him to come home. He used to go out of the apartment, sneak into the Metro in Paris, go all over -- you know, go under the stile, go all over Paris, come back before the cousin -- second, third cousin came back.

So this went on for two weeks. This man couldn't keep us anymore so he found organizations -- I don't know if at that time it was the HIAS or the OCE or the Quakers. All of those people, I'm thankful to those three organizations because they helped my brother and me through our whole time while we were separated from our parents. So they found a place for us to live on the outskirts of Paris.

>> Suzy Snyder: And how long were you there?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, it was 1940. And in May of 1940 we used to look out the window and we used to see airplanes flying by. I think it was German airplanes. They were dropping bombs, not on Paris but on the outskirts. And we could see them. I remember it looked like the Fourth of July.

So one day we were going to Paris. And I don't know what made my brother be in Paris. I just don't remember. But we were there and I think it was May 1940, that's when the German Army came into Paris. And we were there. Not only the Jews but many, many people in Paris were frightened. They wanted to run out of Paris. So a lot of them went to the south, to

Vichy. And a lot of people went west. And there's this town, maybe the people in the audience know, it's about 40 miles from Paris, it has the palace in it. Does anybody know what the name of that town is?

I heard it. Versailles. You're right. Whoever said it, you're absolutely right. There's a big palace there. A lot of people went. So I don't know, I think two nuns -- we were these two children. We had nothing to do with the family that was taking care of us. We were just these two children marching. There were people going in cars. There were people going on horseback, on bicycles, and walking, just to get out of Paris.

So we ended up in Versailles. A lot of people ended up there. And the mayor of the town, I guess he was really shocked. He didn't know what to do with all of these people. So guess what. You know, the biggest house in Versailles was the palace, so they had to put us up someplace.

I don't know how many of you -- have you been there? They have these beautiful gardens. And this palace, way on the other side there was this big pile of hay, as high as the ceiling, I think. So they gave us burlap bags and each one of us took one of the burlap bags and filled it up with straw and the hay, and then we tied it up with a string and that was our mattress.

So the biggest room in the palace, does anybody know what the biggest room in the palace is?

Right, the Hall of Mirrors. And so in the Hall of Mirrors, maybe it's like twice as long -- not much wider, twice as long as this auditorium. And there were mirrors and chandeliers hanging down and on the side. So we put our little mattresses next to each other. So the whole Hall of Mirrors was filled with mattresses and we were sleeping there.

>> Suzy Snyder: That must have been surreal.

>> Susan Warsinger: It was.

>> Suzy Snyder: Meanwhile, what is going on with your family back in Germany?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, we kept on writing to them. We didn't really hear anything from them. I didn't know what had happened.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you didn't know what was going on.

>> Susan Warsinger: No.

>> Suzy Snyder: So after you are in Versailles, what happens then?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, can I tell about one incident that happened in Versailles?

>> Suzy Snyder: Yes.

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, you will think this is really interesting. Can I tell it to you? Ok.

So you know the Nazis didn't decide to just stay in Paris. Guess where they went. They came to Versailles, you're right. And I remember I could hear the boots. It was like a caravan of boots and tanks and cars. You could hear them from far away. They stopped in front of the palace. And the mayor of the town was there and this high official at the beginning of the caravan came out. I don't know if he was a general or a mayor, I don't know. Anyway, he came out. He was this tall, came out and they wanted to talk to each other. The mayor of the town didn't know how to speak any French -- I'm sorry. The mayor of the town didn't know how to speak any German. And the Nazi officer didn't know any French. So someone in the crowd said, oh, there's a little girl in the palace, she knows how to speak German. So guess who it was.

>> [Laughter]

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. So I'm 10 years old by then. 10 years old. So I come out and the officer, really this tall. So they started talking to each other. And I don't remember they talked about. Anyway, at the end of the conversation, the Nazi officer bends down to me and said, "Little girl, how come you know how to speak German so well?" So I said to him, "The schools in France are really good and I learned how to speak them."

>> [Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: Good answer. So at one point you moved again.

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: Ok. So anyway, I don't know -- on the map, saw before, there was this white line in the middle of France, like on the western coast it went up like this. That part the Nazis gave to France and said that's going to be the unoccupied zone. So a lot of people wanted to go into the unoccupied zone. And you saw Vichy, which was in that part of the unoccupied zone. A lot of people went down there. And there was a chateau in a little town. It was a village. So somehow or other, I don't know how we got there but it was run by the OCE, one of the organizations that was helping lost children from all over, they put them into this. And it was an old, old castle. So in this castle we ended up in the unoccupied zone.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let's be clear, the unoccupied zone, or Vichy, was really run by a collaborative government.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. And he was collaborating with the Nazis. But it was better than living in the occupied zone. When I was a little kid, we didn't see any soldiers. So they left us alone there.

But in the meantime, I didn't hear anything from my parents.

>> Suzy Snyder: Still no word. And what was it like at the chateau?

>> Susan Warsinger: I wrote a diary.

>> Suzy Snyder: You did write a diary. This is true.

>> Susan Warsinger: She's the one that had it translated for me. We had a little talk before. I never wanted to read it because it was so childish. She was going to ask me some questions about the diary and I said I don't remember the diary but ask me something about the diary and then I'll see if I remember it.

>> Suzy Snyder: Well, describe -- first of all, you were, again, with Joseph the whole time.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes.

>> Suzy Snyder: And how was he doing?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, he was curious as ever. He was in the same chateau but all the boys were on one side and the girls were on the other side of the chateau.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did you feel a sense of relief having landed in the chateau and being there?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah, I had a sense of relief but I was missing my parents. And I was writing to them all the time. We really didn't know what had happened to them.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you were writing still to Bad Kreuznach, right?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did hear from them at all?

>> Susan Warsinger: No.

>> Suzy Snyder: What was your day-to-day life like?

>> Susan Warsinger: That's very interesting because I don't remember all of the details. I know all the kids had a job. And I know all the kids -- some people learned how to darn socks and some of the girls that I was friends with darned socks. And we had to help in the dining room.

Oh, I remember this one story. Once in a while we got strawberries and the kids were allowed to serve the strawberries. So I remember I got this big bowl of strawberries and I gave one to each of the kids. I had put one down for myself because I didn't want to miss. So then when I got to the last kid, there wasn't a strawberry. And I think I remember writing that in that diary. I took mine and I gave it to the kid. I thought that was very generous of me to do that.

>> [Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: At that time it was because food was at a premium.

>> Susan Warsinger: It was very special.

>> Suzy Snyder: In your diary you talk about being hungry, occasionally stealing grapes from the trees, trying to get grapes from the trees. These are things we take for granted but clearly were very vital to you.

>> Susan Warsinger: Can I tell about one more thing? I don't know if I wrote about it in the diary but let me know.

Anyway, when it was somebody's birthday, we used to -- the friends of the person, we used to go to the cafeteria and we used to borrow a tray, you know, like you get in the cafeteria when you go to lunch. So we got this tray and somehow or other we got some doilies or we made doilies out of paper. So we hid them in somebody's locker. We had a locker. So what everybody did who was in on this birthday surprise, they didn't eat their dessert for three weeks. And we saved it. And we put it on the tray. And then on the day or the day before it was the girl's or boy's birthday, we picked a flower from the garden. It was maybe a daisy or something like -- it wasn't even a daisy. What are those weeds called? I keep -- dandelion. Yes, thank you. So we put it on the tray and we decorated the tray. And in the morning before the person woke up, we took the tray with all the goodies and we brought it to the person and sang "Happy Birthday" to them.

>> Suzy Snyder: For me, it really shows that there was a deterioration of situation and you didn't have much so you tried to make do with what you had. When we were talking, I said it seemed like you tried to make what was not normal into normal. And you did the best that you could, my guess is, at the age of 12.

In your diary, I'm just going to read you one quote because you write about everything daily. You write about things that are happening. You go to Shabbat services because apparently it's an Orthodox, religious chateau, or they introduce Orthodoxy into it.

You write, "How long is it since I ate a piece of chocolate or a piece of cake? I have a terrible longing. Yes, papa often said when you are far away, you will notice how good us parents are. I always laughed at him saying it would be much better and now I really notice what I said then. I'm learning today how bad this is. How nice it was with my dear parents in Germany. I believe that was the best part of my life. And I was so stupid not knowing how lucky we were."

And at this point you still haven't heard from your parents.

>> Susan Warsinger: No. Yeah.

>> Suzy Snyder: So at what point do you leave the chateau? What happened?

>> Susan Warsinger: We were there for a year, almost a year. We had gone to school in the town, in the Village. It was the farmers. They had a school for all the kids in the village. They wanted us go to school with the village kids.

And, again, I don't know why the Villagers didn't want the Jewish kids to mix in with their kids because we could have taught them so many things. Because some of us had come from big cities. We had been around and these kids had only been on the farm. And we could

have learned a lot from them, so it would have been a good mixture. But they wouldn't allow us go to school with them either. So we had a French teacher who taught us all about geography and who taught us about the United States. We learned a lot of things from this particular teacher.

So anyway --

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you remember if you were learning English?

>> Susan Warsinger: No. I was looking for -- and was going to show it to you today. I had -- we had all of our lessons written. I have to check to see if it says --

>> Suzy Snyder: I was going to say, you haven't given this to us?

>> Susan Warsinger: I can't find it. I look for it. So I thought maybe I gave it to the museum.

Anyway, no. We had enough to learn everything in French. We had to do math, reading, writing, everything in French. So we didn't know any English at all.

So anyway, let me just tell you what happened one day. It was in 1941 and the director, it was a lady, a directory -- nobody ever got to see her. Only got to see her when you were bad and I was always a very good person. I never did anything wrong. I always behaved myself.

So anyway, so what happened was she called me to her office and it was really very frightening. I started to walk down like a marble staircase. I came into her office, which was lined in wood. She was sitting behind her desk. I was scared. So she said, "Susi, you're going to go to the United States."

I didn't know what was happening. She said, "Your parents are in the United States. And they had the HIAS and the Quakers and the State Department and everybody in the United States that they could think of were looking for you." So the Germans kept very good records and the French people kept very good records and they found us. And they sent us tickets to come to the United States.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you remember the trip?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Suzy Snyder: And how you felt.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. I was very excited. I was excited because I knew I was going to get to see my parents again. We had known something was going on in Germany but, remember, it was 1941. The concentration camps hadn't really started killing all of those Jewish people. But we knew something horrible was going on in Germany. So we didn't know if my parents had gone to a ghetto or a concentration camp. We didn't know. So when I found out that they were there, I was really very happy.

Can I tell you something about the trip?

>> Suzy Snyder: Please. Yes.

>> Susan Warsinger: You saw in the beginning, you explained the little tag, it was like a tag -- Eleanor Roosevelt, she wanted to help a lot of the children get over here. And evidently, what I found out later, not too long ago, that the children I came -- she had 50 children come on this boat called the Serpa Pinto. And they found room -- the two of us, my brother and I, to go with those 50 children on the boat to Serpa Pinto. And this was in Portugal. So we had to go south to Marseille, over the Pyrenees and across Spain and the Portugal and the capital of Portugal, Lisbon, so we took the boat from Lisbon, and that was supposed to take us to the United States. It was a Portuguese ship.

So the trip, can I tell you about the trip?

>> Suzy Snyder: Please.

>> Susan Warsinger: It was like 14 days. And the trip was up and down, up and down. It was a cruise ship but it wasn't anything like the cruise ships that they have now. It was much smaller. So the 50 children were assigned to the hull of the ship at the very beginning, in the front of the ship. And we weren't supposed to get mixed up with any of the other passengers on the ship.

So anyway, my brother wasn't going to listen to that. So he was all over. He was all over the ship. And he found where they were stashing a whole closet full of fresh pineapple. And we had never eaten any pineapple. So he kept on eating these pineapples. And I tell you, he spent a lot of time on deck getting rid of the inside into the Atlantic ocean.

>> Suzy Snyder: My guess is he doesn't eat pineapple today.

>> Susan Warsinger: He doesn't. He won't.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what was the mood on the ship? Was the mood good?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, the mood was good because they had told us in 14 days, at 6:00 in the morning, the night before they told us, we would pass by the Statue of Liberty. At 6:00, all the kids, the 50 kids, were very excited and all the other passengers were excited, too, so we were all on -- at the railing of the ship. It was like 10 minutes to 6:00 and there was a fog. It was so thick. You did like this to your hand; you couldn't see. We were really all upset.

But we stayed up there. And I'm not telling any lies; this is really what happened. This is one of the things in my life that I'm never going to forget, this more so than having my children and having my grandchildren. That fog at 6:00 lifted like this, like a curtain, like this. And then the Statue of Liberty just came into view and we saw the whole thing. It was really a very exciting thing because it meant to us, first of all, that we were going to see our parents and that we were going to be in the country where there was no more anti-Semitism, and there were no Nazis, and we were going to be free and we were going to live in a democratic society.

>> Suzy Snyder: Were your parents there to greet you?

>> Susan Warsinger: My father was there.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you remember what it felt like to see him after such a long time?

>> Susan Warsinger: It was wonderful to see him. So all the people got off the ship but the kids couldn't get off the ship because the doctor had to get on to the ship and he had to check us all out to see if we had some kind of a communicable disease. So he got to my brother and my brother says he had big flu but I'm telling you, he had a big rash all over his body from eating all of that pineapple. So they saw that and they said he can't come into the United States.

So what were they going to do with him? Did anybody guess what they with him? Can anybody guess?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah, this lady said Ellis Island. That's right. The island right next to the Statue of Liberty. If you couldn't get into the United States, you went to Ellis Island. So they said he has to be quarantined until they figure out what's wrong. I tried to explain to him it was a rash because of eating all of the pineapple. So they put us on Ellis Island and we found out all about the United States.

I'll tell you what we found out. Do you want to hear?

>> Suzy Snyder: Yes.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: No. They wouldn't let us on to the land. And evidently they must have told my father we were going to Ellis Island and they would get in touch with him as to what happened.

So first of all, we used to eat on these long tables. And on the tables they had this white bread and it was high like this with slices, and we had never seen white bread. I took a piece and squashed it in my hands and made a little ball. And somebody told me it was called Wonder Bread. And I thought that was really, really great.

And then my brother was sitting next to a sailor and he was drinking this brown drink and it had bubbles. And the sailor said to take a taste. My brother looked at me. I said, well, do it. And so he took it. And he said, Oh, it tastes really good. And the sailor told him it was Coca-Cola.

>> [Laughter]

>> Susan Warsinger: And then we heard that all the children in the United States could have candy in their mouth and keep it all day long.

So we were prepared to come back and enter the United States. So anyway, my brother's rash got better and they must have gotten in touch with my father and we got together and he took us to Washington where my mother and the baby were.

>> Suzy Snyder: We're almost out of time as far as we want to leave some time for questions, answers, but I want to know briefly if you can describe what was life -- do you remember what life was like being reunited with your parents and getting used to living in the United States?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, it was wonderful to be with our parents. It was difficult for me to go to school because they put me in the seventh grade.

Is there a seventh grader here by any chance? Oh, yeah. One.

So anyway, so I didn't know how to speak English too well. And in those days they had homogeneous grouping, which meant they put all the smart kids in one class and the dumb ones in the other one and all the middle ones in between. So they put me in that class because I didn't know how to speak any English. And all the problem kids were in that class, and I just couldn't believe, you know, what the kids -- didn't do their homework and they chewed gum in the classroom. I couldn't believe it. One kid fell asleep in class. I couldn't believe that was going on because to me a teacher was the highest thing in the whole wide world next to your parents. But later I learned how to speak English and things got to be a little bit better.

But you kids, how many of you are students in the school system? Yeah, a lot. well, I'll tell you. You're very lucky. Be happy that you have such wonderful teachers because in those days, you know, the teachers didn't really understand individual kids and they didn't understand the needs of an immigrant child. They didn't have the classes that the kids have today. If you're an immigrant, you know, you get taken out and you learn how to speak. It was very difficult. I had a hard time. But eventually everything turned out all right.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let's open it up to a few questions. Let me repeat the question so that we can get it in case we're reporting the program.

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Suzy Snyder: What happened to the wet money?

>> Susan Warsinger: Oh, yeah. I didn't tell you. The lady who took my brother and me across the border, she didn't do it for free. She wanted to have a lot of money. And the money, all the money that my father had saved, he gave to that lady to take us across the border. I'm sorry I didn't tell you before.

>> Suzy Snyder: She smuggled you across the border.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes.

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: Joseph --

>> Suzy Snyder: The question is, What does Joseph do?

>> Susan Warsinger: I can brag about him. He's a cardiologist. He saved a lot of people. Now he's retired because he's just a year younger than I am. And he used to live in Long Island but now his wife -- his kids are all grown up and doing well. He's got lots of grandchildren. So he lives in an apartment on top of the -- not the highest. One of the fancy hotels. Do you know where the tip of New York is called, the battery? And the tip of New York -- what's the name?

>> Suzy Snyder: Millennium?

>> Susan Warsinger: Ritz Carlton, yes. You're right. So anyway, on top of the Ritz Carlton they have some beautiful apartments with windows that are facing, guess what.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: That's right. That's where he lives now in the winter of his life. He did a lot and he contributed a lot to the United States.

And the other brother, Ernest, the baby, he was a physicist for NASA. Some of his experiments went up into space. He did a lot of work with the ozone, the air. So he contributed a lot to our society. And he has lots of children and grandchildren.

So the Nazis didn't accomplish what they set out to do.

They contributed a lot but when you think of all of those six million Jews that they killed, all of my relatives are in that six million, look at all of the things that those people could have given to society.

>> Suzy Snyder: Correct.

Briefly, how did your parents and your younger brother get to the United States?

>> Susan Warsinger: Ok. Let me tell you what happened. Remember I told you about that lady who owned the pickle factory? She kept on bugging everybody, the HIAS, the State Department, anybody she could think of. So finally she got enough affidavits to get my father. And she promised that he would not be a burden to the United States, that she would take care of him, make sure he had a job. So she had enough papers to get my father here.

So he came here and he started to work. He sold eggs to the Jewish people. He used to buy eggs from farmers, candle them, and then sell them it. So he saved enough money so that my mother and the baby could come to the United States. So when they were all here together, that's when they started looking for us.

>> Did you have more than one teacher?

>> Suzy Snyder: Can you repeat the question?

>> Did you have two teachers or one?

>> Susan Warsinger: When I was in seventh grade?

>> Yes.

>> Susan Warsinger: We had more than one teacher. We went from one teacher to the other. But we were together, the class was always together. Let's say, one teacher taught us math but it was all of us together. One teacher taught us reading. Another teacher taught us social studies, whatever it was.

But I remember later on, I was taking a course in chemistry and it was a little later. And I knew how to speak English a little bit by then. Just to tell you about this teacher. It's never going to happen to you again. She didn't understand at all. She used to -- I wanted to

please her. She used to call on me and I wasn't quite sure. So one day she said something and then she said -- by that time I was Susan but she didn't remember my name so she called me Hilda, and I don't know why, because my last name was Hilsenrath.

So, anyway, she called on me and she said, "Clear as mud?" Of course, you know I didn't get it. And I said, yes. And all the kids and she, they laughed at me. So it was a very sad experience that I remember. But, you know, later on I became a teacher and I said to myself, I'm never going to do that to my students. Anyway, I learned from her what not to do.

>> Suzy Snyder: We have a question here in front.

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Suzy Snyder: The question is, What happened to your parents' extended family?

>> Susan Warsinger: Ok. My grandparents -- my father's parents and many of his sisters and brothers, except one, they lived in Poland. And in Poland the Jews didn't even go to the concentration camps. They didn't go to the ghettos. When the Nazis came into the town, they made them march into the woods and they made them dig their graves and they shot them and they fell into the graves.

On my father's side, I never found anybody that survived except one of his sisters that had left to go to Israel way beforehand. So I have her. She's a cousin.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me clarify. Susi's father's family was on the eastern side of Poland.

When the Nazis first implemented genocide, they started with this process of killing into open graves and then they quickly saw that was not going to work. Towards western Poland, those Jews actually did end up in concentration camps. But, again, it was -- Susi's correct, that there was this policy of mass shooting first.

>> Susan Warsinger: Because I tried to find them. And there's no record of them at all. And the Germans kept very good records.

Now, my mother's parents also lived in Poland but all of my mother's sisters lived in Germany. They were all German. One I wrote a story about. Her name was Tanta Anna, my mother's aunt, she took care of my mother. She was like my grandmother only she was my aunt. And what happened to her, I found her and her husband and my great grandmother whom she cared for and they were killed. They died in Riga. And all the other aunts, I don't know what happened to them. I never found them, and all of the other relatives I did not find them.

Just lately, a grandchild of Tanta Anna sent a letter to the museum and he said to the museum, who is this Susan Warsinger? They didn't know my last name. It turned out it was me. And he's my third cousin. So we're writing to each other.

>> Suzy Snyder: Found a relative very much later, which is wonderful.

I'm going to actually ask -- we have this tradition to give our speaker the last word. So, Susi, I'm going to give the last word to you.

But before you leave the auditorium, let me just say that Susi is going to be signing "Echoes," which is the publication that the museum produces of survivor volunteers. Many of them write -- do literature. And Susi is part of this program. So you are welcome to go out and visit the table afterwards.

Go ahead.

>> Susan Warsinger: I'm going to read it. Is that ok?

>> Suzy Snyder: Fine.

>> Susan Warsinger: I want my children, my grandchildren, my brothers and their families, my friends and the visitors here in the audience to rejoice in the fact that we are living in a

democratic society and that all of us should make sure that no dictatorship would ever usurp our liberties.

We need to remember the atrocities that happened to families during the Holocaust and pass this information on to our progeny. We need to learn from this horror in our history. We cannot undo the atrocities of the past. But besides remembering, we have to take action to confront hate. When we see injustice taking place, we have to do something about it. We cannot be onlookers. We have to be sensitive to each other and we have to take care of each other.

People ask me why do I volunteer in this museum. They say, How can you do this over and over? How can I not? Giving tours to our visitors, through our permanent exhibit, hopefully teaches them what hatred and prejudice can do to people. When touring law enforcement officers and future FBI agents, I hope that they understand their role when encounters atrocities.

We cannot be bystanders and definitely not be collaborators. There are threats of genocide in many parts of the world at the present time. We cannot be indifferent to emerging threats of genocide and mass atrocities. All of us need to be aware about what is happening and we need to work together to take the necessary actions to prevent people from being murdered for this simple reason that they are different. Never again do we want to stand by and do nothing.

I want to thank you, Suzy Snyder, for helping me tell my story. And I want to thank you, the audience, for coming to our museum and being witnesses to the story of the Holocaust and listening to my story.

Now -- how many of you have gone to the Permanent Exhibit already? How many are going? That's most of you. Can I just tell you? When you get up to the fourth floor, that whole fourth floor is my story told over again. So when you see the Nazi soldier standing in front of the store boycotting, just pretend that's my father's store. And when you see the lady sitting in the park and she's sitting like this, remember how I went through the park and how I wasn't allowed to go to public school. And there really is -- the book "Der Giftpilz" is also on that floor, under the exhibit called Propaganda. And when you get to the exhibit. St. Louis, a boat, you're going to see this great big boat, it's a very interesting story. You might want to read all about that. Make sure that you see the picture of the boat. That's what the Serpa Pinto looked like.

So I hope you have a wonderful learning experience on the floor. Thank you again for coming to the museum.

>> [Applause]