

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON ESTHER STAROBIN
APRIL 5, 2018

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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*. We are in our 19th year of the *First Person* program. Thank you for joining us. Our First Person today is Mrs. Esther Starobin, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2018 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of twice-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 serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Esther will share with us her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Esther a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our online conversation: *Never Stop Asking Why*. The conversation aims to inspire individuals and new generations to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises, and what

this history means for societies today. To join the *Never Stop Asking Why* conversation, you can ask your question and tag the museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program, as well.

Today's program will be live-streamed on the museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. A recording of this program will be made available on the museum's YouTube page. And we invite those who are here in the audience today to also join us on the web for our *First Person* program streams throughout the month of April. Please visit the *First Person* website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

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 which the arrow points on this map of Europe. She was born in Adelsheim, a town north of Stuttgart, to which the arrow points on this map.

Esther was the youngest of five children. In this photograph we see her brother, Herman,

Her mother, Kathi Rosenfeld, Esther (who is on her mother's lap), her older sisters, Bertl 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 the "Night of Broken Glass," instigated primarily by Nazi party officials and Nazi Storm Troopers, took place. The pogrom took place throughout Germany, parts of Czechoslovakia, and Austria.

In this photograph, Germans pass by the broken 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. The arrows show the route of the Kindertransport.

Esther wore this tag attached to her clothing as she traveled from her home town of Adelsheim, Germany, to Thorpe, Norwich, England, to join her foster family, the Harrisons.

We close with this picture of Esther with her English foster family, Alan, Dorothy and Harry Harrison.

Esther came to the United States in 1947 settling in Washington, D.C. She attended the University of Illinois; then 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 a managing partner in her law firm. Deborah, who founded "The Handmade Afghans Project" which made more than 10,000 Afghans to "bring comfort and warmth to our wounded service members" before it ended in 2013, is now very involved locally in Community Supported Agriculture.

Esther and Fred have two grandchildren. Jon graduated in 2016 with a degree in mechanical engineering. He is now testing and developing bicycle tires at Maxxis in Suwanee, Georgia. He is also involved in bicycle racing on the national level. Drew just finished his third

year at the University of Southern California and has an internship this summer in Los Angeles.

With Esther today are her daughter Deborah, son-in-law, Kelly, and niece, Renee, and nephew, Solomon.

Esther's volunteer work at the museum has involved helping to expand the museum's collections of documents, photographs and other items. In 2017 she took the museum's Docent Training to be a tour guide for the Permanent Exhibition, which she is now doing. Esther is also a contributor to the museum's writing project which produces editions of *Echoes of Memory*, a collection of writings by survivors associated with this museum. Following today's program, Esther will be available to sign copies off *Echoes of Memory*.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Esther Starobin.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Esther, thank you so much for joining us and being our First Person today. We have just a short period, an hour. I know you have so much to share so we'll get started.

>> Esther Starobin: Ok.

>> Bill Benson: You were very young when your parents first sent you to England. And though you were too young to tell us about your life at that time, perhaps you can give us a sense of what life was like for your parents in Adelsheim and during the time before Kristallnacht, your parents' decision to send you away to safety. Tell us about those early years as best you can.

>> Esther Starobin: Ok. Well, I was 2 when I left so I clearly don't know this from personal remembrance. As you saw in the picture, there were five children and my mother and father. My father lost a leg in the First World War. He had been trained to be a baker, which he couldn't do with just one leg, so he traded grain and the sale of animals to the local farmers. My mother helped him because he had trouble with the cart.

It's kind of hard, now to think about it, at that time they were using carts.

The year that I was born, there actually was a court case that somebody was suing my father and my mother, that my father sold them a cow that wasn't good. So they actually lost their business the year that I was born, which was happening to Jews all over Germany.

So the three older sisters could no longer go to school in Adelsheim, chase very small place, still is a small place, has one traffic light.

>> Bill Benson: To this day.

>> Esther Starobin: To this day.

So they had gone first to live with my mother's sisters to go to school and then from there they went to Aachen.

One of the things I found out recently -- found out recently -- I'm going to contradict something Bill said. My aunts actually arranged for my sisters to leave on the Kindertransport but my sisters had been living in Aachen with my aunts. My brother and I were still in Adelsheim with my parents.

Adelsheim had a very small Jewish community, but my family had moved there from another small Jewish community because there were enough men to hold services. The actual Rosenfeld family, my father's family, had been in that area 200 years. They were longtime residents of that area. My mother came from another place, Rexingen. I don't know much about my mother at all.

>> Bill Benson: How large of an extended family did you have?

>> Esther Starobin: Both my parents were one of 10 siblings. So it was an enormous family, actually.

>> Bill Benson: Many cousins, aunts, uncles.

>> Esther Starobin: Many. Two of my uncles and one of my aunts was in the United States by then. One aunt was in England. We'll talk about that later.

>> Bill Benson: What was the age range of your siblings?

>> Esther Starobin: My older sister, Bertle, who is the only one who is still alive, is 12 years older than I am. I was the youngest. Bertle tells me I was born at home because that's what happened then. She said she had to wake up in the middle of the night because I was born. And then she tells me like she had to wash my diapers. Like, what does she want me to do, thank her?

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Just reminding you.

>> Esther Starobin: Just reminding me.

>> Bill Benson: Kristallnacht, which took place November 9 through 10, 1938, convinced many German Jews, including your parents, that life under the Nazis had become intolerable and would get worse. Do you know much about the impact of Kristallnacht immediately on your family? Do you know what it meant for your family?

>> Esther Starobin: I know what happened to my sisters. And I know kind of what happened to my parents. My sisters were living, as I said the in Aachen. They had walked off to school because you didn't know everything that was happening then. They saw the synagogue burning.

>> Bill Benson: This was the morning of the 10th of November?

>> Esther Starobin: The 10th. So they were told to go home.

The thing that I don't understand -- my older sister, Bertle, said, well, we were just children, we didn't exactly know what was going on. Well, my sister Bertle is a smart woman so she must have been a smart kid. How could she not have known? I don't understand it. My other two sisters really didn't talk about it a lot.

So something that I read just recently that I hadn't read -- I just read it yesterday, actually. My aunts in Aachen arranged for my sisters to go on the Kindertransport.

>> Bill Benson: Up to that point you thought your parents, as of yesterday.

>> Esther Starobin: Yes, as of yesterday. I mean, that's the thing about all -- I'm finding out and my family is always finding out things we didn't know.

The only story I ever heard about it, Bertle telling me her ears were pierced the night before she left because it prevented her eyes from deteriorating. My sisters never talked about the actual trip, except for Edy, who mentioned getting food when they crossed out of Germany. But I never really heard anything else from them about the actual trip. And considering Bertle was 13 and Edy was 11 and Ruth I think was 7 or 8, I don't know that I didn't -- I don't know why.

But back in Adelsheim, I know what happened there. And I have to tell you how I know this. There's a man in Adelsheim who when people wanted to know what happened to their families, the Jewish families, or what their life was like, they contact this man. He was a high school teacher in Adelsheim, not from Adelsheim but that's where he was. He inherited this position from a man who had known my parents but then that man got too old and he gave it over to Reinhart. And Reinhart has gotten very involved in the Jewish history of Adelsheim.

>> Bill Benson: He's not Jewish.

>> Esther Starobin: He's not Jewish. His father was a Nazi. He said his mother is concerned his getting so in involved will make him go mad but he hasn't gone mad.

I wrote to him to ask him because somebody asked me what happened in Adelsheim. I had no way of knowing. We weren't there. But apparently people came. They went from villages to villages destroying things. They came to Adelsheim. Two or three people from Adelsheim joined them. They burned the synagogue. They took the Torahs and burned those. And they did arrest and beat up some of the men.

Now, my parents lived in a house that was off the main road and nothing happened to them. At least that's what I know. And then they went on to the next village.

We had an aunt, the aunt that I talked about, my mother's sister, in London. She had gone to London earlier and worked as a domestic because that was a job you could do if you were an immigrant. So she did arrange places for my sisters to go.

>> Bill Benson: Your aunt had done that.

>> Esther Starobin: My aunt had done that.

>> Bill Benson: So after Kristallnacht, November 1938, early in 1939 your parents and your aunts begin making plans to have you go to England, to go on a Kindertransport. Tell us what a Kindertransport was.

>> Esther Starobin: Well, kinder is children, transport was the train. But when the war broke out, there was a conference to see if any nations would be willing to take in refugees and England was the only place that did. The Jewish community and some Christian groups, I don't know which other groups, went to parliament and asked if they would be willing to take children. And they were willing to take unaccompanied children --

>> Bill Benson: No parents, no adults.

>> Esther Starobin: No parents, no adults. With the understanding that after this unpleasantness was finished, these children would return to their parents and be gone. There was a fee of \$50 pounds. I don't know what that's worth now but it was quite a bit that had to be paid. And these people tried to find homes or children were sent to hostiles, lived in group homes.

So luckily for my sisters, my aunt knew enough people --

>> Bill Benson: Because she was in London already.

>> Esther Starobin: And the same thing that I read yesterday. They were saying the children who had places to go went to London and the children who didn't went someplace else and then they went to these homes.

>> Bill Benson: You didn't go with your three sisters. You went separately from them. So they went first. Why do you think that was?

>> Esther Starobin: Well, they went in March of 1939. And I left in June of 1939.

>> Bill Benson: So several months later.

>> Esther Starobin: One of the many things about my being sent that I don't know, my brother was older than me, why wasn't he sent? Why did they send me? I would say because he was the only boy and boys were very special but I don't really know.

As much as you can find out, so much information these days, I haven't been able to find out how I got from Adelsheim to the train and who took care of me. Clearly at 2 years old somebody did. So I don't know that at all. But I went in June, as I said. And the Society of Friends found a placement for me.

>> Bill Benson: Friends associated with the Quakers. Right?

>> Esther Starobin: Right. I lived in a place called [Indiscernible] which was a little tiny Hamlet outside of Norwich, a cathedral city in England. My foster father worked in a shoe factory. And the man --

- >> Bill Benson: Before we get to that, a couple of more questions.
- >> Esther Starobin: Ok.
- >> Bill Benson: You said there was a fee, like a 50-pound fee, which was a lot of money. Were there other costs, to your knowledge, associated with being sent on the Kindertransport?
- >> Esther Starobin: Not that I know of but clearly you had to be able to get there.
- >> Bill Benson: Right. Right.
- >> Esther Starobin: And I don't know --
- >> Bill Benson: Get passage on a plane.
- >> Esther Starobin: Don't know about that. I'll have to look that up.
- >> Bill Benson: And you were saying here you are, 2 years old, accompanied by somebody on the train. You shared with me there was a film from 2007, I think, "Into the Arms of Strangers" that I believe does a pretty good job.
- >> Esther Starobin: It really is a good movie. It follows 10 different people who were either on the Kindertransport, one woman who was pulled off --
- >> Bill Benson: It's a documentary.
- >> Esther Starobin: It's really quite interesting if you can get it from your library or Netflix.
- >> Bill Benson: With your sisters going in March, they don't remember what the actual Kindertransport was like for them, the trip, to your knowledge?
- >> Esther Starobin: Well, two are dead.
- >> Bill Benson: But as you talked over the years.
- >> Esther Starobin: They never really talked about it. I don't know if they talked amongst themselves and didn't tell me. I really didn't hear much about it. You could take very limited -- well, it wasn't such a little suitcase. Bertle had the suit case which she had taken, which is now in the museum. You could take some clothes. But other than that, they really never talked -- it's like a mystery in the family. In fact, they never talked about anything. Well, we'll talk about that later. It was very quiet.
- >> Bill Benson: So with your sisters going in March, they arrived and I believe went to separate homes.
- >> Esther Starobin: They did.
- >> Bill Benson: They were separated once they hit London. What do you know about where they went?
- >> Esther Starobin: Bertle, my oldest, went to live with a couple who had a place in Scotland. In fact, Bertle told me they were on the train going to Scotland when war was declared.
- >> Bill Benson: So September 1.
- >> Esther Starobin: So Bertle lived with them in Scotland. She went to school for a little bit. But when she was 16, she returned to London to live with my aunt and go to work. She told me, at a later date, when she was older and living in London, a policeman knocked on the door and asked, "Do you know this man." "I don't know this man." Well, it turned out her foster father was a spy for Germany and when they had been in Scotland, he had been spying for the Germans.
- >> Bill Benson: So what a great cover. The foster home for a Jewish child and you're a spy for the Nazis.
- >> Esther Starobin: A very good cover.

Edy lived with a family in London. And then when the war broke out, children were sent out of London. She then went to live with a Jewish family in the countryside. She always said they treated her like a slave. She was a very unhappy person there. When she got old

enough, she joined the women's Army and was in the Army.

>> Bill Benson: In the British Army.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Maybe we'll jump ahead a little bit because you brought that up. Once she joined the Army, later, after the war, she got stationed in Germany. Right?

>> Esther Starobin: She did.

>> Bill Benson: And went to Adelsheim.

>> Esther Starobin: To get our birth certificates. And she apparently was walking down the street and somebody looked at her and said in German, "Oh, you must be Adolph" -- my father -- "Adolph's daughter." they recognized her. Very interesting.

The other interesting thing about the birth certificates, all girls' birth certificates had Sarah added to the name. So I was Esther Sarah, which was on the tag. And all boys had Israel added to their tag. And then later on, much later, I got another birth certificate and the Sarah is gone, thank goodness.

Ruth, she lived with a doctor in London, a doctor and his family. And then when she was sent from London, she lived with another family, Websters. And I never really heard much about the Websters either. And she for some reason landed in a hostile. The one thing Ruth said about the hostile, she wouldn't do her Hebrew lessons sent to her. I don't think that's why she landed in the hospital but I don't know. So she was just leaving the hostile when we came to this country and then she went to high school.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if during the time -- including the time when you went to Norwich, all in different parts of England, not just in different homes, was there any communication between the siblings during that time?

>> Esther Starobin: My aunt knew where we all were. I remember my sisters visiting but in looking back, I'm pretty sure it was after the war that you couldn't really move around during war.

>> Bill Benson: As you shared with us a moment ago, your brother, Herman, didn't go. He stayed behind with your parents. Tell us what you can about what happened to Herman and what happened to your parents. What do you know about that?

>> Esther Starobin: Apparently much of the stuff I know about Herman we found out very recently. The museum has a new exhibit about the U.S. response to the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: It opens officially in a couple of weeks.

>> Esther Starobin: Right.

>> Bill Benson: So when the historians were doing research, they found a picture of my brother when he came to this country. And from that picture, because I met someone else who was doing research, the connection was made and she found out a lot of stuff about my brother.

But anyhow, my parents -- all the Jews were sent to France. They were deported in October of 1940. It was the Jewish holiday. And my brother by then was not living at home because he was living somewhere else to go to school. He was home for the holiday. It was very common for these actions against the Jews to happen on Jewish holidays, the way it was done. So my parents and my brother were sent to Gurs, which is in France.

My father had a wooden leg, which I mentioned before. Apparently his wooden leg didn't go with him. I have copies of letters from the mayor of Adelsheim telling whoever took his leg to give it back. The camp they went to was the work camp.

>> Bill Benson: In France.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. One of my aunts was there. But there was an organization called

OSE that took kids out of the camp and provided them with schooling and some education and probably more food than they got in the camp. So just recently we have learned that Herman was in this camp, in the school, which one he was in which we didn't know until last year or two.

In 1941, 1,000 children were allowed into the United States. And we came to the United States.

>> Bill Benson: As part of that group of 1,000.

>> Esther Starobin: As part of that group of 1,000 children. And apparently there was a picture in the paper and some family member saw the picture and got connected with Herman. But also just recently I got a list -- I'm not sure where it came from. It talks about the expenses involved in getting Herman from New York to here. So it's just interesting.

My parents stayed in Gurs. And in 1942, when the killing started in full force and people were being deported to be murdered, my parents were sent to Auschwitz August 14, 1942 and they were murdered immediately upon their arrival.

>> Bill Benson: And you -- of course, you didn't know this at the time. But when you learned this, you learned great details including the convoy number that they were on. That's why you know the exact date.

>> Esther Starobin: There's a book published by someone in France. It lists all the convoys, the names of the people, when they were born, what village they came -- well, where they came. They didn't all come from villages and then what happened to them.

Bertle actually had known they had died because she was sending money. I mean, here she was 16, 17, 18. They needed money in the camp, which I didn't know as a kid. And she got back the money from the Red Cross. So she knew.

I was not a questioning child. I didn't really know that. Well, I'll get to that. Can I get back --

>> Bill Benson: Before your experience with the Harrisons, your parents in Germany still, you did, or Bertle at least, did hear from them for a while. You have some family letters. Tell us a little bit about that.

>> Esther Starobin: Ok. In the 1980s there started to be a lot of information on television, the newspapers, people beginning to really talk about it. And Bertle just said, oh, I've got some letters from our mother and father. My father wrote three lines on bottom. Of course they were in German. I took German in high school and college. I really can't speak it. But my husband works -- had them translated where he worked. And that's really all I know about my mother.

So my mother, at the beginning, expected to get out and join us. But she wrote to Bertle, who was not living with us, who was a teenager, make sure your siblings are polite, do their homework.

>> Bill Benson: And here you are living in places separately.

>> Esther Starobin: All over. Wash behind their ears, thank the people. You know, the things that mothers tell you to do.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Right.

>> Esther Starobin: And always a belief in God. She always believed in God.

There's another letter where she knows that Herman has come to the United States. She talks about how pleased she is that he's living with this uncle who lived in Adelsheim before he came here, and he has a cousin, who just loved having this little brother. Not sure about that.

And then there's another letter -- my mother wasn't thin. You saw that on the picture.

There was a lot of her -- telling her to save -- telling Bertle to save her clothes because she had gotten so thin she would be able to wear them. Just unbelievable.

The beginning letters are spaced, punctuation. The last ones run together. So by the end, she was pretty sure she wasn't going to get out. But it was interesting. Bertle said there were more letters. But in all the moving around --

>> Bill Benson: One of the things you said to me is you can really see the despair growing in these letters.

>> Esther Starobin: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: And then, of course, they stopped.

>> Esther Starobin: Me reading the letters, that was the first time I realized you needed money in the camps. I didn't know that.

>> Bill Benson: So when you got to England, you ended up in this little village, living with the Harrisons.

>> Esther Starobin: Norwich is a big place.

>> Bill Benson: You stayed with the Harrisons until 1947. So for eight of the first 10 years of your life. Tell us what you recall about your life with the Harrisons, both during the war and then for that period of time after the war.

>> Esther Starobin: Ok. Just to go back because you asked me about communication. My mother knew where I was going. And she had written to Auntie Dot, my foster mother. And Auntie Dot kept the letters so I have them. She wrote a letter telling her about me, things that I was scared of and that kind of thing. And Auntie Dot -- another postcard which I think must have been a relief to at least know where I was going.

The Harrisons were deeply religious and really believed that God would look out -- I mean to send all of your children to strangers, I can't imagine going doing it.

Anyhow, when I first got there, I had scarlet fever and was quarantined. But Allen used to play with me through the window. He's seven years older than me. I loved Allen from the start.

>> Bill Benson: Was he their only child?

>> Esther Starobin: Their only child. Exactly the same age as my sister Ruth. I was scared of Uncle Harry. He was the mildest man you ever met. Never raised his voice but I was scared of him. And the only thing -- and also, loud noises. And it must have been because of things that had happened in Germany. But I lived with them. They basically spoiled me rotten.

>> [Laughter]

>> Esther Starobin: But they belonged to something called a chapel. And you know, now in churches and synagogues community is so important. Well, this chapel had community. They had a lot of activities.

>> Bill Benson: It was a Christian --

>> Esther Starobin: It was a Christian community. It was people who didn't do Church of England. So I was involved there. Did I know I was Jewish? Maybe. I don't know. They had many activities. The shoe factory had trips that we went on. But I guess all of that was after the war because you couldn't really do that.

We had to carry gas masks which had to be tested. We were given milk in school and things like that. I loved school and was a pretty good student. They had something called the 11-plus exam. I was just about ready to take that, which determined whether you went to an academic high school or a trade school, when we came to this country.

Allen was a really good big brother. I don't know how many of you had big brothers

or were big brother and sisters and were mean to your little ones but he was not. He would take me around, look out for me and all of that.

So I was with them until I was 10.

>> Bill Benson: So eight years. During the war years, you mentioned that you had to have a gas mask. Do you remember or do you know of any of the other impacts in that community of the war that was taking place? Pretty brutal.

>> Esther Starobin: Well, I have known other people who have talked about they never had enough food but that was never true. I mean, the Harrisons grew things. We had chickens in the back backyard. I remember we got rid of the chickens when rats came. Allen said that's not what happened but who knows?

I don't remember having trouble with clothes. You wore uniforms so you didn't have to have a lot of clothes. Uncle Harry fixed my shoes. In fact, the shoes I had have been donated to the museum. They had been fixed many times.

I imagine we had blackout patterns, an air raid shelter in the backyard that we went into. There was an American Air Force Base nearby. So there were a lot of planes. Allen and his buddies would collect pieces that fell off planes and all of that. But I didn't -- that wasn't a girl thing to do.

>> Bill Benson: And you went to a little English school right there. So sort of having -- given that it was wartime, sort of growing up English for a period of time.

>> Esther Starobin: I was very happy. Now, my sisters came to visit. Once I guess Auntie Dot took me to London and I went to a Seder. I had no idea what was going on. It was long. We also went one time, all of us, and what I remembered doing is Allen and I going up and down the escalators because the stores didn't in escalators.

But what's really interesting, something I just found out recently, one of the times we were in England, Auntie Dot gave me a lot of pictures. And she gave me a picture of me with -- I never looked on the back of it. Well, I looked on the back of it this time and it said, "Going to London to see a place on a ship." I never knew that. To me when I left, it was a big surprise. But apparently --

>> Bill Benson: Some plan.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. Since then, you can get records from different places. And Bloomsbury House was the place that rooked after the refugees and I've gotten records from there that talks about money for the passport and money for some shot. None of this I knew. I guess the Harrisons didn't tell me these things.

The other thing that I have that Auntie Dot gave me, she had written to my uncle here, the uncle that my brother was living with, to see if they could keep me, which I would have been very happy about. And my uncle wrote back saying, no, the family needed to be together; that's what my parents wanted and all of this stuff. Pretty nice letter from my uncle actually.

But I was not a questioning kid. I think if you had been sent from one place and told you're going someplace else, you learned you don't ask questions. At least that's what I learned.

So in November of 1947 --

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn there, one more question. So the war ended in May 1945. You would live in England for another two years with the Harrisons. Do you remember how life changed for you, if at all, once the war was over? Was anything different that you recall?

>> Esther Starobin: I don't really remember but I guess the bombing stopped and all of that

kind of stuff. Food was still scarce. All of those things were still true.

>> Bill Benson: Rationing continued for many years in England.

>> Esther Starobin: So none of that changed.

I'm very good at blocking out things that happened.

>> Bill Benson: So 1947, that's when you learn however long it had been planned, you learned that you were now going to be leaving the Harrisons.

>> Esther Starobin: The Harrisons did not have a telephone. Well, not too many people did. So Bertle called the police in Norwich and they came to the door and told the Harrisons they had to take me to London the next day. So Allen and Auntie Dot went with me. Uncle Harry couldn't take off work. They took me to London, handed me over, with another package. They did go to see the ship off, actually. Allen was supposed to receive a big award that day which he didn't because he wasn't there to do it.

We sailed on the Queen Mary. Well, that might sound fancy but it had been a troop ship. It wasn't fancy. They had a strike -- there was somebody from the royal family on the ship. And whoever was having the strike thought that would be a good day. Luckily Bertle had a boyfriend who was a butcher and he had given her sausage, my Aunt had given us bread so we didn't starve. But we left. I was very seasick. I don't think Bertle was.

What I didn't learn until much later, Bertle didn't want to leave either. But we were leaving --

>> Bill Benson: So why did you leave? Bertle was basically taking care of everybody. It sounds like she must have done a lot of the arranging.

>> Esther Starobin: Bloomsbury House arranged it. My mother had said that's what we were to do. Also, if you remember, the Kindertransport said we weren't supposed to stay there.

>> Bill Benson: So your mother, in one of those early letters, had said get to the United States eventually?

>> Esther Starobin: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Esther Starobin: I lost what I was going to say.

>> Bill Benson: Why the United States?

>> Esther Starobin: Because we had uncles here. We had uncles here. My brother was here by then. So we came to the United States.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember what it was like for you, eight of your first 10 years with the Harrisons and now you're told, somebody coming to the door, saying you got to go to London tomorrow.

>> Esther Starobin: It was a big shock. Allen tells me his mother's hair turned white overnight. Yet she knew it was going to happen.

So we came to the United States. Two uncles met us in New York. One was the uncle where my brother was living. He had lived in Adelsheim so Bertle knew him. The other was an uncle who had married my aunt. We came to the United States.

Now, Ruth had come the week before. We lived with another aunt and uncle in town. That was the worst time in my life, actually. Which is kind of interesting. Because if you get a chance to see the Kindertransport movie, "Into the Arms of Strangers," many of the people are very unhappy because they are living with families that didn't love them right away. Why would they think families would love a stranger? Anyhow, or they had to do chores which they had never done in Germany and things like that.

To me, coming to the U.S. was like that. The Harrisons were soft-spoken. They

never yelled. They didn't drink. They didn't play cards. They didn't go to the movies. They didn't wear makeup. I came to this country. We lived in a big house on North Capitol Street, which isn't far from here. There was another immigrant family, my aunt, my uncle, my aunt's mother, and two cousins so there were a lot of people in this house.

My aunt was mentally ill. Nowadays they have medication. But she would do things like come in and pull the sheets off the bed at 5:00 in the morning to wash them, keep the food until it was bad. I threw my lunch away every day on the way to school because the food was bad. My uncle had a bad temper. He used to throw things, furniture and stuff.

>> Bill Benson: So you're describing you come from this household where it's calm and quiet and nurturing, very nurturing.

>> Esther Starobin: Right. They were nurturing in their way. It was just a very strange way.

>> [Laughter]

>> Esther Starobin: So I went to a school. The schools in England at that time were better than the schools here so I didn't learn anything much. But I had a teacher --

>> Bill Benson: Didn't learn much when you got to the United States?

>> Esther Starobin: Except diagramming. I don't know if you had to diagram in English but I never saw the point of it. We didn't do that in England.

>> Bill Benson: And this is from a former educator. [Laughter]

>> Esther Starobin: So I had a new religion, a new family, a new kind of school. She made fun of my English because some of the words were different. Everything was different. And a new family, because while I knew my sisters, I hadn't lived with them.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Esther Starobin: So it wasn't the best arrangement. My uncle once dragged me kicking and fussing to the movies. We went to see "The Wizard of Oz."

>> Bill Benson: At some point you ended up living with your sisters.

>> Esther Starobin: I did. Once Edith had a job and Bertle --

>> Bill Benson: She had been in the British Army.

>> Esther Starobin: She came over the day Truman was elected. So they didn't pay much attention to her because there was an election. But anyhow, after they had jobs, my sisters got an apartment. They took me with them. If you think about it, they were two young women in a new country trying to make a go of it. They could have left me with my aunt and uncle but they didn't. So we lived in an apartment. I went to school. Sometimes they were dating people who were my teachers but I lived with them.

>> [Laughter]

>> Esther Starobin: I graduated from high school when I was 16. Not because I'm very bright but just because I had gone to school in England. And it never occurred to me I couldn't go to college. My sisters never said, well, now you can go to work. Which was probably good. I failed typing. But I went to the University of Illinois and lived -- the middle of us, Ruth, had been married by then so I lived with them. My brother-in-law was going to work on his Ph.D. I lived with them and went to school, studied to be a teacher, got my degree.

Luckily in one of my classes I found out you could get your citizenship when you were 18. Because at that time you couldn't teach in public schools in Maryland unless you were a citizen. So I got my citizenship the day after Ike was elected, I think. And I came and taught for many years. I loved teaching. I was pretty good at it, too.

I taught for three years. Then I got married. Well, I got married my second year of teaching. And then we had two children. I stayed home for nine years. Then I went back to

teaching. And I taught for 29 years altogether.

>> Bill Benson: Talk to us a little bit about the Harrisons. It didn't end with you coming here.

>> Esther Starobin: Oh, no, no, no. My sisters were very wise people. They made me write to them regularly. And in 1964 -- '64? '54? Maybe it was '64. Allen came over as an exchange teacher. That was really nice. And then the summer -- when he finished that, we brought the Harrisons over. They stayed with us for a while.

It was very brave for them. They weren't real modern people but they got on this plane and came here. We went to the beach, which was an unfortunate beach because -- Allen was teaching in New Jersey. We asked to find a place for us. He found a place. I hope nobody's from Toms River. This was in Toms River. They have a lot of mosquitoes. Not a good place to go. But we had a great time. And then the Harrisons went back.

We visited the Harrisons, Fred, the girls and I. And the Harrisons were sort of like grandparents. My kids knew they weren't their grandparents. Allen was always Allen. He was never Uncle Allen, just by Allen. We went back and forth a couple of times. Deborah and Judy went to visit once or twice by themselves. Allen came here pretty regularly. And when Auntie Dot died, Uncle Harry would spend six weeks in the summer with Fred and I.

And what was really interesting, after his father died, he found out from a cousin that his grandfather was from the Ukraine and was Jewish. Uncle Harry had loved going to synagogue, so maybe there was some connection there.

>> Bill Benson: That was a recent -- relatively speaking?

>> Esther Starobin: Relatively speaking.

So my foster parents are dead. Allen and I, you know, we go -- he used to visit. He's a little old for that now. I go there. He's pretty special to me. My brother was, too, but he was the brother also. And Fred considered him a brother, too, brother-in-law.

>> Bill Benson: And as you said, you've been back to England to visit them. What about going to Germany?

>> Esther Starobin: Ok. In the late 1980s I had this great need to find out where I came from, that I didn't hatch out of an egg. So Bertle and her husband, Fred and I, were going to go back to Adelsheim. In the meantime, Morris had a heart attack and couldn't go. So Bertle wrote a letter, in German, to them saying we were coming. And Fred and I went off to Germany.

Well, we got there. There was nobody around. It was like it was dead. But eventually we found somebody and they sent us to the Town Hall where they couldn't find the letter. They didn't speak English. We didn't speak German. But the deputy man's wife spoke English. So we made arrangements to meet the next day. And they said, Well, where are you staying? I said someplace here. They wanted me to go out of town. I said, No you sent me away once; I'm staying this time.

>> [Laughter]

>> Esther Starobin: We stayed in this sort of like bed and breakfast. Well, they had meals. We stayed there. I had such nightmares that night. I thought the Nazis were coming up to get me. We ate in the thing. I don't know what we were eating but the people there kind of knew who we were. We could tell they were talking about us.

And the next day, the man who had known my parents, the man who originally answered questions, who wrote back, we went on a tour. My sisters had told me a couple of places to see. Apparently when they -- on Friday nights there was a community bakery. Somebody had to take the loaf. Edith once dropped it in the little stream, so I knew what stream to look for. They showed us the outside of the house.

>> Bill Benson: The family home.

>> Esther Starobin: The family home. And while it was big, apparently the second floor other people lived on. We went to the cemetery. There's another little town, and in between the two towns there's a cemetery that was really pretty well taken care of. It was off the path, so it wasn't where people might see it to vandalize. So we did see everything. There's a little museum there that's only open every other Sunday or something but they opened it for us and they had a section about the Jews.

I did not feel like I was going home. It had no memories for me but I had seen it and I was glad I went.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember right, you encountered some people who acknowledged that they knew your family.

>> Esther Starobin: No. Not that time.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. But you have encountered people.

>> Esther Starobin: So at some point Bertle and Morris decided to go. And by that time Reinhart was the person doing the introductions.

>> Bill Benson: The fellow from the town.

>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. They actually stayed at the house of my other daughter's in-law's family that lived close by. But they went and they saw everything. But they became friendly with this man Reinhart. And in 2000, he wrote to Bertle -- actually e-mailed -- to say he was planning a commemorative -- the deportations of the Jews. And Bertle and I looked at each other and said you got to have some Jews there; let's go. So we did go.

And Renee came with us, my brother's oldest daughter. I have to backtrack. At some point Bertle had said, I wonder if there's anybody in Rexingen, where my mother came from. So I put something on. Somebody answered. It turned out this was a young man going to American U, in town here, and Bertle said, "I want to meet him" and made arrangements. I said, "Bertle, you can't go meet a strange man by yourself," so her husband went.

We became friendly with this Tim guy. He had said we could go to Rexingen and stay with his parents. So on the way to go to this commemoration, we went to Rexingen. We saw the cemetery where a lot of my maternal grandparents and people were born -- buried, not born. So we went there. We saw some of the places in Rexingen. But I don't know as much about my mother's family or Rexingen.

Someone -- there is a book about the cemetery, about the Jews buried in that cemetery that Reinhart sent us a copy. But after this man did the book about the Jews, there's a book about the crusaders buried in the same cemetery. So it's interesting.

Then we went to Adelsheim. That's where we met people who knew and that Bertle remembered. The first day a translator told me what was going on. But she met people she had been in first grade with. And somebody had died and they were visiting just like if you go to a reunion. They talked about all of this and then somebody who was a native said, "Oh, my father used to take food to your parents." Because Jews didn't get the coupons for food like the rest of the Germans. He said, "My mother was very concerned because if I had been caught, something would have happened to us." And I said to Bertle, You think this is true? Because a lot of stories like that happened afterwards. People talk about what they did. Bertle said, yes, she remembered in some letter from mother had told her that.

>> Bill Benson: That acknowledged these folks had done that? Ok.

>> Esther Starobin: And someone else had exchanged -- they had sold them things they had in the house in exchange of food. And again Bertle said. So it was an interesting trip. We got to

go up in the house where my parents had lived. Well, it had been totally renovated. And the thing that was interesting, they had a son who was the same age as my oldest grandson. We went upstairs and he had all the same toys, Legos and those. But they were very neat, unlike my grandson's whose are all over.

>> Bill Benson: Speaking of neat, I have a question for you. I want to ask a couple more questions before we turn to our audience. You had shared with me that at some point you learned about an inventory that was done of the property inside your parents' house. Can you say a little bit about it?

>> Esther Starobin: At this same time when we were there with Reinhart, he had collected some data. He had found the proclamation about the Jews having to leave. But he had found an inventory of our house, pages and pages and pages. It even includes rags. I mean, every little thing. Bertle looked at it and said, oh, but we had a China doll in the living room that we weren't allowed to play with. That was not on the inventory. Clearly it had disappeared.

>> Bill Benson: So this was done evidently as your parents were being sent to the camp.

>> Esther Starobin: Apparently these items were then sold to pay off -- to go to the government.

>> Bill Benson: When you described it to me, you said the inventory was so detailed about their property; it mentioned a hardboiled egg that was in the refrigerator.

>> Esther Starobin: It had everything, pages and pages.

Reinhart had this ceremony, all in German so I didn't really understand it. There was also police outside and a neo-Nazi. But it seemed pretty moving, even in German. And then when I came home, I had it all translated.

>> Bill Benson: My last question for you, Esther, if you don't mind me asking this. You clearly experienced a huge amount of upheaval early in your life, being uprooted from your parents, sent to a foreign country with a different family; then you were uprooted from that family and brought here. What is the impact, is there an impact, on you in your later life? What do you think about that?

>> Esther Starobin: Definitely. I often feel an outsider. And I think because so often I was an outsider. And I think -- also I think I mentioned that I forget I sort of can close off an area of my life where I keep the people that I know in this place. I'm not good at intermingling. And I think it is directly from that.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, I think we have a few minutes to turn to our audience to see if they have some questions before we close the program in a few minutes. We have two mics. If have a question, go to the mic to use it. Try to make your question as brief as you can. I'll repeat it to make sure we got it right and that everybody in the room hears it.

So if you don't, I have many, many more questions. But I'm hoping -- here comes a brave soul right off the bat. That's great.

>> Thank you so much for sharing your story. It's been very interesting.

You mentioned early on that you have a lot of extended family, both your parents had nine siblings each. How much do you know or have you been able to trace of what happened to any of them?

>> Bill Benson: Just so everybody hears. The question was, What do you know about what happened to your very large, extended family?

>> Esther Starobin: As I mentioned before, Reinhart's gotten very involved. He made this big family tree. He has traced I think both sides what happened to them. And most of them landed up going to concentration camps and being killed.

The thing for me, I never heard stories about any of these people. It doesn't mean a lot to me. I mean, I'm glad to know it but I don't feel connected to it. But I do know what happened to most of them.

>> Bill Benson: Did any survive that you know of?

>> Esther Starobin: I think one uncle but he was married to a non-Jew so that may be why. The ones that were here were here. I have a cousin in London who was also on the Kindertransport. And I think that's all.

>> Bill Benson: That's it out of this very large family.

>> Thank you.

>> Esther Starobin: But I have a large, extended family now because Bertle has worked hard to make us a close family.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you for the question.

We have one over here.

>> Thank you so much for your story. What an amazing testimony you have. Can you tell us a little about how or if you have found forgiveness, how you've dealt with that in your life over the years towards the Nazis, towards, you know, just all of that hate?

Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: The question is, How have you dealt with the issue of forgiveness in light of all the hate and horrors you and your family went through?

>> Esther Starobin: Well, let me tell you. I taught in a middle school. And we had German. I didn't talk to the German teacher for two years. And then she was a lovely lady. This was silly. It doesn't hurt anyone but me to be filled with hate. So I really have sort of come to grips with that.

Do I forgive them? I don't understand it. I don't understand the need to pick one group of people and hate them and try to abolish them. I don't understand it. But it doesn't do me any good to hate it. It really doesn't. Do I forgive? Maybe.

>> [Laughter]

>> Esther Starobin: I will tell you. I think I truly have had a blessed life because my parents clearly loved us to send us away. I mean, how do you do that? The Harrisons were wonderful. My sisters were wonderful. I had a great husband. And I have pretty marvelous children and extended family. So I think out of all of this awfulness good has come.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Esther.

Thank you for those questions. Oh, we have one more. Ok.

>> Thank you, again, for coming and sharing so much with us today.

I'm curious to know. Do you have any thoughts on how your experience as a displaced person and the broader lessons from the Holocaust should inform the immigration policies that we create in the United States today?

>> Bill Benson: I think, if you don't mind, I'm going to hold on that question.

>> Of course.

>> Bill Benson: I want to keep it focused on her story if at all possible. It's a very good question. It might be one to ask Esther after the program when she goes up there, if you don't mind. And partly I'm very cognizant of the time. So thank you for that. I appreciate that.

Esther is going to close our program in just a minute. But I want to let you know, first, that when she finishes the program, she's going to go upstairs where she will sign copies of *Echoes of Memory*. And that's also a chance to ask her some more questions or just say hi to her if that's ok.

I want to thank all of you for being here. We will have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August so we hope you'll come back for another program.

We will be live-streaming all of the programs in April as we're doing today, so you can listen to them on the web. And all of our programs end up on the museum's YouTube Channel. So you can access them that way, too.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So on that note, I'm turning back to Esther to close our program.

>> Esther Starobin: And I always have the same last word. I strongly believe because of my experience -- most of us are never going to be in a position to affect thousands of people but we can help one person at a time. And I think it's important for us to do that, to help people along the way. And I think that's my last word.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

>> [Applause]