United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Kitty Weiss Penner
July 29, 2016
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PREFACE

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KITTY WEISS PENNER
July 29, 2016

Ina Navazelskis: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Kitty Weiss Penner in South Portland, Maine on July 29, 2016. Thank you so much Kitty for agreeing to meet with us today, speak with us today. And share your and your family's experiences. As I explained earlier, we are going to be doing a lot of discussion, a lot of delving into the past particularly the European history of your family and we will start this with the most basic of questions. So I've got three of them. And here they are. Can you tell me the date you were born.

Kitty Weiss Penner: August 7, 1933.

Q: And where were you born?

A: In Vienna, Austria.

Q: And what was your name at birth?

A: Kitty Miriam Weiss.

Q: Kitty Miriam Weiss. And has it stayed Kitty the whole time?

A: Yes, that was the name my mother found for me. She read a book. She liked the name Kitty. And so I've been Kitty.

Q: It's not a very either German or Austrian or even Jewish name.

A: That's right.

Q: It's very Anglo.

A: I think it was a book about England. And the character was Kitty.

Q: Has anybody ever questioned you about it?

A: Constantly. They keep fixing my name. I get mail from Katherine and with a K and Catherine with a C and they keep Katy and—

Q: So even for something as simple and, and recognizable

A: Yes.

Q: That comes up. So what about the rest of your family. Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes, I have an older, had an older sister and, her name was Inge Weiss. And she was two and a half years older than me.

Q: So she born in 1931.

A: Correct.

Q: And what about your parents? What were their names?

A: My father's name was **Lizer**.

Q: Lizer.

A: **Lizer**, Lazer Weiss. And he came from **Knihynicze**.

Q: **Knihynicze**?

A: **Knihynicze**.

Q: And what is that?

A: That was in Galicia. However, it has changed borders and, and rulers constantly.

Q: So when you say Galicia, **Knihynicze**, was it a shtetl? Was it a town?

A: I think so. I think it was a shtetl.

Q: Did you ever go there?

A: No. I've never found it. I've never found it on a map, but a cousin of mine who is very savvy on the internet found it.

Q: Oh really. So now at least you know where it is.

A: Exactly, and the spelling, which is extraordinary.

Q: The places in that part of the world can have five spellings for a small town, a small place, five different languages. Did your father ever speak of it?

A: He did. Not too fondly. He was very eager to get away from it and he served in the First World War and had a chance to see the world, a little more of the world. And he was very eager to get away from **Knihynicze**.

Q: Can you give me a sense, now that you've found it on a map, where is **Knihynicze**? Where in Galicia would that be?

A: Today it's Ukraine. It has changed hands sometimes called Poland. The Germans called it Poland. And so my passport said Poland.

Q: Because you had your citizenship based on your father's birth.

A: Correct.

Q: Is it near any large city that you were able to place when you finally –

A: No but he always spoke of Krakow, which is in Poland and he, he sort of hoped that that was, that was a goal of his to go to Krakow.

Q: That's a beautiful city.

A: It is, I've been there yes.

Q: Did your father come from a large family himself?

A: He was the oldest and he had quite a few sisters and brothers. And his father was a carpenter who quickly brought him into the business. And so he learned carpentry from knee high up and he became a carpenter, which served him very well throughout his life.

Q: Yes, it's one of those types of skills that is transferrable. A lawyer may not be able to be a lawyer in every country, but a carpenter, that's different.

A: And it gave him sort of a privileged position during the First World War when his commanding officer recognized his talent and sort of kept him close by to feather his love nest basically. And so he, he made things for this--

Q: Commanding officer

A: Commanding officer. And stayed safe.

Q: One thing I didn't ask was which army did he serve with. That's also not a done deal.

A: Right. It must have been the Kaiser's army.

Q: It would have been the German depression army?

A: Correct.

Q: Not the Austro-Hungarian army?

A: You know, I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Poland when it was subdivided, well basically torn apart in 1795 is when it went to Austro-Hungary, to Prussia and to Russia and when your father was born, he was born in one of those three places. Whether it was the Russian part--

A: I think it was Austria, Austria. Yes.

Q: So then it probably was the Austrian army.

A: Army. Correct. Yeah. He spoke German so.

Q: Well both places, Prussia and Austro-Hungary.

A: Well they were on the same side.

Q: What else did he tell you about his life, as he was growing up that sticks in your mind?

A: Well they were, you know, in a small town and the, everybody watched everybody else and made sure that you were doing the right thing. That you were going to **cheder**, you were observing the holidays. And of course it was a very kosher home. And that's, that was you know all he knew. When his father died suddenly, he was 14 years old.

Q: Oh he was very young.

A: He was very young and he became the head of the house.

Q: That's a huge burden for a young boy.

A: It was and he never got, he never quite got over it. I mean I think the man was a genius.

Q: Your father.

A: Yes. And the older I get, the more I can relate to what he went through, but he was very stern. And he had all these kids to take care of. And his mother. To take care of. And he did it, he did.

Q: What year was he born?

A: He was born in 1892.

Q: So his father would have died in 1906, something like that. And he took care of these kids. He had learned the carpentry trade from his own father, during those first few years that he had with him. And he served in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I.

A: Correct.

Q: Where the carpentry kept him safe.

A: Exactly. Exactly.

Q: Did you ever know any of your aunts and uncles, his brothers and sisters?

A: I, I knew two of them. There was a hard feelings in that family. Very, very hard feelings. And so there was a rift and I did not really get to know them. I know of them but I did not have a direct experience with them.

Q: You say when you know two of them, you know of two of them, rather than having met them?

A: I think we did meet them. In fact one of my father's sisters came to meet the boat when we arrived.

Q: Oh I see, so she had already been to the United States. She was already in America.

A: Correct, yes. My grandmother's, his, my father's mother, **Chia Rivka** Goldberg had a large extended family and some of them had emigrated to the United States. Probably before the First World War. And so there was a family on this side of the ocean yes. And they were the ones who provided the first visas for our family.

Q: We'll come to that. Now what did your father tell you about his own parents, his own, what kind of people they were and things like that.

A: He didn't really talk about them too much. As I say, by the time he was talking to me there was this rift.

Q: Do you know what it was due to?

A: It was a lack of appreciation for what he had done for them. It was a lack of acknowledgment and he just couldn't get over that. So he just turned his back on them. It was very painful.

Q: I can imagine or I can't imagine actually.

A: Well it meant that you know we didn't have any supportive family around.

Q: And that means in Vienna?

A: No, this was in the United States. In Vienna, his mother had her own apartment, which my father supported.

Q: So you knew your grandmother?

A: A little bit, yeah. Yeah.

Q: Do you have any memories of her?

A: Just that she was very tiny. Very tiny and she didn't speak German. She spoke Yiddish and we didn't have much, much contact. Yeah.

Q: What about religion? Was he brought up in a very orthodox family? Or?

A: I don't think they were you know really committed to orthodoxy but the trappings of orthodoxy. Kosher home and food and observation of major holidays. I don't think the, the real ethnic deepness of the Jewish religion was something that they actually felt connected to.

Q: Even your grandparents' generation?

A: I think I think it was just –

Q: Tradition.

A: Yes, just the trappings of it. I don't think they were intellectually rooted in Judaism.

Q: Did the children that means your father and his siblings, what kind of schooling did they get?

A: My fa, well as I said my father left school by the time he was 14. And he was very frustrated with the schooling because it was German one day and then they'd come back from a vacation and they, everything was in Polish. Then everything was in Russian. And he just lost patience with the whole thing. He just said to heck with it.

Q: Well that's what happens when borders change.

A: He just, it was too frustrating.

Q: Now your mother, let's turn to her side of the family. Where was your mother from?

A: My mother was born in Vienna.

Q: And what was her maiden name?

A: Her maiden name was **Zehngut**, which means ten times good. And her parents were Austrian. Her father was a photographer and a inventor. He invented a washing machine and he invented all kinds of useful things but he never made money. He never made money at that.

Q: Sometimes it's not the inventors who do. It's the people who take their ideas and market them.

A: Right and there were no patents and everything. But he was a very kindly person, very generous and very nice.

Q: Do you remember him?

A: Barely, barely. I remember my mother's impressions of him where he was very gentle and very kind to the girls. She had two sisters and she was the youngest. And her mother was, her maiden name was, the mother's maiden name was Ernestina **Deutch**.

Q: Ernestine German.

A: Yes. And she had several siblings whom I knew. And she actually was the breadwinner of the family and she did sewing which many of the women did in those days, because everything was hand made. Clothing was hand made. And so she supported the family. And she was you know she had a tough job. She had a tough job.

Q: At a time when that wasn't acknowledged so easily or almost at all by society that women were supporting families, more than men were. Some of them ended up in such a predicament. Was your maternal side of the family well to do or struggling do you think?

A: I think they were struggling. I think they were struggling to be middle class. But they valued culture. They loved to go to the opera and dances and beautiful clothes and Vienna was sort of a, I don't know, high class place like Paris and New York.

Q: Before the Austro-Hungarian empire fell it certainly was.

A: Yes, yes. and the trappings are still there. The Baroque buildings and the opera and museums and that's still there. And the art and the music. Very, very proud of it, the Austrians. Especially the Viennese.

Q: Do you know much about your mother's side of the family, if they had been Viennese for generations. Or whether they had come from someplace else?

A: Well with the name of **Deutch**. I would guess that maybe they were sort of more from Germany and her father, **Zehngut,** had a branch of the family that was in Eisenstaedt, which is, well it was the mining area, probably more to the east. So there is some relationship there. So it was Austria.

Q: Within those lands, within the German speaking lands--

A: Exactly, exactly. And the Austrian empire, the Hungarian empire was quite extensive.

Q: What was your mother's first name?

A: Stella.

Q: Stella. And so her maiden name was Stella, she was Stella **Zehngut**.

A: Correct.

Q: Do you know how your parents met?

A: I do not, I do not.

Q: Were they very different as people?

A: I think so. I think they were, I think my mother was very proud of her Austrian heritage and sort of lauded it over my father who was, who was the country bumpkin.

Q: Well you know I didn't want to ask it quite like that but these are different worlds. The world of Vienna even if you are let's say in a lower middle class and the world of the town I can't pronounce.

A: **Knihynicze**.

Q: **Knihynicze**, the world of **Knihynicze** are two different ones and you know when they're blended you know how do they mix.

A: Yeah, yeah there was always that tension. Yeah but you know she recognized that he always earned a good living and that he was very reliable and very dependable but had rough edges.

Q: What were their personalities like as people, your parents.

A: Well my father loved to work. He really liked his work and he knew that he had ability. He could look at something and make it. He could design something new and did. I have some of his furniture that he made for me. Yes. Made here in the United States. So he was, he was really, I think he was a genius. If he had, had any schooling he would have god knows where he would have been. But and my mother was very, you'd have to call it **shtultz**, she was very proud. And snooty. Kind of snooty. I have to say that. Yeah and so she always liked pretty things and made sure that her girls had pretty things. And that sort of thing. But she was a very strong woman. I mean she, she was the one who signed us up to come to America. My father was in **Knihynicze** taking care of things there. He was out of town at the time. And she signed us up. When he came home it was fait accompli.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Yeah. He went crazy.

Q: I can imagine. You know one parent taking you know the decision on the children. And such a decision. We'll come to that. But this sets the scene, this really does. And what about as parents. Was there one parent that you were closer to than the other?

A: Well I think children are especially girls are close to their mothers. And it's only later that they discover that their fathers are people too. My father seemed brusque and he was very powerfully built so he was a little scary.

Q: Was he a handsome man?

A: I think so yes. They were both handsome people. So yeah.

Q: For a little girl--

A: He was tough. He was yeah, I sort of [*pushes hands away*]

Q: Were your parents strong disciplinarians?

A: Well they were very protective. For girls. Very protective. But we were such good girls. We didn't do anything. We were such good girls. We were so—

Q: You were well behaved.

A: --And nice, yes. I don't know where that came from. But I made up for it. (laughs)

Q: The second part of one's life one undoes the first part.

A: Probably. [*wipes mouth*]

Q: What do you remember from home, from your home in Vienna. Can you tell me what it looked like?

A: We had an apartment in Vienna. I believe it was on the second floor. And it was on **Rohdenstern Gasse**.

Q: **Rohdenstern Gasse**.

A: **Rohdenstern Gasse**.

Q: Red star street. Alley, actually.

A: And I remember that each room had a ceramic heater.

Q: You mean one of those old stoves that you put coal into.

A: Exactly.

Q: Those used to be huge.

A: They, each room had its own heating. You know Vienna being in Central Europe was quite chilly so yes, and it was heated with coals. The furniture, my father made every stitch.

Q: Really. Everything that you had –

A: Everything yes.

Q: Did he have a workshop nearby.

A: Yes. I don't know the address of it. But it was nearby. And it was a Jewish neighborhood. And it was not fancy. I mean we didn't have the furniture that we have today. We did not entertain at home. And my children puzzled about that. That I don't' entertain. They said didn't you entertain in Vienna. No. People met in cafes. They did not, it was only family that came home. And had you know –

Q: Oh, so that's like Manhattan. In Manhattan people don't have space to entertain so they meet in restaurants.

A: Well they meet in restaurants, but this was you know this predates that by quite a bit. It was the home was for the family.

Q: So it was more than just space. It was a tradition, it was a way—

A: It was yes and, and it was around the dining room table and meals that one had entertainment with the family. So there was not the easy chair kind of sitting area. There were bedrooms and there was probably like a big common area. I don't remember the kitchen at all. I probably was not permitted to go into the kitchen. We did have a maid. Because there was so much you know in terms of coal and, and laundry and cooking that unless you were very poor, you had a maid.

Q: It was far more prevalent in Europe –

A: Yes. it was not unusual. You know it was not the status thing that we have. It was a necessity. And the maid very often would be a young woman from the country who was looking for opportunities to meet a nice young man, somebody that wouldn't be in her home town.

Q: Everybody wanted to get away from all those eyes.

A: Yes, yes. Totally understandable. But I do remember that the we had Christmas for the maid and I would hang up a stocking and I would get a hunk of coal in the, in the toe, just to keep me humble. And oranges. And it was not a matter of toys so much but it was just you know little things. But I do remember the hunk of coal which was supposed to be if you were a bad girl.

Q: And you weren't.

A: NO. Let's see what else. I do, well when, when things got bad, after **Kristallnacht** which was 1938, which I do remember. And so pretty soon the maid said that she couldn't' work for a Jewish family. Her boyfriend was a Nazi. And so the maid left.

Q: And that was a real change.

A: It was, it was. We really liked her.

Q: What was her name?

A: Erica.

Q: Did your mother take in sewing like your grandmother did?

A: No. No she did not have to do that.

Q: Was her role basically running the household?

A: Exactly. She was running the household and taking my sister to school. And then when things got bad and she was trying to figure out what to do, of course my father was working. Working, working. She was figuring out what to do. She left us alone. My sister went to school. Now I can't imagine that I was totally alone in the apartment, but I would paint. I was you know I was painting and drawing from the time I could hold a pencil. And so I was busy with my own things that I was doing.

Q: And this was on paper not like on the walls or anything like that?

A: No, no, no. This was on paper with water colors and colored pencils.

Q: I painted on the walls.

A: No I wouldn't think of that. Oh my goodness. You were a free spirit.

Q: I paid.

A: I bet yeah. No, no, this was just at a desk. And I would be busy for hours.

Q: Let's go back before history and politics and you know makes itself felt. Did you have plumbing and –

A: Oh yes. oh yes, yes.

Q: So there was running water?

A: Running water, plumbing.

Q: There was a bathroom?

A: Yes, yes. Tub, yes.

Q: And of course, I would assume, electricity.

A: Yes. Even a telephone.

Q: You had a telephone. Did you have a radio?

A: Yes. one of those big curvy jobs, yes. And my father listened intently in the evening to the radio.

Q: Was it music or was it news or was it—

A: Oh he wanted only the news. But there was, there was music too, yes.

Q: At the workshop where he worked, was he self-employed and the only person?

A: He was, no he hired. He had people working for him and one worker in particular was he probably had been with him for years. And he actually warned us of **Kristallnacht** and warned that we were not to open the door, no matter what. And when the storm troopers and the Black Shirts came and knocked on the door, and banged and called for my father to come out, he did not. He would have been sent off to **Buchenwald** or god knows what.

Q: So I just want to make sure. Can you tell me the name of that worker who warned your father. Did you know him?

A: I can't come up with a name now. I, I guess I didn't, I didn't' really go to the shop.

Q: Did any of them ever come to your home, any of those workers.

A: No. No.

Q: But was your father friendly with them?

A: I guess so. I mean I guess he was a good employer. He, he was very short with people. They had to, he had few people. In the United States he never kept a worker. They just didn't do it right or you know he didn't' have the patience to teach yeah.

Q: But there he is, this person felt this obligation.

A: Right. **Kristallnacht** in Germany had preceded the one in Austria.

Q: So what was the date for –

A: It was November tenth, 1938.

Q: I believe it was the day earlier.

A: In Germany, yes, yes. And so he got wind of it and warned my father.

Q: Did you father ever speak of that in later years.

A: Not really, no.

Q: Do you remember the banging –

A: Oh yes, oh yes. We were all in one bed.

Q: Were you really?

A: Yeah. But and my, you know the idea was to be hushed and not make a peep, not breathe. And so they went away and they came back and they banged and yelled again. But at that time they didn't break in. They didn't break in. They just expected cooperation.

Q: You said you lived in a Jewish neighborhood.

A: Yes.

Q: So that would have been a target area?

A: Oh for sure.

Q: And the next day, do you remember seeing other things or things being different?

A: Oh yes, yeah.

Q: What did you see?

A: A lot of broken glass. Store fronts had been smashed. And I don't remember, I know that they broke into the synagogues and set fires and, and the police and the fire department just watched and let it happen. And the next day they got old men with beards to clean it up on their knees.

Q: You saw that.

A: To clean up the streets with buckets of water.

Q: Did your father go to work the following day?

A: I believe so.

Q: And you said that, how did you know that he could, well this must have been afterwards. Did you hear of people who had been picked up, men from families and sent to **Buchenwald**.

A: I personally don't know but I've certain read about it. And that was the first round. Although, you know intellectuals and, and people who were prominent were rounded up. Had been you know it was an ongoing process.

Q: I jumped ahead of myself a little bit. I want to go back to the smaller world without the politics in it. You say and I'm going to repeat a little bit. Your father was at the workshop. He hired workers. As subcontractors do you think or as permanent workers.

A: Oh as permanent workers. Yes, everything was done by hand. You know there probably was an electric saw or something like that but everything was done, measured and cut and –

Q: Did you ever visit the place?

A: Not in Vienna, no.

Q: Ok, only here. Your mother ran the household and you had a maid named Erica who stayed with you until her boyfriend, whom she did find having left the village.

A: Right.

Q: Who was a member of the Nazis, the Nazi party or at least the young –

A: Yeah, he was a sympathizer.

Q: No longer could she work there. And before then your sister went to school.

A: Yes.

Q: Had you started school?

A: No.

Q: So your world was the home world?

A: Exactly, yeah.

Q: Did you know your grandmother, your maternal grandmother, your maternal grandfather. Did they visit the home. Did they come and see you?

A: I don't remember, I don't remember that.

Q: And do you remember other people coming and sitting around your dining room table and being with you?

A: I don't remember that.

Q: Do you remember going to the cafes and meeting people there?

A: No.

Q: Did your parents have much of a social life?

A: I think they were mostly focused on family.

Q: Did they talk much to one another about these events, this wider world?

A: My father sort of as I said, he listened to the radio and, and my mother read the newspapers. And he said you know Hitler was a menace and that he was going to go after England which was you know out of the blue. Nobody really thought that that would ever happen. That he, he really he's going to go after England. My mother read the paper. And my mother socialized in the cafes. And there was an exchange of information. I mean that's all they, they really talked about was you know the oncoming menace and

how do we get out. My mother, I don't' know how she got the addresses of the family that was in New York. We wrote to them. –

Q: You mean your father's side of the family.

A: Correct. She wrote to them and asked for visas. For the family.

Q: Did they supply them? Did the New York relatives supply them.

A: Well I think they wrote back that they were not wealthy and that they would send the visa for my father. And that as soon as he became established he would bring family. And that's the way it had been done previously.

Q: It's true. In the first wave of immigration that often is what happened. One family member came over and then brought the rest. But who knew that this was not going to be that kind of situation ---

A: Exactly, exactly. So they sent papers, visa and their, immigration was tight. Visas were allocated according to strict quotas and so they sent visas for my father, and I believe for his brother.

Q: Was his brother in Vienna as well?

A: I guess so, I guess so. I guess he lived with his mother. And that was in a separate apartment.

Q: So when you father had turned his back on the family, it wasn't to his mother.

A: It was much later.

Q: Oh that was much later.

A: It was state side, state side. No he supported his family through thick and thin. And so they sent those visas and not for my mother and not for my sister and me. And so my mother, as I said, was constantly reading the newspapers and talking to people and hearing what how everybody was trying to get away. and she came across this article in the paper that this family was coming. And they were going to bring 50 children out of Vienna.

Q: This must have been a Jewish newspaper. Was it?

A: I don't know. I, my mother did not read Hebrew.

Q: No, no but I mean a German speaking or maybe there weren't any by that point. Because I can't imagine that in an Austrian newspaper such a thing would have been published.

A: I think it might have been a little ad something like that.

Q: Maybe something innocuous.

A: Yeah. They were the **Krauses** were below the radar. They were very, they did not call attention to themselves either in Vienna or when they got to the United States. It was very hush, hush. There were **kindertransports** going to England.

Q: A lot.

A: Yes. And my cousins went.

Q: Your mother's side?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me about that. What did you know of that.

A: Well I did know my cousins. **Herta** who was older. She was a teenager. And her brother, Freddy who was the only grand boy, grand child, grand son and so he had a special place. And so we, were closer to them and we went to the park together and stuff like that. And my aunt Olga, had an opportunity to sign her kids up.

Q: This is one of your mother's older sisters, mother's older sisters. --

A: Correct. Her oldest sister. And so that was a little precedent that and of course they were older than these, my sister and me. So **Herta** went to England as an au pair, to a family. And Freddy was adopted into an English home, where they had already adopted a boy out of Berlin. So they that was the precedent and they left quite a while before my sister and I.

Q: And your mother's father, was he alive then your grandfather –

A: He was. He had cancer at some point, came down with cancer. And all these things. Whether there's a war going on or and he was at home. And he died I think shortly after we left.

Q: And your grandmother, your maternal grandmother, was she alive?

A: She was alive. And her oldest daughter stayed back with her.

Q: That wasn't **Herta**. That was –

A: That was **Herta**'s mother.

Q: Oh excuse me. So **Herta**'s mother stayed.

A: Yes.

Q: And her name was what?

A: Olga.

Q: Excuse me. You had told me. Yes, so they two stayed together.

A: Yes.

Q: And what about the other sister?

A: The other sister, Annie, was married, well Olga was married too. Annie went, her husband was Bulgarian.

(cut)

Q: Annie, what happened with her?

A: Annie was married. She had no children. Her husband was Bulgarian. His name was **Tager.** Annie, **Tager**. And we always called him **Tager**. I don't know that he had any other name. He must have. but when things got bad, everybody kind of made a plan. And they said well I'm going to do this and either you're going to come with me or you're not. And many people did that.

Q: So what did Annie do?

A: Annie I think she went to France and ultimately she was interned. In a camp in Nice. And she spent the war years in Nice and survived.

Q: What about **Tager**? What happened to him?

A: No one knows. He went back to Bulgaria and disappeared.

Q: Was he Jewish?

A: I believe so, yes.

Q: So that could have been --

A: Right, right. He got caught in some net.

Q: And Olga?

A: Olga was married to a man named **Ulmacher** who was the father of those children. My cousins. And he she said he had to stay back and take care of her parents. As the oldest. And as I said, my grandfather probably had early signs of cancer at that time. she stayed back, sent her children to England.

Q: So **Herta** was the one who was the au pair?

A: Yes.

Q: And what about her father? So what happened to Mr. **Ulmacher**?

A: He wound up in South America. In Caracas.

Q: After the war, before the war?

A: I don't know when he got to Caracas but he had a whole new life in Caracas.

Q: But Olga stayed with her mother?

A: Olga stayed with her mother and I've always thought that the two of them stayed together and went, were sent to **Theresienstadt** together. And from there to **Auschwitz**. But I understand they were separated. And, they went to **Auschwitz** at two different times.

Q: Is that, no trace then after that?

A: No. No. And after the war my mother sent for Annie to come to the United States.

Q: And did she?

A: And she came to New York, yes she came to live with us for a short time. But and then she went off on her own and went to the cafes as she always did in Vienna and continued playing cards in the cafes. At one time she was playing cards, she said I have a terrible headache, fell over. She had had a massive brain hemorrhage and died. Shortly after she came –

Q: To the United States?

A: To the United States, yes.

Q: What different destinies for everybody.

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: And what it shows is how families were completely torn, I mean people can tear one another apart. You know families can, but these are outside forces that come in. And –

A: And how you deal.

Q: Yeah and how you deal. And how they tear, and what you do and how you end up one place and like another. It's like a storm.

A: It was, it was. That's why it's the Holocaust.

Q: You were such a little girl. Do you remember and children remember through their emotions very often. Do you remember what your emotions might have been or were, not what they might have been, what they were?

A: I remember going to pick up my sister at school, with my mother. We walked together at the end of the day and there were other mothers standing outside and jeering and yelling about the Jewish children so [*waves hand*] I don't know what they were. But they it was horrible. And these were mothers, jeering at the Jewish children coming out of school. They had separated the, you couldn't go to a regular school. They were now into Jewish schools.

Q: So this was jeering in front of the Jewish school?

A: Probably, yeah. that's where she went. And so pretty soon she didn't continue going to school.

Q: Did she talk, did Inge talk at all about what school life would have been like? You know what she ex, cause you were little and you hadn't yet gone and it's a –

A: No, she didn't talk about it. That I remember. But I had great confidence in my parents. They I just trusted that they knew what to do.

Q: So in other words you had a secure, a security kind of --

A: Yes, yes. I felt, I felt secure. I did. I felt secure and I felt confident. I sort of got that from them, that they felt confident that they would figure it out.

Q: Did your father travel to K

A: **Knihynicze**. He had property there –

Q: For someone who has such a long last name as mine and I can't pronounce it, it's shameful. **Knihynicze**. He had property there you're saying.

A: Yes.

Q: Did any of his siblings stay in **Knihynicze**?

A: I believe that I believe that they did. I think maybe there was one that stayed there. And was still there.

Q: But everybody else had kind of scattered.

A: Right.

Q: So he had property there and he was going back.

A: Yes, to, to see you know what he could, I don't know. What he could sell or what he could rescue. Or what they had taken at that time.

Q: Was this a one-time visit or was this something that he did on a regular basis?

A: I don't' think he did it on a regular basis. I think he went to sort of clear things out. To settle things.

Q: And it's during this time that your mother finds out something, sees this ad.

A: Correct.

Q: And what happens then?

A: Well she inquired about it. And she said count me in. Take my girls, take my girls to America. And the hope was that when my father's family saw how desperate they were, by sending the girls away alone, that they would send the visa for her, which indeed is what happened. She, they did send the visa. They saw that we were, did not have horns, that we were normal healthy girls and my sister's job was to beg them to send that last visa for my mother.

Q: Oh my gosh, what a –

A: It was quite a responsibility and I don't think she ever got over it. I don't think she ever but you know that they, that was her task, one to look after me. And two, to convince them and she only had like one little visit to send the papers for my mother.

Q: In what ways would you say your sister didn't' get over it? How did it show itself?

A: I think she always felt that she had extra responsibility and that I got a free pass, which there is some truth to that.

Q: in some ways it's an echo of your father having had too many burdens.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: But it is a huge, you know had it not worked and it would never have been anything of your sister's fault because she's a child, the kind of burden that was on her should she fail, is huge. So do you remember saying goodby to your mother? And your father?

A: I remember the fight when my father came home yelling and screaming and carrying on. What have you done? You must be crazy, insane to send your children away. But he already had the visa and he already was secure. And she was desperate, absolutely desperate. This was her last chance and our last chance.

Q: And she was right.

A: Absolutely. She was very wise, she was very wise, intuitively wise. So she said –

Q: So they came to terms and she put her foot down, right?

A: She said they're going. And she made all the arrangements for my father and his mother and his brother to travel to America.

Q: How bitter that is though.

A: It's what she did.

Q: Everybody gets to go and I'm back here.

A: Exactly.

Q: And she was a hair's breadth away from Olga's fate.

A: Exactly.

Q: Do you remember taking leave of our parents?

A: I remember the train station. And we all sort of you know everything had been said. There was nothing to say. It was silent.

Q: Was it a heavy silence?

A: Yeah. it was and the station was patrolled by black shirts and brown shirts and we just waited for the train. We were not going to miss that train.

Q: Did you have anybody accompany you?

A: The other children.

Q: Do you remember having gone to a US consulate to get paperwork, to get medical exams. Do you remember anything of the process?

A: I remember being interviewed. And I remember you know what I thought were sort of silly questions. Would you make a window out of wood or would you make it out of glass? Being a carpenter's daughter, I had a hint on that. You know stuff like that and, and maybe a Rorschach test. And physical exam. But that was the question that I

remember. And I was a very charming kid. I was cute. And so they said yeah she's just on the border of the right age. Just on the border.

Q: Which meant you could have been too young?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Do you remember meeting the **Krauses**?

A: I remember them on the ship. I don't remember meeting them. I remember meeting the doctor. Doctor **Shluss**, **Shless.** And then I remember meeting them on the ship.

Q: Who was Dr. **Shless**?

A: He was their German speaking spokesperson.

Q: In Vienna?

A: He came from America. With the **Krauses** and he was their German speaking envoy who was able to talk to people. They didn't speak German.

Q: What do you remember of him?

A: Dr. **Shless**? He was just a kindly man and reading Steven Pressman's book, he has several children. He was a widower and had several children of his own. So he was good with kids.

Q: But going outside of his book, if you can remember this. What I'd like to get a sense of is Dr. **Shless** from your memory as a little girl, what did he look like. You said he was kindly.

A: He had glasses and he was not imposing. He was very easy to talk to. He was very pleasant you know. That's all I really remember.

Q: And you remember going out of your house to meet him someplace?

A: Yes, we, I don't remember where. It was some office place, some –

Q: When, you say the air was heavy when you –

A: At the train station.

Q: At the train station.

A: It was May 1939.

Q: You remember?

A: Well I don't remember the date.

Q: But you remember that it was May?

A: Yes, something like that. Early spring.

Q: Was the heaviness due to the fact that your parents had had this huge fight or was it due to the politics of the situation?

A: Both, both. It was just you know we were saying goodby, although the actual goodby had, and the whole you know why we're going and I'll see you soon and that whole, that had all transpired. That had all been done. Yeah.

(cut)

Q: So we talked about Dr. **Shlesser**. We talked about –

A: I think his name was **Shless**.

Q: **Shless**, excuse me. We talked about the heaviness of the air. And what it was due to. Now you're very little. Did you know what being Jewish meant?

A: well I knew it was a burden. Because I remember walking down the street with my father one time. And we were I think we were going to the bakery. And this man in uniform came up and as I said I was a cute kid. Came up and he said, started talking to me. And he said are you **Catholische**. **Ist du Catholische**? And I said no, I'm Polish.

Q: That must have gone over well.

A: He was flabbergasted is all I know and he didn't say another word. Turned on his heel and walked away. But my father held his breath.

Q: Being Polish or being Jewish Polish –

A: Well Polish was synonymous at that time with being Jewish.

Q: In Vienna?

A: Yes. My little passport said Polish. Not Austrian. Polish. That was like a code word.

Q: Isn't that interesting. I wouldn't have thought that here would be an equal sign between the two. But clearly –

A: I believe so.

Q: There are many, there were many Jews from Poland living in Vienna. There were many.

A: Yes.

Q: And your mother, did she have an Austrian passport?

A: Do you know, I don't know.

Q: And would she have had to change it?

A: I think she also, because she was married to someone who was Polish. Even though he was, I don't know. Ukrainian or whatever, was labeled Polish.

Q: You knew that it was something that was a burden.

A: Mm hm.

Q: Were your parents religious at home, your own parents?

A: My mother kept a Jewish, a kosher home but I can't remember any big hoopla. Yes, my mother went to Yom Kippur and but it was not a big deal.

Q: It also sounds fairly flexible, if she put up you know Christmas stockings.

A: Yes, well ostensibly that was for the maid. But it was, it was fun for the kids.

Q: I can also see that it would, you have a feeling that you wouldn't be left out from something that other kids had.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Do you remember anything of the train ride?

A: No. I remember. The train stopped in Berlin and subsequently. I mean I knew we were in Berlin. I didn't know why we were there. Apparently we were there to get the last exit papers. And if we hadn't gotten those we would have had to turn around and go back home. So we were at this Jewish c, some kind of Jewish organization or building. And they, my sister and I were in bunk beds. And there was a big to do downstairs in the

street. Marching and music and parade and, and so my sister jumped down from her upper bunk and came into my bed. And then we peaked out the window and we thought it was Hitler. And we watched and saw this you know all this uniforms and flags and it was very frightening. It turned out it was a kind of the solidifying the relationship between Germany and Italy. **Von Ribbentrop** was representing the German Reich and Mussolini's son in law, **Chiano** , was representing the Italians and this was their allegiance, their alliance being cemented in with great pomp. As we watched it.

Q: How did you trace that back because as a five year old you wouldn't know.

A: No, I thought it was Hitler from all the pomp that was happening and the marching and the uniforms and the flags. Subsequently from Pressman, Steven Pressman's book and his research filled in the details.

Q: Isn't it interesting when you see dots that connect things that you yourself have seen.

A: It was wonderful to fill in the spaces because I just had a generalized impression of what was going on.

Q: Was there an adult accompanying all the children from Vienna?

A: There were the **Krauses**, there was Dr. **Shless**. And there were two nurses, for 50 children.

Q: There were two nurses.

A: Two nurses or women in white uniforms. So there was very little supervision.

Q: I can imagine.

A: Can you imagine 50 children.

Q: Chaos.

A: Well –

Q: Or were you very well behaved children?

A: We were very well behaved children but we were curious. And we ran all over that ship, my sister and I.

Q: Oh you're talking about the ship now.

A: Yes.

Q: I'm still on the train.

A: Oh sorry.

Q: That's ok. On the train you know I guess I'm wondering when you said goodby to the two adults that you know, your parents, is there somebody that you remember who kind of takes over or now adults are kind of foggy, hazy.

A: We were on our own and my mother said you are going to have a wonderful time.

Q: And you believed it.

A: I totally believed her and I made sure that I did. So you know I made you know I was curious. I looked around. I had my sister. And I was out for adventure.

Q: Oh how wonderful. And she put that security blanket around you and –

A: She did. She said you're going to have a great time.

Q: Do you remember anything else from that train ride?

A: I don't' remember eating. I don't remember sleeping. I don't remember any of that.

Q: And now you are on the ship. Do you remember what the ship looked like.

A: Big. It was a big ship. With a very loud horn. And, and we took off and we went from Hamburg to Southampton, England and then we went across the ocean.

Q: Were there other passengers, not part of this group of children.

A: There must have been.

Q: I wanted to get a sense of the ship life. Were there people on there who weren't part of the group of children. Was it like a regular passenger liner.

A: I'm sure it was. But I am not aware of, I don't know whether we had a separate dining room. Or they you know they kind of kept us together as best they could.

Q: Do you remember being sea sick?

A: No. No.

Q: This is the part where I kind of interrupted you before when we train ship, train ship. So what did you guys do on the ship?

A: We ran around. We ran up and down the stairs and we ran up the decks and we explored and we found first class playroom with fabulous rocking horses and FAO Schwarz toys. I mean we weren't supposed to be there. But there were no other children there at the time. so maybe there were no other children on the ship besides these. And so we availed ourselves of that fabulous playroom. And as far as I remember, we did not like the food. It was not familiar. But we did find a barrel of apples and we ate those.

Q: You remember this?

A: I remember yes, stealing apples. And but I don't' remember sitting at a table. Or anything like that. I just remember being totally free. I mean we could have fallen overboard. Not even made a splash.

Q: And every once in a while the two nurses in white would be kind of seen around.

A: Seen, especially if, for taking pictures, photographs. Documentation. But I can't remember seeing them. I don't' remember what our bunk was like. I –

Q: do you remember playing with other kids?

A: Just my sister. We were –

Q: How was Inge doing? You know the older you were the less that security blanket can work.

A: Well again she had a heavy responsibility to keep track of me which was probably quite a job. But she went along with me. We had fun. And I don't' remember being sea sick. I don't remember, I remember taking a bath in salt water. It, it the water, even the hot water was sourced from the ocean. And it had a particular smell.

Q: Bad or good?

A: Different, just different and many years later when I was in Atlantic City, lo and behold the bathtub water was salt water. And it had a particular odor.

Q: And that brought you back.

A: Yes. And that was, 25 years later.

Q: When you were on the ship with the **Krauses**, did you know who they were in your life? Did you know of their role?

A: No.

Q: Did they talk to you at all?

A: I don't' re, they didn't speak German. They did not speak German. And we did not speak English. We were on our own. Make sense of it as best you can.

Q: Did the children talk amongst themselves about why you had all left?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: Well you were little, I know you were little.

A: Yeah, right. it was many years later but there was a reunion, the so called children. And. There was a reunion and people got up and talked about their memories. And the men had total amnesia. They did not remember the trip at all. And there were several who had no memory of their transport or anything like that. It's just and memory picked up again when they were on land in Philadelphia.

Q: How sad.

A: Amnesia and it was probably a safety mechanism. It was too traumatic. It was too traumatic for several of them so they blocked it out.

Q: But it wasn't for you.

A: Well I have very you know just smatterings of memory but I remember being happy. Sunshine and freedom and I, I was good to go.

Q: I mean that was one of the biggest **aufca**, one of the biggest sort of efforts that parents made to protect their children from what's going on.

A: Definitely.

Q: To protect them emotionally and some succeeded because of a confluence of factors, sometimes they had no control over. And sometimes they did. I mean you were littler. That helps.

A: I think so.

Q: And sometimes they didn't succeed. Sometimes the children—

A: It's trauma.

Q: What do you remember next, while you are on this boat and you're having a good time. You're with your sister, whose job is to make sure you're ok. And participate in some of these adventures. What happens after that.

A: Then we got to Ellis Island. And my aunt met us.

Q: This aunt that you didn't know.

A: Right.

Q:What was her name?

A: I think her name was **Fraicha**.

Q: **Fraicha**.

A: **Fraicha**.

Q: Is that the last name?

A: No that's her first name.

Q: **Fraicha**. I didn't know that name. What's her last name? **Tante Fraicha**.

A: Right. Weiss if she was not married. Weiss. And she's a young woman. She's pretty and, and she wore a fashionable hat. And she came to meet us and that's when my sister delivered her message.

Q: Oh she had held it in all this time.

A: You've got to send that visa, you've got to send the papers.

Q: There on Ellis Island.

A: Yeah.

Q: The first thing she does when she gets off the boat.

A: Right.

Q: And do you remember how **Fraicha** reacted?

A: she was very friendly. She was very pleasant and I guess she took it to heart. Now you know there's no telephone. I could not write. I don't know how soon thereafter the visa was sent. But she got the message. She relayed it to the family in Brooklyn and they sent the visa for my mother.

Q: Now when you get to Ellis Island did she take you home?

A: No.

Q: What happened with you girls?

A: Well the group stayed together and I don't know how, I guess we took a bus or something, put bus, put us on a bus. We went to Philadelphia where the Jewish organization had a summer camp. Today I would call it like a motel and it was all on one floor. And we had our separate rooms. And there was an attempt to teach us English and baseball and stuff like that. And we played hopscotch and games and looked at the comics and just had summer. Played outdoors and rallied round the flag to pledge allegiance which we were taught. And it was just nice. It was pleasant.

Q: Did anything strike you as impressive when you first came to the United States? Different from what you were, you were thinking. How the place looked, how people talked, how the food tasted. Anything in your mind's eye?

A: No, I was receptive to it all. You know it was all new and it was ok. I didn't' have any great expectations or disappointments you know. A lot of the members of this Jewish organization the Brith Shalom of Philadelphia took an interest in the children and came to visit us. And they brought you know they were business people. Some brought hats that they had in their shop. Or they brought cakes. They, they befriended us and visited us. And I made particular friends with somebody who had the ability to throw his voice. He was like a ventriloquist. And I just thought that was the most fabulous talent and we just had a great time together.

Q: So this is one of the visitors.

A: Yes.

Q: He kept you entertained.

A: He did, he did and he came you know regularly more than once. And I don't know whether he thought he would adopt us or what.

Q: How was Inge doing? Now that her mission was accomplished.

A: We didn't talk about it. She just –

Q: Was she as carefree as you were?

A: Probably not. Probably not.

Q: In general was she a serious personality?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: I put words, how would you describe her personality?

A: I don't think she ever got out from under that cloud of responsibility. And she just had very different interests. And I was successful in ways that she was not. And that was hard. That was hard for her because she felt that she had blazed the trail and that I had an easy time.

Q: You said that before.

A: So for instance I, I mean we both did well at school and stuff and, and skipped you know the New York City school system if you did well, they didn't know what to do with you. There was no such thing as enrichment. They just pushed you ahead so that you were in the next class. And so they pushed us both ahead and we had some of the same

teachers and, and that sort of thing. And then I tried out for a special high school in New York. Now she had—

Q: What high school?

A: High school of music and art. She had tried out for that school (bells ringing).

A: You don't want to continue where we were.

Q: We will, but no I won't. Ok. we had a break now and before going back to the point where we had our break. I wanted to ask a question that I hadn't before. And that is your earliest memories total.

A: Well the very earliest memory is of a curtain in probably in the nursery which sort of we, they were casement windows, which means that they rolled out. And when the breeze came in, it would lift this curtain which was very airy and lightweight. And it would lift this curtain up and I just thought of a giant outside the window breathing in and out because the curtain would rise up and then fall. It would rise up and fall. And I remember the fabric so distinctly. It was pale sort of a pea green with white leaves ovoid leaves scattered throughout the curtain. And there was a heavy thread running the warp of the fabric to make it hang right. And if I ever ran into that I would know that fabric in a minute.

Q: Isn't that amazing.

A: And that was, it was the very earliest memory that I had.

Q: The logic of a child.

A: The giant.

Q: A giant you know. how could a curtain move like that.

A: Right. repetition, you know in and out, in and out. And we were on the second floor so it had to be a giant.

Q: So are we talking second floor American or second floor European.

A: Vienna.

Q: So it would be the third floor in the United States because there's the **adgeschloss** and then there is the first floor and then there is the second floor. that's the way it is in Europe. So if it was the second floor from what you remember from Europe then it would be the US Third floor.

A: there was a courtyard in the center of the house. Now these houses were very old. So the courtyard was probably at one time where carriages would enter this large gate of this entrance and then there would be this courtyard and then these wide curved stairs, going upstairs.

Q: And did your house have windows going onto the street or into the courtyard as well?

A: Yes. Both.

Q: Both. Was it a house that was of stone or brick or –

A: I'm not sure. I don't know what the construction was, but it maybe had five floors, five stories high.

Q: Put up probably wood. ok so let's go back to the camp that you were in outside Philadelphia, that first summer when you were here. And you make a new friend who knows how to throw his voice, the ventriloquist. And the only time you saw your relative, her name was Aunt **Fraicha, --**

A: **Fraicha.**

Q: **Fraicha** is when she greets you at the boat.

A: At Ellis Island.

Q: At Ellis Island and your sister delivers her message and you two go off to camp. What happened after the summer was over?

A: Well my mother had made all the arrangements for my father, his mother and his brother to travel to the, to America. And so since her visa arrived in time, she was simply added to his cabin.

Q: So she did arrive and she was able to travel with him.

A: Exactly.

Q: You didn't know this at the time though.

A: No we did not. I mean I wasn't in touch with her. The letters you know went back and forth would take weeks and no telephone and nothing like that. No Twitter. No Skype. So we didn't know anything.

Q: All of this is going on but you don't know it. You and your sister are unaware.

A: Right.

Q: And when the summer ends what happens with you two.

A: Well my parents arrived at the end of August, 1939. We had been at the camp since the beginning of June when we arrived. And so they arrived and –

Q: They picked you up.

A: They picked us up. And somehow we got to Brooklyn where the family had set up an apartment sort of like a, like a railroad flat. All the rooms were in line. And, and we settled in. and war broke out officially September 1.

Q: I mean they got in by a hair's breadth.

A: By a hair. And so September comes around and we start school. Not speaking English and my mother described us walking to the school weeping because we couldn't understand and couldn't speak. But the teacher spoke Yiddish and so she said don't worry. I'll take care of them. And you know within weeks we were speaking English.

Q: Of course, but the beginning is difficult.

A: Yeah the very, the very start was hard. But people were friendly. It wasn't like it was in Austria. It wasn't that way. There was nobody jeering and throwing things at us. And so we started school and you know learned English, fit right in.

Q: Cool, very cool.

A: Yeah it was like a magical age you know. [*gestures idea of "margin"*] Just that little margin of adaptability.

Q: And also being shielded and protected from the larger events and the reasons for them.

A: Right, well of course that was all that my parents talked about was what was happening in Europe and my mother had her family there. And received letters periodically that had big pieces censored out [*gestures "censored pieces"*], black marks cut. And so she pieced it together that her father was dying of cancer. And, and pretty soon those letters stopped.

Q: Did your father ever say to your mother you were right. I was wrong.

A: Not that I know of. No. But they were very, very happy. And then we were at some kind of family gathering and I don't re, family was talking and they asked my

grandmother something about how her life was in Europe. Oh, she said it was terrible, terrible. And it was she never got anything, she never had anything and so my father said well who bought your shoes. And who paid your passage. And he was just he was humiliated in front of these strangers who were family. I don't know what her motivation was. Maybe she was just stupid. You know she could have been stupid. Or she you know this was before social security and things like that. Maybe she thought that she would do better by throwing herself on these relatives. And my father was just more than incensed.

Q: I can imagine.

A: And that was the end of that. And he took a job in the Bronx and we moved to the Bronx which was like you know—

Q: Another world.

A: Another world. Different.

Q: Where in Brooklyn had you had this flat? Do you remember?

A: I do not.

Q: Do you remember where the rest of the family lived in Brooklyn, what part of it?

A: No. They had a house and a garden. And I believe this uncle I don't remember what his, what his business was. He was elderly. He had a parrot, I remember that. And he used to cut the parrot's toenails, claws, yes. But he broke off.

Q: So it was through his mother actually, more than the rest of the siblings that this kind of absolute unawareness of what his sacrifice had been.

A: Mm hm.

Q: And when you moved to the Bronx, when was that?

A: I think I was in about third grade. I remember--

Q: So you had been here a few years.

A: Possibly yeah. A year or two, yeah. And I remember third grade in the Bronx. Miss Bullock.

Q: It's funny how we remember our grade school teachers.

A: Unh hunh.

Q: And your father, how did he make a living?

A: He was a carpenter.

Q: His own. Or did he work for somebody.

A: Well he worked for somebody and then he lost patience completely and set up practically next door. In the Bronx. And so he had an apartment first. And then my mother noticed, she would walk from the apartment, two blocks around the corner to his shop. And one day she was walking by and people were moving furniture out of one of the houses. And so she inquired and it turned out an old lady had lived there and died. And she, well you know can I buy this house. And I don't know. They said something ridiculous, but $5000 and it's yours. And she went to the bank without my father's knowledge, plunked down $5000 and the house was ours. So here was the second time that she acted totally on her own and it was wonderful. It was wonderful. It was –

Q: Did he give her any grief for that?

A: No. No, that was a good thing. It was a brick house, three stories. Fabulous woodwork, oak paneling and molding and stairs and it was a godsend –

Q: Had a middle class life. A nice middle class life.

A: Absolutely, absolutely. It had a porch. I have a picture. I'll show it to you, of this house. It was, it was something special.

Q: And your father's workshop was right—

A: Around the corner, like two blocks away.

Q: And did he own his workshop or did he rent it?

A: No, he rented the space. Yes. And originally it had an apartment behind it and he thought that maybe we should move there. And my mother said oh no. She's not going to raise her f, her children, her girls, in this situation.

Q: There is a benefit to having Viennese standards. You know.

A: Definitely [*nods head*] yeah.

Q: Did she also work when she came, work for pay, when she came--.

A: No never. She worked in my father's shop. When he went out to install things and he did store fronts and fixtures. Very often for immigrants, refugees who established their own businesses and he would make their showcases and their store fronts. And if he was out of the shop, somebody had to mind the store. So she stayed at the store. While he was out.

Q: That really does sound like an amazing, I don't want to say easy but so much easier than someone who doesn't have that skill.

A: Oh of course. I know people who were lawyers and whose skills did not transfer. And people when family a doctor, he spent you know he had to go back to school and do you know make up some coursework or something in order to get licensed here. And were furriers and shop people.

Q: What language, when you were now in the Bronx. What language did you speak at home.

A: German.

Q: Still.

A: Yes. We would come home for lunch. It was quite a, quite a walk. Go to school. Speak English. Come home for lunch. Go back to school, come back home. So yeah we spoke German at home and we spoke English in the world.

Q: Very much an immigrant kind of experience.

A: Oh yes, yes. My mother was very eager to learn English and she went to classes and became a citizen. My father became a citizen too.

Q: When?

A: As soon as they could.

Q: So within the 40s.

A: Yeah.

Q: Sometime in the 40s.

A: Definitely. I think even before the end of the war.

Q: And what about you and your sister?

A: I think I have my own papers, yes. And my –

Q: Do you remember becoming a citizen too, a US citizen?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: You remember the actual experience?

A: They just asked some you know historical questions and things like that.

Q: Did your parents, you mentioned in the beginning that they were trying to keep track of what was going on in Europe.

A: Definitely.

Q: And did that continue?

A: Yes. Yes. Oh my father railed, railed against government in Germany. He, he gave up being Jewish completely. He never we never had a kosher house again. We, he never went to temple. My mother did. Once in a while, for holidays. And Yom Kippur and

Rosh Hashanah. He said there was no god if this could happen and ne just turned his back on the whole thing.

Q: Wow. Because so many other people had the reverse thing. They did not particularly feel themselves to be Jewish and then when they were targeted said all right now. I'm not going to pretend to be someone I'm not. Did that seem strange to you at the time or is just that's his choice and that's her choice.

A: Definitely. It was—

Q: What about you and your sister?

A: My sister felt more connected to, to her Jewish heritage. She when they were in Florida, she participated at a temple. I never have. And her daughter also seems more connected to the Jewish heritage and not that she keeps a kosher home but she you know she's connected to the community. And I'm not.

Q: Was this a conscious thing or is the way you developed in your interests and how they grew?

A: Well I'm an atheist and I just from my experience and my reading I have come to that conclusion. If anything, I'd be a Buddhist.

Q: Did your parents eventually find out what happened to various family members?

A: They did. They I mean some people just disappeared like **Tager**. And I think one of my father's brothers just disappeared like a blown leaf. We did know that my grandfather passed. And we knew that Olga and her mother, my grandmother, were pushed from one apartment to another. I always thought that they were together, but I subsequently learned that they also were separated.

Q: How did you discover this?

A: A friend, a cousin of my ex-husband is very savvy on the internet and she puzzled it out.

Q: So it's a recent knowledge.

A: Yes, yes. I always had a little fantasy that somehow they went off to the Vienna woods and hid. And survived.

Q: As you were growing up, tell me a little bit about school, about high school, about how did your life develop.

A: Well I enjoyed school. I had friends in school. I applied to the high school of music and art which was a special high school that you auditioned for in New York. And I prepared a portfolio and auditioned and was accepted. And that was probably the biggest learning experience.

Q: Was it really?

A: Yes, cause I was with a wide variety of people, very diverse student body from all over the city. Some very well-heeled people, some people who were very political. There was one gal whose father was a died and hard communist. There were people of color which was unusual. That wouldn't' have been in the neighborhood school. There was a Chinese girl that I was very friendly with, Gloria Wong. And when the communists took over in China, I hadn't a clue. I said well what do you think? And she said I think it's going to be a better thing for China. This was the era of the Rosenberg trials. And it was very, it was still very conflicted. It was still very, the world was coming to my awareness.

Q: That's normal when you're in high school. That's what happens you know.

A: But I was so happy at that school. I just, I just blossomed. I couldn't wait for summer vacation to end and go back to high school, which is not your typical high school experience.

Q: No it isn't.

A: But I was very lucky. Yeah. and I still have friends from high school. Yes. And then when I went off to college, it was a total disappointment. It was not as stimulating as high school.

Q: Where did you go to college?

A: Well I started out at Brooklyn College. Which was free. The city colleges of New York, I mean totally unbeknownst to anybody today were free. Just like high school and so I would meet my friends on the subway. There was quite a little contingent that went from the Bronx to Brooklyn. Brooklyn College, because they had a very interesting art department. And but of course you know it was a liberal arts school and so I had classics and I had history and I had language and yeah.

Q: But it wasn't as stimulating.

A: No, it was not. It was a come down. We had artists. I mean it was sort of like a carry-over from the WPA projects where they hired artists in the art department to teach. So I had Mark Rothko as a teacher. The poor man could not put two words together. He was a wonderful artist but he was not a teacher. I had Clyfford Still and William Bazeotis and all these fabulous names today. They were struggling artists at the time. Anyway they

were not good teachers. And so I decided that and I really wanted to know about art. I wanted to know the background and so I was interested in art history. And Barnard College at that time was investing heavily in their art history department. And I was told to apply and I did and I got in and so I have a degree from Barnard College which is prestigious.

Q: A question. You mentioned the different languages when you were at home at lunch time and going back to school. Did that every change. Did you ever end up speaking English at home?

A: I think, I think yes. As the years went by. They understood. My parents understood more than they could speak. My mother was pretty proficient but my father there, never, I mean he spoke Yiddish.

Q: Did he speak any other language besides German and Yiddish. Did he speak Polish, did he speak Russian, did he speak—

A: He just had a few phrases and he even had what, he had an English phrase like son of a bitch. Somebody when he was a kid had come back and taught him son of a bitch and he used that.

Q: He knew that from then.

A: Yes he knew that from **Knihynicze.**

Q: Isn't that funny. Did you ever feel like you were an outsider when you were in the United States.

A: [*shakes head "no"*] No.

Q: So there was no sense of I don't really belong to this society. I'm from over somewhere else.

A: Never. [*shakes head "no"*] Not in New York, not in Connecticut, not in Maine. No, I just it's where I'm at.

Q: Did you ever think of Vienna.

A: I've gone back to visit.

Q: I want to come to that point about returning to your story. You mentioned that you are writing your memoirs.

A: Mm hm.

Q: what prompted you to look back and when did you start looking back?

A: I think I've always been sort of an introspective person. And I realized that my grandchildren who are not near and have not been close to me or I to them. Cause they've always grown away, grown up away from me.

Q: You mean geographically distant?

A: Yes. But you know geographic distance also means emotional distance. And knowledge and knowing somebody. So I thought that I would clue them and help them out to know me a little better.

Q: And that's what's prompted the memoirs?

A: Correct, correct.

Q: How far along have you gotten?

A: Well I can't say it's a thing that goes chronologically from here to there. It's a series of stories. Of things that happened. Of things that I've thought about. And we'll put them together in some kind of a scrapbook and that'll be it.

Q: Those are the kinds, the most precious gifts now.

A: I hope so, I hope so.

Q: When did you first go back to Vienna?

A: My sister has gone back several times. And then one time, we went together. And we went with my niece also, Tina, her daughter. And well my sister had some money there. And she filed for social security basically where she paid into the system and then accumulated money out of the system, which, which was effective if she spent the money there. In Europe. And so she was motivated to use that money. I never bothered to pay into the system. I don't care about it and I don't want it. And she planned to live to be a hundred so she would use it all. That didn't quite work that way. So we went back hm, I'm trying to think of when. In the 90s. And maybe 92 or so. And we went to **Rohdenstern Gasse**. And we went to the **Prater** and we went to the Vienna woods and we went to the opera. And then Pat and I, my partner, went to Vienna also as part of a trip that included Budapest and Prague. And I don't like Vienna. I find it stuffy, baroque and false, pretentious. I don't, I don't like it at all.

Q: Is there anything that was familiar or did you, when you went you felt like you were kind of to a place you had never been before?

A: No, I was tourist, I was a tourist. I had my eyes open and I was curious and we went to Salzburg, went to a play there. It turned out to be a play about an old age home and my sister said oh, why do we want to go to see that. Cause it interests me. I didn't get all the nuances of the language but I got enough of it. But it was interesting, it was interesting. We went to performances and I thought that they were just stuffy. They were for tourists. There was nothing with heart. We went to Bratislava which was just recently liberated from Russian domination and we went to the opera. And they were, they could have been bus drivers. It just had, they were just doing a job. You know they had no heart. They had no emotion in to the part. It was just a businessman's opera. It was, it was nothing. It was just nothing.

Q: What a disappointment.

A: Yeah, cause my parents loved opera. And we went to the opera in New York. We went to the City Center and we went to the Met.

Q: You have mentioned off camera that in 1998 I believe it was you went to Auschwitz.

A: I did.

Q: Tell me about that trip and what that was all about.

A: Well it's something called the March of the Living. And apparently, well it's a Jewish organization that tries to get young people to understand the Holocaust and their heritage first hand. So they were mostly young people, but there were some survivors. And we were on a bus. And I made friends with several people. One of whom, Sophia **Afariat** was spent the war years in Poland. And she spoke fluent Polish so she had the advantage of language. And we went to restaurants and things like that and she could speak fluently with people. We went to **Krakow**. We went to Warsaw. And went to some of the stations that Jews were assembled. We went to the ghetto. It was the first time that I was with very devout Jews. The young people were devout. They prayed, on the airplane. So that was the first. And then we went to Israel. (pause, something happening off camera) We have to stop every time that door opens and closes.

Q: What are the most memorable moments for you of that trip.

A: For the trip. Well seeing **Krakow** which my father had spoken of was a high point. I thought that well, um, Warsaw was just a gray depressing place. We had a bus that took us from one place to another. We had guards on the bus. We had a Polish soldier who was on leave earning extra money, accompanying us on the bus.

Q: And the purpose of his presence?

A: Well there's a lot of anti-Semitism, a lot of anti-Semitism. We went to a little village I don't even know that it had a name. But it was a typical village, shtetl, town. The Jewish synagogue, and there were no more Jews living there but it somehow, I don't know who took care of it. So the synagogue had, was neatly tended. And the church was on the top of the hill. So the church was on the hill. And the synagogue was down here. [*gestures location of church and synagogue*] There was a contingent of Polish soldiers, with a tank stationed at the synagogue. They were playing cards. But there was a military presence. We passed houses that were very derelict that probably had not been lived in for a number of years. We passed another place that was like a farm where they were very neat and tidy. They had cranes nesting in this chimney. I'd never seen anything like that and that was a tidy farm. So you know if the people who had the place could take care of it, had the wherewithal to take care of it, had the energy and the skill and maybe some money to take care of it, they did well. If the people were old, poor, the place was derelict.

Q: So you saw these types of things—

A: I saw that yes. This lady Sophia, who had spent the war. She was able to talk to our guard and sort of befriend him and find out who he was. And that's how I know that he was on furlough and stuff like that. We went to a place in Krakow that was sort of a folk art place. And I wanted to buy something for my grandchild who was little at the time. My first grandchild. And so we bought something there. And I brought it to the hotel,

opened it up and it had shattered into you know 42 pieces. So the next day we went back and I said well you know this, you packed it poorly. I need something else. And oh, no. No they wouldn't, they wouldn't' honor that and so Sophia said we are Jews. And she played the Jew card. I was so embarrassed. I was so embarrassed that she felt it necessary to draw that card. And he said ok, pick out something else. We went to a Jewish cemetery and there was this little old lady scuttling through the cemetery. And Sophia started talking to her. And she had spent the war. She was Jewish. She had spent the war there. She, she had no prospects of going anywhere else.

Q: The lady in the cemetery?

A: Yes. And that was her life. I don't know, I think she was doing a short cut through the cemetery to her home. Yeah. And she lived in that town with her daughter.

Q: Did you feel in some way distant from these things or close to these things?

A: No, I felt close to that, I did. It was very emotional. And when we went to Auschwitz there were graffiti, anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls outside of Auschwitz, just outside. They do keep the grounds themselves preserved. But it was very emotional. And so I left a note saying you know but for fortunate kindness in this world, I would be here too. [*shrugs shoulders*]

Q: Have you gone to any other of these—

A: Well that was part of the trip. We went to **Sobibor** and we went yeah, the whole, yep.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. To when you finished Barnard college. How did your life evolve after that?

A: Well I got married. And that made me very happy. He was a wonderful young man.

Q: What was his name?

A: Eugene. He had a very supportive family. My family loved him so all was good. It was good.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Two sons. One lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with two daughters who are now going to live on the east coast, one of whom is a graduate student at Harvard. And the other one is just a graduate out of the college at Wooster, Ohio. I have a son now in LA, who had two children, one of whom is in Providence, Rhode Island at Brown University. And the daughter is a high school graduate, graduated, senior and she plans to go into musical theater. She's very, very talented.

Q: Have you talked about these things with them? About your childhood, about your escape? With your children, with your grandchildren?

A: A little bit. Well they've seen the, they've seen video of the 50 children that Steven Pressman made. They have the book. They have very casual interest in it all.

Q: How do you think it shaped you? Did it shape you? Did it contribute to you being the kind of person that you are today?

A: Oh, completely.

Q: In what way?

A: I don't know. If I had remained in Austria, and there had been no war, I would be a German **hausfrau**.

Q: Artist?

A: I don't know. I think that women still have a very tangential life there. I think it's still very patriarchal. I think there is still some anti-Semitism that keeps people from

dreaming and thinking that they could be something more. I don't think I'd have the education that I have. I'd be somebody else.

Q: In your personality, has it had an effect on things that are your values or the way you look at things, that early history.

A: Well I think my mother's message that I'm going to have a wonderful time and to be open to new experience has been my way of doing things.

Q: What a wonderful gift.

A: I know.

Q: Tell me about how the rest of their years were here in the United States.

A: My, when my sister hit adolescence my father lost it. He, he wanted to impose kind of the old protection. He did not understand that girls have you know rights and thoughts of their own. He made life very hard for her. Constant bickering and constant picking on her, constant demeaning. He did not understand that she wanted to wear something that he didn't' approve of. Lipstick drove him up the wall. And, and she, she was destroyed. And my mother could not stop him. I don't know what he had in mind. Loose women

you know wear lipstick and he just, he just had a totally, totally other way of looking at a young woman.

Q: It sounds almost like a village he came through.

A: Exactly. Don't be this and don't be that and be careful here [*gestures with hand*] and be careful there and he just made her life miserable. Somehow I did not get it into his craw the way she did. That was something deep set him off. I did not buck him. I put on lipstick around the corner. I did not, I didn't, I didn't defy him. I just went my own way. And somehow, he could accept that. So again she was the pioneer. She got the full brunt of his ire. And the only way she could think of to get out of it was to get married which she did when she was 17.

Q: Very young.

A: Didn't work out too well. Of course. So.

Q: Your parents, did they stay in that nice brick house in the Bronx.

A: They did. Until my sister, my sister divorced that husband and remarried and they, with her new husband and her daughter who was Tina was about eight by that time, moved to Florida. My parents had vacationed in Florida. Just briefly you know go on

two weeks' vacation. They liked it. And I don't know if you were around at the time but Arthur Godfrey radio program really was a spokesman for Florida. And he talked up Florida. And so my sister asked my father to come down and build something for her. To build, I don't know, some kind of storefront and of course he went. And he was not a young man at that time. So my mother saw an opportunity to get him out of his regular routine and they started talking about retiring to Florida.

Q: Nice.

A: Which they did.

Q: Where in Florida?

A: They bought a place in Coral Gables. They like Miami. There was a large Jewish contingent there, a lot of lands people. And they were very happy there.

Q: Did they ever go back to Europe?

A: No. At one point my father wanted me to go with him to some of his haunts like **Bad Kastine**. And I had little kids at the time and so it wasn't that, I couldn't do it. Yeah.

Q: They passed away in Florida?

A: Yes. My mother had a series of heart attacks and died at age 59.

Q: Oh my gosh, how young.

A: Yeah. And my father was like 12 or 13 years older, he lived to be 88. On his own, in Florida.

Q: On your journey over to the United States what would you want your grandchildren and everybody else's grandchildren cause this will be on the internet, what would you want them to understand the most about that journey?

A: Hm. I think it is to just keep an open mind and keep your eyes open to experience things for yourself, not what somebody told you, not what you read in a book, just be there. Be there and see it for yourself. And live it for yourself. And make whatever sense you can of that experience. It'll be your own.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add to what we've talked about today.

A: No it's been good. Thank you.

Q: Thank you Kitty. And with that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Kitty Weiss Penner on July 29, 2016 in South Portland, Maine.

(looking at photos)

Q: Ok Kitty tell me what is this picture of?

A: This is a picture of Gilbert **Kraus** reading to four children, and I'm one of the children. So this is me.

Q: Next to the doll?

A: Yes. Her name was Judy.

Q: She was yours?

A: Yeah. A doll I had to share with my sister but she was not a very cuddly doll so I didn't mind.

Q: And do you know the other children who they are?

A: I do not.

Q: OK, let's go to the next picture. What is this picture of?

A: This is the last picture that we took with my mother in Vienna before leaving to go to the United States.

Q: In the shot there is your mother and then –

A: The blond is me and the dark haired sister, girl, is my sister Inge.

Q: This is in 1938 or 39?

A: 1939.

Q: What is this photograph of?

A: This is a picture of my sister and myself in happier times. I would guess that this might be 1938, spring of 38, something like that, before **Kristallnacht**.

Q: You both look very nicely dressed. Very cute. Which one is you?

A: The little one. The little girl.

Q: That's you.

A: Yes.

Q: And the one next to you is –

A: Is my sister Inge.

Q: What is this photograph of?

A: This is a picture of my maternal grandparents. This is Ernestina **Deutch** and Joseph **Zehngut**. And this is about 1895 maybe. The signature at the bottom says **Zehngut Vien**.

Q: So that means he took a photograph of himself? In his own photo studio?

A: In his photo studio. He had a photo studio for many, many years. and –

Q: And this is his wedding shot.

A: It is, it is very elegant.

Q: So your grandmother Ernestina is the one who ended up in Auschwitz with her daughter.

A: She did yes. And Joseph passed away of natural causes in about 1942.

Q: Kitty, then tell me who were the little girls in this photograph?

A: This also is from the **Zehngut** studio and they are my mother who is the youngest --

Q: In the middle.

A: Yes. And her two sisters, Olga and Annie.

Q: So your mother in the middle is Stella.

A: Yes.

Q: And Olga is to her left and Annie is to her right.

A: No, the other way. Olga is the tallest.

(you can point to them)

A: Yeah Olga is the tallest and she is probably I think six years older than my mother. And Annie is maybe four years older.

Q: And Olga is the one who perished in Auschwitz along with your grandmother.

A: Yes.

Q: And Annie was in France,

A: Annie escaped to France and was in an internment camp, interned in Nice France. Came to the United States after the war.

Q: So this was taken in your father's studio.

A: Grandfather.

Q: Your grandfather?

A: Yes.

Q: Thank you. (arranging shot) OK, Kitty tell me about what these photographs are. It looks like newspaper clips. We saw a close up of one of them. Tell me what it generally is.

A: This is from the Sunday Daily News, the Sunday News which is like a magazine section of the newspaper, of the daily news, in New York City. And it's dated June 18, 1939. And this documents the children of which I am one in Collegeville, **Brith** Shalom. You can see on the carpet there, was the sponsoring organization that helped the **Krauses** get all these children here. And my mother found this just in the newspaper. And she, oh my god. These are my children. The one on the bottom right, I don't' know that you can see me but I can see my sister, right there [*she points*]

Q: Oh there are a lot of children there but thank you for showing us.

A: So –

Q: How did she, and she found this and she kept it.

A: She kept it and then when she died my sister kept it. And then when she died, my niece kept it. And I asked to make a copy of it which this is.

Q: And you told me off camera that this was all you had until you saw the book and the documentary.

A: Exactly.

Q: On the 50 children.

A: Right. Right.

Q: How interesting. Well thank you for sharing that.

A: Well thank you for bringing it about.

Q: So now we're a few generations ahead and tell me who all is in this photograph.

A: This picture was taken at my oldest granddaughter's Bat Mitzvah. In Ann Arbor. And –

Q: Left to right.

A: Ok this is Tina, my sister's only child.

Q: She's at the far left.

A: Left.

Q: In white.

A: Yes, with her daughter, my grandniece, Tess, followed by my son Charles. And his wife, Paula. Then the boy is my grandson.

Q: What's his name?

A: His name is Cooper and he is currently at Brown University.

Q: So this was taken a few years ago.

A: Yes this was taken nine years ago.

Q: So that would make it 2007.

A: Something like that.

Q: 2006 or 7 and you're there in the middle.

A: Right.

Q: And next to you is your granddaughter.

A: Granddaughter, the bat mitzvah girl.

Q: And her name is—

A: Julia.

Q: And in front of her –

A: Is her cousin Ava.

Q: And next to her –

A: Is her sister, Leah. Behind Leah is my son Jonathan.

Q: And next to him –

A: Is his wife, Stacy.

Q: And next to him.

A: And my partner Pat.

Q: We've got them all there.

A: We do.

Q: Thank you. Now tell me who is this, who is in this photograph?

A: This is my niece, my sister Inge's only child Tina on the left, named for our grandmother Ernestina. And the blond is her daughter Anya, pregnant with Ada. And she's holding her other child, who is Aria. And the girl on the left or right is Tess, her other daughter. So she has two daughters and two little granddaughters now.

Q: So Tina has two daughters and two granddaughters.

A: Yes.

Q: And you're a great grand aunt.

A: I am.

Q: Thank you so much and this completes the photos.

(end)