Advisory Council Meeting
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>> Ladies and gentlemen, the program will begin shortly. Please find your seats and be sure that your cell phones are silenced. Thank you.
>> Bill Benson: Good morning. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, First Person. Thank you for joining us. This is our twentieth year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Esther Starobin, whom you shall meet shortly. This 2019 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 August 8th. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests. Esther will share 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 to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises. You can ask your question and tag the Museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and the hashtag #AskWhy.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's website, meaning people will be joining the program online and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. We invite everyone to watch our First Person programs live on the Museum's website each Wednesday and Thursdays at 11:00 AM EST through June 6th. A recording of this program will be made available on the Museum's YouTube page. 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.

And we beginner with this photograph of Esther Starobin, born Esther Starobin in Adelsheim, Germany.

In this photograph we see from left to right her brother, Herman, her mother, Kathi, Esther (who is on her mother's lap), her older sisters, Berth and Edith, her father Adolph, and her sister, Ruth.

On November 9 and 10, 1938, a violent anti-Jewish pogrom known as "Kristallnacht," the "Night of Broken Glass," instigated primarily by Nazi party officials and Nazi Storm Troopers, took place. 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.

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

We close with this photo 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, who recently got engaged, 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 has just graduated from the University of Southern California and will move to Seattle to start his work at Microsoft's Gaming Department later this summer. With Esther today are her daughter Deborah, and her nieces Stacey, Rene, and several family friends. Esther's volunteer work at the Museum has involved helping to expand the Museum's collections of documents, photographs and other items. She also speaks to groups and talks with visitors at the Museum's Donors Desk. And, Esther is 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 of Echoes of Memory. Please join me in welcoming our First Person, Esther Starobin.
[Applause]

Esther Starobin, thank you so much for joining us and being willing to be our First Person today.
>> Esther Starobin: I'm happy to be here.
>> Bill Benson: So good to have you. You have so much to share with us in such a short time that we'll jump right into it, if that's okay. Esther Starobin, you were very young, just two years old when your parents sent you to England. Although you were too young to be able to tell us firsthand, of course, about life in Germany and your family at the time, perhaps you can give us a sense of Adelsheim and your family during that time before Kristallnacht and your parents' decision to send their daughter away to safety.
>> I can't. Some of this I know from my sisters, who didn't talk a lot, and quite a lot of the rest of what I know comes from a man who lives in Adelsheim, and when I have questions, I can write to him and he'll find out and send me the answers, so that's how I know. Truthfully, I don't remember anything, though I have been back to Adelsheim three times. So, Adelsheim is a very small place. There were basically ten, 11 Jewish families there, and there was a synagogue. I was, as you saw from the picture, I was the youngest of five, and soon after I was born, my oldest sisters were not allowed to go to school in Adelsheim, because they weren't allowed to go to public school, so they were living in Aachen, and that left my brothers and me in Adelsheim. I don't really know a lot about the decisions my parents made as far as the Kindertransport. My sisters were living in the biggest city, and they were living with aunts, and they went on the Kindertransport from there, but since neither my aunts nor my parents survived, it's hard to know what exactly went into the decisions to send us. Part of it could be because we had an aunt living in London. She'd emigrated earlier, so there was someone there, but the actual what made them do that and how they do it, I don't know.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about your father's business.
>> Esther Starobin: Okay. My father had been in the First World War, and he had lost a leg in the First World War. Before he went into the army, he trained to be a baker, and it was hard to train on a wooden leg, because it is not like wooden legs today. He sold grain to farmers. My mother helped him because he had trouble getting up and down the cart. I'm so used to cars thinking about how you run business, going up in down with a cart.
>> Bill Benson: It had to be horse-drawn.
>> Esther Starobin: I was born in April. In February of that year, one of the customers sued my father because he occasionally arranged a sale of a horse or a cow, and this person sued my father and said that he had sold him a bad -- I think it was a cow, and took him to court. And it is very interesting. Somehow, mysteriously I got a copy of these court proceedings and had it translated. The judge didn't even call my father by his first name. He was called Jew. How insulting is that? Of course, he lost the case, because this was a time when businesses were being taken away from Jewish people. He not only lost, he had to pay for the court case, he had to pay for the cow, and he had no business anymore, so it must have been a bit daunting for them then to have a new baby come.
>> Bill Benson: Uh-huh. How large, Esther, was your extended family?
>> Very. My parents both came, had -- there were ten in each family. Two, three uncles and one aunt had come to this area, the United States, earlier. My mother's side, the one aunt in London was one of my mother's sisters. The rest of them, as far as we know, all were killed. Reinhardt has made a family tree, and he's traced everybody. He knows when they were born, where they were sent, and when they died. The thing that's sad to me, I haven't heard stories about any of these people, so it doesn't mean a lot to me. I look at it, and I'm glad to

have it. But I wish I knew something about these people, but I really don't.
>> Bill Benson: Really don't. You had three sisters and a brother. What was the age range of your siblings?
>> Esther Starobin: My oldest sister was 12 years older. My next sister was ten and a half, the next one was seven, and my brother was four years older.
>> Bill Benson: Four years, okay. So, November 9th-10th 1938, Kristallnacht, what we call the Night of Broken Glass, that terrible night, we saw a picture in the opening where so many synagogues across Germany were destroyed, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested, stores were destroyed. That convinced many German Jews, including your parents, that life under the Nazis had become intolerable and would get worse. Do you know anything about how Kristallnacht impacted your family at that time?
>> Esther Starobin: Well, in Adelsheim, they did come through the -- the police, the soldiers, they came through, and they ruined the synagogues and they burned the scrolls. My parents' home was not on the main road, so nothing actually happened to them.
>> Bill Benson: Okay.
>> Esther Starobin: But the biggest impact was that after Kristallnacht, in England, the Jewish community, the Christian community went to parliament and asked if they could rescue -- bring children to England to rescue them, and the parliament said yes. There were a couple of things: The kids had to travel alone, without adults, and there was a 50-pound fee, which was actually quite a lot of money then, because they didn't want the kids staying and taking jobs away from English people, eventually. So that was the beginning of the Kindertransport to England.
>> Bill Benson: Uh-huh. Did you -- because your sister Bertle was 12 years older than you, 13 at that time. They were in Aachen, a different city. Did they remember anything about Kristallnacht?
>> They were walking to school, and unlike now, when you know the news immediately, they didn't know what was happening. They passed a synagogue burning, and people told them to go home, which they did.
>> Bill Benson: Back to Adelsheim?
>> No, back to Aachen. So they didn't talk a lot about it. There were a couple of things they used to say about the town. One, there would be people in the apartment at night who were gone in the morning, so evidently my aunts were helping people escape from Germany. Edith, my second sister, who liked to eat, talked about going across to Belgium sometimes and coming back with foods tucked in their clothing, but they didn't talk a lot about it. Bertle said she had her ears pierced, because there was an old wives tale that if you had your ears pierced, you didn't need glasses, and I don't think she wore glasses. Apparently, one of my aunts owned a nightclub, which seemed kind of strange, and the other one was a seamstress, but there is little to know about them.
>> Bill Benson: Just little snippets.
>> Esther Starobin: And they were my mother's sisters.
>> Bill Benson: Your parents in 1939, following Kristallnacht and all of the others, made this extraordinarily profound decision to send you and your three sisters and eventually your brother away. Tell us what you have been able to learn about the Kindertransport and any arrangements that your parents were able to make. As you said, one of them was that you had to travel alone, that there was a significant cost associated with it.
>> Esther Starobin: Which I think Jewish organizations paid then. I don't think my parents did.

The biggest question for me, my brother was four years older than I was. Why did they send me and not my brother? We have a couple of speculations. One, that he had been sent away to school and wasn't at home when the opportunity came up, or it was harder to send boys. But, again, we'll never know because my parents didn't survive. My sisters, when they traveled to England, my aunt worked as a maid, which was one of the things refugees could do, and she found three homes. My sisters were all in separate places in the London area when they first went, but, as you probably know, in England, once the war started, kids were sent out of London. But they were all in different places.
>> Bill Benson: And we are going to come back to that. But your three sisters went separately from you.
>> Esther Starobin: Oh, yeah. They went in March.
>> Bill Benson: Do you know why you didn't go with them?
>> Esther Starobin: I wasn't with them. It wasn't next door.
>> Bill Benson: Was that the reason, that there was a Kindertransport going earlier, as far as you know?
>> Esther Starobin: I don't know, yeah.
>> Bill Benson: You went later.
>> Esther Starobin: There are so many things you can find out. We are constantly finding out things, but there are other things that I can't seem to find out. I maybe don't know the right places to look.
>> Bill Benson: Like you say, you are still learning many, many things.
>> Esther Starobin: You asked how we were placed, right?
>> Bill Benson: Before we get to that, did your sisters ever talk about what it was actually like for them to get on a train, leave on a train, and go to England without their parents. Did they ever share what that must have been like for them?
>> Esther Starobin: They were very silent on the subject. My sister Edie only talked about when they crossed out of Germany, somebody gave them food, whatever country. That was it. But they didn't really talk about it. I mean, you read that refugees and people who were in the Holocaust didn't talk about what happened to them, and they really didn't much. I mean, when we all got married and had kids and people would ask, the children would ask, would want to ask, Bertle would say, ask me anything, and I'll tell you. But if you don't know how to ask, how do you ask? My sister Ruth never heard her talk about anything, but her kids seemed to think it affected her greatly, and I am sure it did, but it wasn't a topic that we talked about. They were young people trying to make their way in a new country.
>> Bill Benson: So a new country, your sisters arrive several months before you, and then you arrive. And you all went to separate locations. Tell us where your sister, before we talk about you, where did your sisters end up going?
>> Okay. My sister, Bertle, went to a family that had a place in Scotland, so she went up to Scotland with them, and many years later, when she was living in London with my aunt, the police came to the door and knocked on the door and said do you know this man, and Bertle said I don't know who that is. It turned out the foster father was actually a spy for the Germans, so he had a good cover-up by having one of these Jewish kids. When she was 16, she came to live with my aunt and go to work.
>> Bill Benson: And this was the aunt that was in London.
>> Esther Starobin: The aunt that was in London. My sister, Edie, lived with a family in London, and when kids were sent into the country, it was a non-Jewish family, she went to a

Jewish family, and Edie said they treated her like a slave. They made her work hard and she left school at 14. Later, she joined the British Army, was in the ATF. and at some point later after the war she went back to Adelsheim and got us all birth certificates, which were good to have, but one thing she talked about with her trip to Adelsheim was she was walking down the street, and somebody came --
>> Bill Benson: And now she is in the British Army.
>> Esther Starobin: Yes. They knew exactly who she was, because she looked a lot like him. Ruth in London lived with a doctor and his family, and then she was sent to another family in the country and wound up in a hostile, and she always said that it wasn't -- hostel, and she always said it was because she wouldn't do her Jewish studies, but I don't know why she was sent to the hostel.
>> Bill Benson: What role did your aunt play in trying to keep you connected?
>> Esther Starobin: She knew where we all were, and she probably communicated with our parents when they were in camp, and we -- once I was there, she came once to where I lived, but there was a big tension between my foster mother and her, and then we went to London a couple of times.
>> Bill Benson: Uh-huh, okay. Do you remember or do you know if at any point you all had a visit together, all of the sisters, during that time?
>> Esther Starobin: My sisters came to Norwich.
>> Bill Benson: They did come to Norwich. Okay. Before we come back to your time with the Harrisons, as you said, your parents and your brother Herman remained behind in Germany. Tell us what did you know about what happened to your parents and what happened for Herman.
>> Esther Starobin: Herman was home for a Jewish holiday, when many of the German actions took place. All of the Jews in Baden, which was like a German state, were sent to France in October 1940. They went to Gurs, which was a work camp, and then they were transferred to an area where people with children went, and there, there was a group, OSAY [phonetic], which rescued children from the camps and took them -- they had some Manor houses they had taken over. They fed them, taught them, and Herman was there, and then in 1941, they managed to bring the thousand children to the United States. We knew he came in 1941, but when the museum was doing research for the exhibit downstairs, what the Americans knew, the researcher found a picture of the children waiting in Lisbon to get on the ship, and there was my mother with a tag around his neck, Stacey's dad and Rene's dad, and they had a list of who the children were, and in the meantime, I am friends with a young woman from Indiana who has written a book about somebody else, and her person was on that list, so from what lily has found, we know what home Herman was in, because we didn't know before, and knowing this has helped find out information about Herman.
>> Bill Benson: And this picture, it's only fairly recently that you became aware of this, right?
>> Esther Starobin: In the last three years, three years ago.
>> Bill Benson: Like you said, you're still learning things, finding them all these years later. When your parents sent you to England, and of course when they went to Gurs, during any of that time, do you know if -- particularly Bertle, because she was your older sister, did anyone hear from your parents at all?
>> Esther Starobin: Yes. In the 1980s, when there started to be a lot of information about the Holocaust, Bertle said, oh, I have got some letters, five letters from our parents from when they were in Gurs and the other city. And my husband had them translated.

>> Bill Benson: That was the first time that you became aware of them.
>> Esther Starobin: Yeah, we were all busy with other stuff, and Bertle said that she had letters. That's basically all I know about my mother. My mother wrote the letters. My father wrote three lines underneath. And that's where I know a lot. In one of the letters, she talks about Herman being in one of these camps, and in another letter she talks about that he was in this country living with an aunt and uncle, so we know that she knew this, and that -- I mean, the thing that's interesting, she tells Bertle we are all living in different places, and Bertle is a teenager, that Bertle should make sure we behave, we thank the people taking care of us, we wash behind our ears, we do our homework, you know, all of the things mothers say, but there was no way Bertle could do any of that.
>> Bill Benson: As you said, she's a teenager. She's in Scotland.
>> Esther Starobin: Even when she was in London, she couldn't.
>> Bill Benson: But your mother expected her, as the oldest child, to take care of you.
>> Esther Starobin: The other thing they expected her to do was to write and send money.
>> Bill Benson: Which she couldn't do at that time. August 14th is a very significant date for you, August 14th. Tell us why that is so significant.
>> Esther Starobin: That is when my parents were deported to Auschwitz. There is a book written by a Frenchman that lists all of the transports, tells you everything about the transports on the first day, and when my parents got there, they were killed immediately.
>> Bill Benson: You even know the transport number. You learned about all of that, almost 77 years ago, in August 1942. When did you learn about the fate of your parents?
>> Esther Starobin: I was very -- you haven't asked me how I got to the Harrisons yet.
>> Bill Benson: Not yet.
>> Esther Starobin: I was very protected by the Harrisons, my foster family, and I don't remember hearing the radio or being conscious of the fact that I had parents and something terrible was happening to them, so when we came to this country, I sort of thought for a while that they might show up, and I'm not sure how it quite dawned on me that it really wasn't going to happen. I mean, Bertle knew because she had sent a letter to them and it had come back, and of course Edith and Ruth would know then, and my aunts and uncles, I don't know.
>> Bill Benson: You spent eight of the first ten years of your life living with the Harrisons.
>> Esther Starobin: I did.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that time, going to the Harrisons and what you remember of your life with them.
>> Esther Starobin: When I went to England, the quakers found a home for me. Originally, I was supposed to go to Wales, and that fell apart, and my foster father worked in a factory owned by a Jewish man. There was a bulletin board that said take any one of these kids, and I came off the bulletin board. They were fundamental Christians that belonged to the chapel movement, which was nondenominational. They had one son seven years older than I am. I went to live with them outside of Norwich, which is a cathedral city, but they lived out in the country. I think most of the people who lived there actually belonged to this chapel. The uncle rode his bike into the factory every day, rode it back, such a different life. When I first got there, I had scarlet fever, and lived in isolation, and Alan used to play with me through the window. He was their son. I was deathly afraid of Uncle Harry. He was the mildest man that you ever met. He never raised his voice. Why was I scared of him? It must have been something that happened in Adelsheim with men. I went in 1939. The war started in September, so Norwich was bombed. There was an American air base, so there was a lot of

activity there, so we had gas masks. There was bombing. We went into raids, but it was all I knew. I was a little, little kid. What did I know different? That's how life is. I went to school there. I loved school. I went to chapel with the Harrisons, and while community is a big thing -- synagogues, churches, mosques -- today, it was a big thing then. They had a lot of activities, and I always participated, and somebody asked if I knew I was Jewish. I guess I knew, but it wasn't really part of my life. The man who owned the chapel, Mr. Ramsey, tried to teach me Hebrew, but I'm really bad at languages, so I didn't really learn it.
>> Bill Benson: As you said, Mr. Harrison rode his bike to and from work, and generally they lived a very simple life, didn't they?
>> Esther Starobin: Oh, yes. They didn't dance, drink, go to movies, wear makeup. As an adult, they didn't have the money to do any of those things either. Well, they did go to the church of England before they died, but in those times --
>> Bill Benson: For you, though, it was a happy childhood.
>> Esther Starobin: Oh, I was very happy. I loved being there, and I guess in the back of my mind, I knew I would have to leave, but I didn't question much. There was that part of my life, and there's this part of my life.
>> Bill Benson: And, of course, eventually you would leave. In 1947, your sister Bertle, your oldest sister, arranged for you and your sisters, including Bertle, to come to the United States, which meant, of course, leaving the place you had lived for eight of your first ten years, and the last eight years of your life at that time. What was that like for you?
>> Esther Starobin: Well, the Harrisons didn't have a phone. You know, 1947, everybody didn't have phones, and Bertle called the police, and they came to the door and told them they had to take me to London the next day, because we were leaving, so Uncle Harry couldn't take time off work. Alan was supposed to get some big award at school, but he didn't go, so Alan and Auntie Dot took me to London and handed me over. Alan has since told me that his mother's hair turned gray overnight. Now, maybe it did, maybe it didn't, but she also knew that I was going to leave because she had saved a lot of stuff, and one of them was a picture of me with a bee feeder earlier in that summer. I looked on the back, and guess what, we were on a ship to London to leave.
>> Bill Benson: You just found that out.
>> Esther Starobin: I just found that out. The place that looked after the refugees actually arranged for us to leave. And the other thing, it's not a passport. It's a travel document. I had signed it. I had pictures taken. What did I think they were for? But maybe I didn't want to think about it, because I really didn't want to leave. So, we sailed on the queen Mary, which had been a troop ship during the war, so it still wasn't fancy, and there was a strike, because somebody from the royal family was traveling on it, and it's a good time to strike when there's a royal family person, but Bertle had a boyfriend who was a butcher, and he'd given her a sausage to travel with, and what do you give someone who is going away? A sausage. And my aunt had given us bread, so we didn't really go hungry, and they gave the kids milk, and it was very short. I was very seasick. I really didn't want to be there, and later I found out Bertle didn't really want to go either, but our mother and father has said that we had to come here, because we had uncles here.
>> Bill Benson: So that was the reason for the United States, that you came here.
>> Esther Starobin: So, we landed in New York, and two uncles met us. One was an uncle who'd married into the family, and one was an uncle who had lived in Adelsheim, and Bertle knew him. I didn't know them at all, and we came to Washington, and we lived with a different

aunt and uncle than my mother Herman. It was not a good experience. First of all, you know, I'd lived out in the country, very quiet. This was on a Main Street in Washington, DC. My uncle sort of had a temper. He threw furniture occasionally. My aunt was --
>> Bill Benson: Very different than Mr. Harrison, yeah.
>> Esther Starobin: My aunt was mentally ill before they had all of the medicines, so she did weird things, took the sheets off her bed when we were sleeping, kept fruit until it was bad, but it was okay. They loved us in their ways, but it was very different. My uncle took us kicking and screaming one day to see a movie. I like movies okay, but I'm not a big movie person.
>> Bill Benson: Before we continue on about your life in the United States, it was 1947 when you came here. Do you know why it took two years after the war for you to be able to come to the United States? Because we are in May of '45.
>> Esther Starobin: You know you're not supposed to ask me questions I don't know the answer to. I have got no idea.
>> Bill Benson: I am sure it had to do with just being able to make the arrangements, because they had to -- Bertle had to connect with relatives in the United States. They had to get affidavits.
>> Esther Starobin: And I think --
>> Bill Benson: They did some of the work to get you here. Going back to what your sister said, I think it was your sister Edith, who had gone to the countryside, where she did not have a happy experience, contrasted to your happy experience with the Harrisons, what about your other two sisters? What was it like for them?
>> Esther Starobin: Bertle lived with my aunt. My aunt --
>> Bill Benson: In London.
>> Esther Starobin: In London, when she was 16. My aunt could get very upset. Bertle didn't bake for years, because my aunt, when she was angry, would bake. You know, I said at the beginning they didn't talk a lot. They really didn't. Edie had a really good friend, Avril, who she kept sort of in contact with, and I think when she joined the army, she was happier. She had good friends in the army, and she came a year later, because she had to get home from the army.
>> Bill Benson: Okay.
>> Esther Starobin: Ruth didn't really talk about it.
>> Bill Benson: So --
>> Esther Starobin: And I didn't ask.
>> Bill Benson: And you didn't ask. Here you are, ten years old, and you told us about the family that you stayed with in Washington. In general, the transition was a difficult one for you.
>> Bill Benson: Yes. English schools at that time were way ahead of American schools, and I went to a school where there were three or four classes. You had 6A, 6B. The teacher, I spoke perfect English, and she made fun of my English because some of my words were different. I also have a lazy eye, and somebody thought when I was ten, being pretty weird already as a refugee -- okay, immigrant, I had to wear a patch on my eye, which I took off as soon as I left the house, and it was a big surprise for me when I learned the school knew I was supposed to be wearing it, but I also was Jewish. Now, I mean, everything was different, and while I knew my sisters, I hadn't really lived with them, so I didn't really know my sister. And then we had this brother who wasn't Alan, my foster brother. But I had this nice brother Herman, but we didn't live together, so it was a very different world.
>> Bill Benson: And eventually, you would end up living with your sisters.

>> Esther Starobin: Right.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that.
>> Esther Starobin: Once they both got jobs, they got an apartment, and thank goodness they took me to live with them. It was really interesting. Sometimes they were dating in each of the schools that I was going to, because it was the right age range, but they were really good. Among other things, they were wise. They made me write to the Harrisons, because the Harrisons have already been a part of my life and my family's life. They also encouraged me in school. They never said, oh, you can't go to college, because who is going to pay for it? It never dawned on me I couldn't go to college. That's what I said. Where was my brain? So, my sister Ruth, the one close, seven years, she had gone to the University of Maryland, because she graduated from high school soon after she came here, but back then, you could work and earn your room, board, and tuition, which is what she did. Of course, by the time I went, that wasn't true.
>> Bill Benson: Uh-huh.
>> Esther Starobin: But I graduated from high school just after I was 16, not because I'm particularly smart but because I was skipped when I came, and Ruth, by that time, was married, so my brother-in-law was in a Ph.D. program at the University of Illinois, so I went to live with them, and my brother-in-law became my guardian. Every once in a while, he tried to tell me what to do, which was not good. I wasn't used to people telling me that, but, you know, having in-state tuition, it worked well for them, because I could help with their little boy, and I got a good education.
>> Bill Benson: You know, I think back to you sharing with us the letter from your mother to Bertle about make sure you wash behind your ears and you say thank you -- Bertle took that responsibility and really took care of you and got you to the United States, and she played an immense role there, didn't she?
>> Esther Starobin: We got a small amount of money from Germany at that time. There is now something called the conference, and there is a procedure, but back there there wasn't. You had to type and use carbon paper. She spent a lot of time on this, and we got a small amount of money, like $20 a month, and she made them, by siblings, give it all to me for college. Some of them weren't happy about it. But she did it. She's a force not to be reckoned with. She was very dramatic, left, right, black, white, very much so.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your relationship with the Harrisons, because you said that has endured.
>> Esther Starobin: Once my foster brother came over here as an exchange teacher, and once I got married and had two kids, one who is sitting here, we went to visit them in Norwich, and it was back when you still dressed up to go in an airplane. I mean, they were three and four. They had little suits on. We went to visit in Norwich, but we decided at some point the Harrisons should come to the United States, and we brought them over, and Alan was --
>> Bill Benson: They had probably never been on an airplane.
>> Esther Starobin: Been on an airplane? No. Alan was teaching in New Jersey, and we said find a beach for us to go to, and he found a beach. I can't think of the name of it. It was a terrible place. It had a mosquito problem.
[Laughter]
We all went up to this place, and they sprayed every night for mosquitoes, but we didn't tell Alan. He was sleeping on the porch, and he got sprayed. We figured --
[Laughter]

But the Harrisons were so trusting. I mean, they really were. And after Auntie Dot died, Uncle Harry used to come every summer and spend six weeks with us. He loved coming. I was ready for him to leave after five. But he loved going to synagogue with my husband. He loved the brotherhood. He loved it. And after he died, Alan found out that Uncle Harry's father was Jewish. He had been a pretty good photographer, and he had come from Poland, married Alan's grandmother. They had two kids, and then he left, and she landed in the poor house with these two kids, but that probably explains why he liked all of the Jewish stuff so much.
>> Bill Benson: And Alan is still alive.
>> Esther Starobin: Yeah. I just visited him in April. He doesn't really travel anymore, so I go there. He used to come here a lot. And it was interesting. I mean, I think my kids kind of thought of the Harrisons as grandparents even though they never were, but Alan never was. He was uncle Alan. It is kind of interesting how that happened.
>> Bill Benson: You have also learned relatively recently there were other Kindertransport children in the area where you were living with the Harrisons. Did you have any idea then?
>> Esther Starobin: I had no idea. The Harrisons, not being Jewish, were certainly not part of the Jewish community. I don't think they knew, because at some point I met somebody through the Kindertransport association. I met somebody who had been with a family in Norwich, I was telling Alan, and he said look in the phone book, and they were still around. There were 200 Kindertransport children in that part of England, but I never knew them. In fact, I never knew anybody else who had been on the Kindertransport, and there was an association in England, and then one was started here, and they had a meeting, and it was so exciting to meet other people who had had similar --
>> Bill Benson: There had been kids.
>> Esther Starobin: Yeah, I mean, when I was in junior high in particular, there were other kids -- there weren't many Jewish kids in the junior high, but I had a couple I was friendly with, and their family had been immigrants here, but I didn't know other people had been in similar situations, and I didn't read anything about it in books, and, I mean, I was an adult, and I found a book -- I can't think of who wrote it, Marge Piercy, a book about someone who'd gone to another state, and her story was so similar. Now, of course, there's a lot of literature about the Kindertransport.
>> Bill Benson: Right, including films, right?
>> Esther Starobin: There's a very good film called into the arms of strangers that followed ten people who were on the Kindertransport. There was one person on this who was angry to be on it. She wanted to stay with her parents. Of course, she would be dead. But people have such different feelings about it.
>> Bill Benson: You have been back to Adelsheim. Tell us what that was like for you to go there.
>> Esther Starobin: The first time was in the 1980s. I needed to find out I didn't come from a black hole. Bertle was supposed to go. The other had a heart attack. We went, and we eventually found the town hall. I only speak English. I don't speak German. I took it in high school and college but I don't speak it. But they arranged the next day for someone who could translate to come around with us, and then they said, well, you can go to another town and stay. And I said, no, I don't want to be sent away again, so we stayed in a guest house. I had such nightmares that night that the Nazis were coming to get me, but we survived, and they took us around. I saw the house where we'd lived. I saw the brook where Edith had dropped the bread she was supposed to be taking to be baked, and we saw the Jewish cemetery, but I

felt like a tourist. It didn't mean anything to me. But the next time I went, by that time, Bertle and Morris had been back, and Reinhardt was there. She wrote to Bertle that he was planning a commemoration of the deportation of the Jews to France, and Bertle and I looked at each other and said they need juice, and Rene, my niece, she came with us too. By that time -- my mother came from Rexingham, and years before that, Bertle said go on and see what you can find about Rexingham, and they found a young man from there who went to American U in Washington. He came to stay at our house. He spoke to the kids where I taught. And he said my parents would be happy for you to stay with them, so Bertle and I went, and we saw the cemetery where a lot of our family had been buried, so to see that, because I know more about Adelsheim than that town. And then we went to Adelsheim. While we were there, we met someone. First of all, Bertle was talking to the -- when she had been in while she could still go to school, somebody in her class died, so she met somebody in the class and they were talking about what happened to this person, and somebody came up and said my father used to give your parents food after dark. I said, Bertle, do you think it's true? She said, yes, there have been other letters, and my mother had said that. But he said his wife was very concerned. She was afraid of what would happen to her family, her family if they got caught, and somebody else told us the same thing, but then the ceremony was on a Sunday in a synagogue that was in the next little place over. There were about a hundred people, a big age range. It was all in German, which I didn't understand, but I could feel the emotion. There were neo-Nazis outside and there was security outside. So I came home, and I had everything translated. One of the things that Reinhardt had found was a list of everything that had been in my parents' house, pages and pages, including rags. No furniture, so somebody had helped themselves to furniture, I guess, and my sister said there used to be a doll that they couldn't play with. That wasn't there either, but it was an amazing list, and the other thing that Reinhardt had found was a letter from the mayor of Adelsheim when my father was sent to France, his leg didn't go with him, and it was a letter to the people who made the leg saying send the leg because he can't work without his leg. So it was very interesting to go.
>> Bill Benson: This inventory of goods that were in the family home, it was so detailed, it was down to, if I remember right, like food in the refrigerator.
>> Esther Starobin: It was really down.
>> Bill Benson: It is this was what was in this home.
>> Esther Starobin: What was in the home was auctioned off and then sent to Germany. It wasn't like we got the money. They got the money.
>> Bill Benson: You mentioned Reinhardt several times. He has been instrumental in getting the information. Who was Reinhardt?
>> Esther Starobin: Reinhardt, the man who I originally met when I went the first time, had known my parents, and he was the person who if people were Jewish and wanted to know about their family, they would write to him, but he got a little too old for that. He gave it to Reinhardt. Reinhardt was a teacher in the local high school, and they had an after-school club. They did a lot of research. I am sure they did some of the research into the family tree.
>> Bill Benson: So research like what happened to the Jews that lived in our town?
>> Esther Starobin: Yeah, I mean, at some point I had written and asked about what he could find out about my father, so I had a whole list of all of the things that my father, that Reinhardt --
>> Bill Benson: It's just something that he does.
>> Esther Starobin: Well, not so much. He has grandkids now, but he used to.

>> Bill Benson: It's more like his passion.
>> Esther Starobin: Yeah, but he's retired, and he did find out that apparently in a lot of the small German communities, people like to do the research. So, yeah, I found out a lot from Reinhardt. Now, Reinhardt came to visit here once with his wife, and he's been in contact with a couple of other families from Adelsheim, so visited them too, and then at some point his son and him and his wife came here, because Tim was at the University of Maryland as a post-doc, and I was very good friends with his wife, Christine. We'd go to museums and do things, and being part of the memoir group, I wrote an article. I knew more about their life here than he did, and he knew more about my life in Germany, and it was kind of an ironic kind of thing, so he did come to visit while they were here, too.
>> Bill Benson: I think we have time to turn to our audience for some questions, but I want to ask you one more that I would like to ask before I turn to our audience, and that is your sister Bertle passed away --
>> Esther Starobin: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: -- recently in December, and your other two sisters had died earlier.
>> Esther Starobin: And my brother.
>> Bill Benson: And your brother, Herman. With the passing of Bertle so recently, what has that been like for you?
>> Esther Starobin: I can't talk about it.
>> Bill Benson: Okay. All right. All right. We are going to turn to our audience, and we'd like you to ask some questions, if you like. We have microphones, one in each aisle. We do ask that you go to the microphone and use it for your question. Make your question as brief as you can. I will repeat the question, just to be sure that we hear it correctly before Esther responds to the question, and just I want to mention, at the end of the program, we are going to hear again from Esther before we close the program and she leaves to go sign copies of Echoes of Memory. But we have time for some questions. If not, I will continue to ask questions for a few more minutes, if we can do that. But while I'm waiting to see if anybody wants to ask one, I'll ask you another one, Esther, if you don't mind. When you were here with First Person 2017, an audience member asked you a question that was along these lines. If you could go back in time and speak to the Nazi leadership, what would you say to them? And I know at the time you thought that was a really interesting question. Do you have any thoughts about that?
>> Esther Starobin: I think what I said then, and I still think, why do people or leaders find it so necessary to find someone to hate? What does it do for them? But the interesting thing that I was going to say, my niece, who often comes, wrote a whole thing about that, and then there was an exhibit here about neighbors, and then she connected it. I don't understand what does someone gain by hating someone just because of what group they are. I understand you don't like something a person does, but to hate them because they are Jewish or that -- some other minority, why? What does it do for you?
>> Bill Benson: Right.
>> Esther Starobin: Why does it make you feel superior? What's wrong with you?
>> Bill Benson: I remember that question was one that --
So, we have a gentleman with a question here to the left.
>> What language did you speak at two, and then did you learn English when you came to England? Is that what happened?
>> Bill Benson: Okay. What languages do you speak, and did you learn your English -- obviously, you learned that when you got to England.

>> Esther Starobin: That's all I speak, is English. I have tried German, and I guess I -- my uncle, who was in charge of me when I started middle -- junior high, he liked his Spanish teacher, so I had to take Spanish, and I certainly don't know German, but I think if I actually lived in German and had to use it in Germany, I would be okay with it.
>> Bill Benson: Did your sisters, did they speak German? Did Bertle speak German?
>> Esther Starobin: Bertle could. In fact, when we went back, she only translated one day for me, and then she was back in German. Herman knew German, I think.
>> Bill Benson: Question over here, and then we have one over here.
>> I would like to know, you moved around a lot, but you were with the Harrisons the longest, and you said your children considered them like grandparents. Do you consider them like your adoptive parents, or did you not create that parental child role?
>> Bill Benson: The question is you were in many different places but spent a long time with the Harrisons. You mentioned that your children sort of thought of them as like grandparents. Did you think of the Harrisons as your family, as your parents? It never felt quite like that.
>> Esther Starobin: No. I close all sections of my life and keep things separate, which is why I had trouble mixing people I know from one part of my life with people from another part. It's kind of separate, and so I think many things that are important to me certainly came from the Harrisons.
>> Bill Benson: Yeah. Thank you. And we have one here.
The mic, just turn it down towards you. When it's on, it should be on.
>> What advice would you give future generations so that something like the Holocaust doesn't happen again.
>> Bill Benson: Ask it one more time?
>> What advice would you give future generations so that the Holocaust doesn't happen again?
>> Bill Benson: What advice would you give to future generations so that something like the Holocaust doesn't have again? Actually, we are going to hold, because that's something that Esther wants to close on. That's the perfect question. I will ask one more. We will answer it. That's not going to get lost at all. You shared with me that you obviously didn't know your parents, obviously, but yet you felt their influence on you as a mother and as an adult, and will you say a little bit about that?
>> Esther Starobin: Clearly, number one, they really believed in God, and they also thought family and friends will take care of us. They thought family was really important, and family is really important to me, and it was to Bertle. I think it is to all of us. I mean, my daughter is here, but so are two of my nieces, and almost all of my family that lives in Philly and here have been, and some of their children have been. I -- I think it's the family connection that I feel. Do I know how they celebrate at holidays? I haven't a clue. Do I know what diseases were in the family? I don't know any of that kind of stuff, but it's family, the importance of family, the importance of looking out for other people, which I think comes from my parents and some from the Harrisons. I mean, they took me in. They didn't have to. But my sisters, they didn't need to take care of me, and I feel while I am definitely a survivor, I have been very blessed by people who really went out of their way. They loved me. They took care of me. They did things for me which I feel I need to repay in some way. I don't know if I do, but I try.
>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Esther in just a moment to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being with us, remind you that we'll have programs here until August 8th. Programs will be live streamed through June 6th, and all of our programs will be made

available on the YouTube channel at the museum, so if you can't come back, you can see other programs as you wish. We hope you'll come back, and if not, maybe think about us for our 21st year next year. It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word, so I'm going to turn to Esther to close our program, and then she will leave immediately from the stage, because she's going to go up and be available to sign copies of Echoes of Memory, which has some examples of her writing in it. Esther?
>> Esther Starobin: So, this answers your question, too. I think it is important in this day and age to keep informed about what's going on, to read newspapers. Don't get all of your knowledge from social media. Talk to people who have a different viewpoint. Learn what's going on. If you're old enough to vote, vote. Pay attention. My other thing that I usually say that I really feel strongly about, most of us are not going to be in a position to influence what happens to big groups of people. You can help one person. You can help two or three people. Be aware of what's happening to people around you. If you see someone who needs some help, help them. If you're a kid and you have kids in your school who don't have anybody to eat lunch with, invite them to eat lunch with you. You can do simple things to help people, but do keep abreast of what's happening in the world. It's really important.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Esther.
[Applause]