

EI-1095
MARIANNE ELIZABETH DASH (DACH) MAXWELL
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SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service, I'm the director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project and today is Thursday, July 22, 1999. I'm in the recording studio at Ellis Island using the portable recording equipment and we are about to record the first interview conducted by Krista Senator who is a student intern from Skidmore College this summer here with the Oral History Project. Okay, Krista.

SENATOR: Good afternoon this is Krista Senator for the National Park Service today is the 22nd of July 1999 and I'm at the Ellis Island recording studio with Marianne, Micky, Maxwell who came from Berlin, Germany in 1937 when she was two years old. Why don't we begin by you giving me your full name.

MAXWELL: My full name is Marianne Elisabeth Dach Maxwell

SENATOR: Could you spell that please?

MAXWELL: Marianne M-A-R-I-A-N-N-E Elisabeth E-L-I-S-A-B-E-T-H Dach D-A-C-H Maxwell M-A-X-W-E-L-L

SENATOR: Thank you. And please state your date of birth.

MAXWELL: June 3, 1935

SENATOR: And what is your maiden name?

MAXWELL: Marianne Elisabeth Dach (German pronunciation) in English, Marianne Dash.

SENATOR: Oh wow. And where were you born?

MAXWELL: I was born in Berlin, Germany.

SENATOR: Uh, what is the size of your birth town? Is it quite large?

MAXWELL: Berlin was one of the major cities in Germany.

SENATOR: And what did it look like?

MAXWELL: I don't recall what it looked like since I left when I was two years old. I just have picture images of where I lived.

SENATOR: You father's name?

MAXWELL: My father was Felix Dach. F-E-L-I-X D-A-C-H

SENATOR: And what was his occupation?

MAXWELL: He was an attorney.

SENATOR: Could you describe what he looked like?

MAXWELL: Yes, he was about five-foot-two, black hair, glasses, a very kindly, smiling face, dark eyes, of moderate built.

SENATOR: Describe his personality and temperament.

MAXWELL: He was a very happy person and a diplomat and peacemaker. He had gone to Heidelberg University was quite formal in his attire even though he was relaxed in his temperament. And his major concerns were the happiness of my mother and myself.

SENATOR: So, did you have any other siblings?

MAXWELL: No, I had no siblings. In fact, my parents did not plan to have a child at all given the circumstances of Germany at the time they were married and shortly thereafter and never did have any other children.

SENATOR: Any your mother's name?

MAXWELL: Maiden name?

SENATOR: Full name.

MAXWELL: Herta Marie Jacobsohn (German pronunciation). H-E-R-T-A, Marie, M-A-R-I-E and Jacobsohn, J-A-C-O-B-S-O-H-N

SENATOR: Her occupation?

MAXWELL: She also was an attorney. She was one of two women attorneys in Berlin.

SENATOR: Ah, fascinating. Could you describe her appearance?

MAXWELL: She was quite petit, black hair, dark eyes and very, very pretty.

SENATOR: And, please describe her personality and temperament.

MAXWELL: She was more serious than my father in temperament, somewhat more intense but quite shy in public. He was the one who was socially the leader and quite comfortable in company and she was more quiet. She worked in this country as well and did very well in her work.

SENATOR: Do you have any anecdotes about either of your parents?

MAXWELL: Oh, quite a number. (she laughs)

SENATOR: I'm sure. Any that you can think of right now?

MAXWELL: Originally we came to New York and then went to Birmingham, Alabama. And my father, both of my parents, of course, lost not only their money but their professions. They were multi-lingual. They spoke English but with an accent. My mother worked at Kresky's [ph], which was a five and dime, as a sales clerk in Birmingham, Alabama. And my father tried to sell insurance with his three piece suit, his white shirt, his gold cufflinks, his tie and his spats, in, with a German accent, a Jewish appearance, in 1937 and in Birmingham. Needless to say that was not very successful. And he lost his job, and therefore, he ended up coming to New York to try to, be able to get a job in New York. My mother and I stayed in Birmingham because she was the only one working. And it wasn't until a number of years later that we were all rejoined in New York, where I grew up.

SENATOR: Well we'll talk about that a little bit more in a bit after we speak about your life in Germany and what you remember of it. Describe, do you remember your house where you lived in Berlin?

MAXWELL: Ah, we lived, I have memories of pictures that I was shown and my grandparents owned an apothecary. My grandfather was a pharmacist and owned a pharmacy and at that time pharmacies were licensed in Germany they, and uh, owned one in the middle of Berlin. And above the pharmacy were apartments and we lived in one of those apartments above that pharmacy. And, on Louisenstrasse in Berlin.

SENATOR: Can you describe the appearance of the apartment?

MAXWELL: From my perspective it was enormous, of course. (She laughs) I think it was fairly sizable compared to the apartments in New York where we ended up. It was well furnished and quite comfortable. I know we had household staff and I had a nanny at the time, who took care of me while my parents went first to South Africa and then the United States before they decided where they would go.

SENATOR: So did you stay home with...

MAXWELL: I did.

SENATOR: ...the nanny during that time?

MAXWELL: Yes.

SENATOR: How long were your parents in America and then in South Africa?

MAXWELL: I don't know, they went for visits to see where they wanted to go.

SENATOR: So they were just, a week or so at a time?

MAXWELL: Yes, yes.

SENATOR: And this nanny, how old was she?

MAXWELL: She was a young woman and was not Jewish, in fact by anecdote again, I looked enough like a boy and she would take me down and her friends were the SS soldiers and I learned to say "Heil Hitler" and they all assumed that I was going to be a young Jewish boy, in Germany, grow up to be a soldier like they were.

SENATOR: Did, do you remember her name?

MAXWELL: Kova [ph]

SENATOR: Who did the cooking in your family?

MAXWELL: Not my mother (laughs) and I have inherited that lack of talent. At first, both my parents worked once I rejoined them in New York. This was in 1941 and my grandparents left Germany in 1941 and went to Mexico City so they did not join us until after the war. So my parents hired live-in housekeepers who were also older refugee ladies who did the cooking as well as take care of me when both of my parents worked. And the first lady's name was Frau Levy, Levy [She uses a different pronunciation] also from Germany and the second was Frau Sterner [ph]. Frau Levy did the cooking and she was a terrible cook. Frau Sterner was an excellent cook. In 1945, my grandparents came again through Ellis Island from Mexico City and then my grandmother, who was a superb cook, did the cooking from then on.

SENATOR: You all lived...

MAXWELL: And we all lived together in a two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn, New York.

SENATOR: In the old country, who did the cooking there?

MAXWELL: A cook.

SENATOR: A cook, you had a cook in your apartment in Berlin.

MAXWELL: Yes.

SENATOR: Were you especially close with anyone in your family?

MAXWELL: I didn't have many family. I had my parents and I had my grandparents. And I...

SENATOR: In Berlin?

MAXWELL: We were not a large family and yes I was close with a cousin. My father had a sister, Nellie, who was, I believe, a widow. And she had a daughter, Edith, Edith (German pronunciation) Edith in English, and Edith was at the time, I believe, about eleven years old. And Edith had a birth defect and limped apparently one side of her body was smaller than the other and she was crippled and therefore, limped. And she and I were very close and we played with each other. Unfortunately at that age I imitated her and picked up her limp, which would have meant that I would not have been eligible to immigrate into the United States or leave Germany. And so, I was taken to a physician who was smart enough to hold some candy out and I ran, no limp. And he informed my parents not to allow me to play with Edith anymore because I needed to drop that imitation, limp before I could leave Germany. And so, I never saw her again and my father pleaded with his only sister to leave Edith in a sanitarium and to emigrate but she would not leave her only child and they both perished in the Holocaust.

SENATOR: Do you remember your grandfather?

MAXWELL: Oh, very much. Because both my grandmother and grandfather came to live with us in 1945, '45, '46, so I was ten or eleven years old at the time and, uh, he was a traditional, German, "pater familias" and although he lost his profession, couldn't work anymore, he definitely had the strait ram-rod back and the German temperament. I know that I was the apple of his eyes, I was the center and apple of that entire family constellation. And I was rather mischievous. (she laughs) But, I can remember one time, ah, he had a stroke and therefore had to walk with a cane and I can remember, I was playing the piano, and he, all of a sudden I heard a crash and I went running and there he was, he had fallen bringing me a glass of milk. Another time, I can also recall, that I would do things to provoke and infuriate him, of course, running around the dining room, he running after me with his cane raised and my grandmother in German saying "Jakob, Jakob, (German) Please don't. You will kill her." And he said, "I hope so." (she laughs) And he then, had a stroke and ended up in a nursing home where he had to be and I would come from school everyday and stop at the nursing home and I will never forget the smells of that nursing home and he was in a dark little room. But I stopped everyday and spent at least an hour with my grandpa, with my Opa (German) and talking with him. But in the summers I was sent to camp and when I was thirteen, I was sent to camp and he

died while I was at camp and I was asked, "Do you want to come home and go to his funeral" and I did not want to, I wanted to remember my Opa (German) the way he was.

SENATOR: Was this your father's father?

MAXWELL: No, my mother's father. My father had no parents left. His mother, Elisabeth Dach, died shortly before my parents were married and I was named, my middle name is named after my paternal grandmother, this was my maternal grandmother and grandfather.

SENATOR: And your paternal grandmother was she...

MAXWELL: My paternal grandmother was the one who died shortly before my parents were married.

SENATOR: What was your religious life like?

MAXWELL: In Germany, the German Jews, or many of the German Jews were not observant. They were more assimilated than Jews of other countries so although we were ethnically Jewish, we were not religious or observant in any manner. And, ah, when we came to this country, again my parents were not observant at all but, when we went to Birmingham, there were a series of events that resulted in my having to be placed in an orphanage. And I was three years old. I had been placed in foster care which was eminently unsuccessful and therefore, I ended up in an orphanage, through the Catholic Church. And the orphanage that I was in was an orphanage for school-aged children, but I was three so I was by several years younger. I spent two years in that orphanage and in fact, a few years ago, Jim and I went and I found my orphanage in Birmingham, Alabama. But for those two years, I was Catholic and learned to say "Hail Mary's" faster than anyone because I had to say so many of them. Then when I was reunited with my parents in Brooklyn, New York and that was when I was in, well first in Jackson Heights one year when I was in kindergarten and then in first grade in Brooklyn, New York. I was sent to Sunday school, Jewish Sunday school, as a reformed Jew just to give me an identity there but I still had, from those early years, a certain affinity for Catholicism and the camps that I was sent to for two months from the time I was five through the time I was fifteen were usually Protestant camps so I could sing all of the Protestant hymns. So I would say it was rather ecumenical. My best friend, my next door neighbor, was catholic and we would go to the Immaculate Heart of Mary where I'd say, "Schmi is ro ale " and she'd go to Garfield Temple where we'd say "Hail Marys." (she laughs)

SENATOR: Did your parents encourage you to explore other religions? When you stayed at this orphanage, when you were young, you describe yourself as being Catholic, were they trying to pass you off as Catholic...

MAXWELL: Oh no, no, that was the only organization that, where they could place me under the circumstances. See, when my father came back to New York and my mother stayed in Birmingham, I had a nanny and she was black. And my mother and I shared one room in a boarding house in Birmingham. And they only had one bathroom for the boarders and the other boarders complained because my black nanny was using the single bathroom. And so my mother was told that she had to get a white nanny, but she couldn't afford a white nanny. And so, I was told that we were going to visit a lady who my mother knew, who was also a German lady, and when we got there the lady said, "Why don't you go with these children and play downstairs, your mother will be here when you come back." And later on I was told, my mother was told that this was the best way of handling it and when I came back upstairs, the lady said, "Your mother's gone, I'm your mother now." And so, I apparently did not behave very well or respond very well to that and ended up declared unsuitable for foster placement and so, I was then taken to the Catholic orphanage and did not see my parents for two years until I was ready to come home.

SENATOR: Why is it that you were away from your parents?

MAXWELL: There was no, no welfare, no AFDC, no other way, they couldn't afford to keep me. My father was in New York and had to find a job and work. My mother was the only one with a stable position working

as a clerk at a five and dime store. They couldn't pay for a white nanny, they couldn't leave me alone at age three. There were no other alternatives.

SENATOR: Let's take you back again to the old country.

MAXWELL: All right.

SENATOR: Bring you over to America, backtrack a little bit. Do you remember any of the games you played when you were in Germany, anything about what you did for entertainment?

MAXWELL: Again, apparently both from what I recall and what is consistent with what I recall as a child and from stories, I was quite mischievous. (she laughs) But I had my own nurse maid whose only job was to keep up with me, take care of me, keep me entertained. And so I do remember going to the Weihnachtsmann which was the equivalent of Santa Clause only he wore a robe instead of the American Santa Clause, I remember that. I remember being taken to the Tiergarten which was the Zoo. And so, my nursemaid's job was to keep me entertained and I had the impression that the universe revolved around me. (she laughs) And I do know that I was quite verbal cause I do recall being on the boat coming over here and I have images and pictures of that but as far as specific types of entertainment, it probably was whatever I wanted to do.

SENATOR: Who made the decision to come to America? You said your parents traveled to both America and to South Africa what made them decide...

MAXWELL: The United States?

SENATOR: The United States.

MAXWELL: We had a distant cousin of my father's who sponsored us, Bernard Natt was his name, N-A-T-T. Bernard and Bella Natt and they were related to us, I believe through my father's mother. So, it was that support as well as the United States after what they had seen, and knowing how my parents made decisions, it would have been the two of them together. Decided that they were coming to the United States. My grandparents and I know this, not only didn't want them to go, but though that all of this nonsense would blow over and besides which they were so well placed financially and politically that nothing was going to happen to them.

SENATOR: Your cousin lived in Birmingham as well?

MAXWELL: No, lived in New York. It was an older second cousin so it was a generation, was, they were the age of my parent's parents.

SENATOR: When did they come to the United States?

MAXWELL: They were born here, I believe.

SENATOR: Born here, okay. How did you feel about leaving your homeland? Were you aware of what was going on?

MAXWELL: We were going on an exciting trip. The only tension that I recall, and I recall some tension, Was going with my parents to a building where my father had to go in and the anxiety that I could sense from my mother and later. What I found out, that was where my father was getting the exit visas and there was some concern about my father's health and, but making sure that we got all three exit visas and I remember the sense of anxiety.

SENATOR: As a young child.

MAXWELL: Yes, that is all I recall of that.

SENATOR: Was it difficult for your family to get those exit visas?

MAXWELL: It was always difficult apparently it was always a question of whether you would get them or not. And as it turns out there had been some anxiety about my picking up a limp because if they picked up anything it would have been put on the record. And in fact they picked up a heart condition in my father and it was put on the record and it affected our entry into this country.

SENATOR: How did it affect your entry?

MAXWELL: This, and this I recall, when we came to Ellis Island, I had the picture of lines of people and all the suitcases and the stifling nature of the environment. And the line and we going through the line and people talking in a language I couldn't understand. My initial pronouncement of how stupid these Americans were because they didn't understand a word of German but my parents as I said were multi-lingual and they knew enough English to be able to communicate. We being pulled out of the line and I sitting on a suitcase waiting hours and hours and hours and ended up crying. What had happened was, they saw in the record that my father had a heart condition, pulled us aside and we were going to be sent back. All I personally recall was this feeling of tension, of waiting, of stifling, of something not being right and sitting on the suitcase and the tension in my parents which was what made me cry. And them ending up, my parents, the official coming over looking at me crying and what he said to my father and mother was, "Oh hell, I've got kids of my own" and passed us into the United States.

SENATOR: That's amazing. So you were supposed to go back.

MAXWELL: We were supposed to go back which would have been a death sentence.

SENATOR: Absolutely. Could I take you back a little bit again, could we talk a little bit about your voyage over here, what you remember about that.

MAXWELL: What I remember were the high sides of the ship and again I remember those pictures and remember the desire of wanting to be picked up and look out over and see the ocean. What I was told later on since I had been comfortable going to people I didn't, was not a clinging child, was that I tried to get any and everybody on the ship to pick me up look over and try to jump. Because I wanted to swim. They also had contests, costume contests and my parents I guess had made a costume for me at one of the contests. And I had for many years a little sailor that I had won as first place in one of the costume things. That's what I remember. But I remember parties, I remember games, I remember lots of people and remember having a wonderful time coming over. It was an adventure.

SENATOR: So, in what class were you staying?

MAXWELL: I don't know that.

SENATOR: Probably one of the first or second classes.

MAXWELL: I , I don't recall that at all.

SENATOR: Did you meet any other children while you were there?

MAXWELL: Oh there were children of various ages.

SENATOR: Close friends?

MAXWELL: Not close friends and ah, we lost, you know nobody that I knew growing up who had come over with us. I just remember it as a party.

SENATOR: How much luggage did you pack?

MAXWELL: I didn't pack at all. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Of course not.

MAXWELL: Um, I had no idea. I do know that I still have in my parents' things that they brought over. They had furniture that was made specifically for refugees out of walnut. And it was cubicle furniture that it could be put together, Swedish modern furniture, very much uh, that style of furniture. They had brass lamps, they had pots and pans, they had household goods. All of those they kept and I inherited a number of those including the Rosenthal china which I have which I received without cups because the cups got lost on the voyage over. And the family silver and those kinds of things. Apparently, this was nothing compared to what they had to leave behind. Ah, so how much was packed, it was a household full of furniture and household goods.

SENATOR: Do you remember what you were wearing on the voyage or have you seen a picture, perhaps?

MAXWELL: Ah, no, just I would assume normal two-year old clothes. I do know that I was dressed as a boy.

SIDE TWO

SENATOR: Was there a reason for that?

MAXWELL: Yes. My father, once he accepted the idea, apparently, that he was going to have a child at that time, had wanted a boy and was told by the attending physician that he had a boy. Then the second physician, the primary physician came over and congratulated him on his daughter and my father said, "no, no, it's a boy" because the assistant had come, the younger assistant, had come and congratulated him on a son. And so they had to go back and check again and sure enough, I was a girl. But I was, as my mother was brought up, not in the traditional female role but was brought up to have her own profession. It was intended that I be brought up to have a profession rather than be brought up in any of the household skills and since I was rather active, I hated skirts, so I was dressed in overalls because it gave me much greater freedom and I liked it better.

SENATOR: You were a very active child.

MAXWELL: Yes. **(Break in tape)**

SIGRIST: We are now resuming.

SENATOR: Do you recall the name of the ship.

MAXWELL: No I don't, as a matter of fact, I have a picture of it at home and I don't know it off hand.

SENATOR: And from which port did you leave?

MAXWELL: I don't know that. We left from, probably the closest, from Berlin.

SENATOR: Describe how you felt when you first saw New York City, from the ship.

MAXWELL: I remember the Statue of Liberty. I was lifted up and it was pointed out to me and that was my, I was fascinated with that so that's my first image, that's my picture. And then I was put down because people were getting ready to disembark and of course I couldn't see over the side and my next memory is of Ellis Island. And when we were finally released into New York, I do recall a sense of relief. Of getting out of hold.

SENATOR: Did you understand what was going on at the time, why you were leaving Germany and coming to the United States?

MAXWELL: Ah, at the time, no I didn't understand. I had seen things in Germany, that I knew it wasn't good. I had a sense that there was something wrong. Where friends of mine, I saw friends of mine who were SS officers treat an old man cruelly. And being pulled back in an apartment when I wanted to see what was going on cause I didn't understand.

SENATOR: Do you have any other memories of this period?

MAXWELL: No, that, you know happy memories, having young men who were friends of mine who taught me how to say "Heil Hitler" salute, made much of me and then their cruelty to someone, just confusion, a lot of confusion about that and nobody talking about it. Because the whole notion at that time was you don't tell children anything, you protect them by not telling them.

SENATOR: How did you get from your ship to Ellis Island?

MAXWELL: I don't know.

SENATOR: You don't remember if you docked and then took a police boat.

MAXWELL: What ever it was, it was a whole crowd of people. We were not singled out until we were at Ellis Island.

SENATOR: You mentioned that there were long lines of people and that you had to stay there.

MAXWELL: Yes, long lines of people, lines of people, rows of people, all with various types of luggage.

SENATOR: Did you see anything that you had never seen before?

MAXWELL: That. (she laughs)

SENATOR: And how were you treated by the staff at Ellis Island?

MAXWELL: I think I told you, they saved my life. They saved the life of my parents.

SENATOR: How long were you there?

MAXWELL: Hours, hours, everybody it seemed to me I could see, we were practically the only ones left.

SENATOR: And where did you go after you left Ellis Island?

MAXWELL: After we left Ellis Island, this is not by recollection specifically but by report, we immediately went with the Natts, Bernard and Bella Natt, they had a second home. They had an apartment in Brooklyn, I believe it was Brooklyn, and they had a summer home in Babalon. I know we went to Babalon and then were ensconced in a small apartment in Brooklyn. And I was still young enough that I was in a crib in the living room and that's where we first tried, my parents first tried to establish themselves.

SENATOR: For how long did you stay?

MAXWELL: Only a short period of time and that was when I got introduced to my first Black nanny.

SENATOR: Can you describe her?

MAXWELL: Oh yes. Apparently my mother and father left for work before I woke up. And I woke up, again in my crib, and saw this woman, who was black, who was dirty all over. I had never seen anybody like that. I was terrorized that she would touch me and make me dirty. So I escaped, climbed out over my crib, escaped into the bathroom and locked the door. And, uh, stayed there. And when my mother came home that night, and I later learned it was about six o'clock at night, I heard her voice, burst into tears, unlocked the

bathroom door and went flying to my mother. My mother described it that I was crying on the inside and the poor woman was crying on the outside. Where she had stayed outside all day and could not persuade me to open the door. So I told my mother I would not let that woman touch me, she was dirty all over. And my mother tried to explain, no that was the color of her skin just as people had different colored eyes, people had different colored skin. I did not believe it. And that woman allowed me to take her into the bathroom, take the nailbrush and scrub the back of her hand until I saw blood. Which, had so horrified me what I realized what I had done, that I realized how much I hurt her and she allowed me to do it to demonstrate that no, this truly was the color of her skin that she and I bonded after that. (she laughs) And that was my nanny.

SENATOR: What was her name?

MAXWELL: I don't remember.

SENATOR: How long was she your nanny?

MAXWELL: I believe she was the one who then went with us to Birmingham and was my nanny from the time I was two, until, for about a year, until I was about three.

SENATOR: Now, what did your parents do for work in New York?

MAXWELL: I don't know what they did in New York. Whatever they did, it was for a very short period of time and not very successful. And then when they went to Birmingham, my father had a job, they both went to Birmingham with jobs.

SENATOR: So they had found jobs...

MAXWELL: They had found jobs through connections, through people who knew people so my father became an insurance salesman and my mother worked at Kreskys.

SENATOR: Why Birmingham?

MAXWELL: Because they got jobs there, both of them.

SENATOR: So they got the jobs before they left New York City.

MAXWELL: Yes, they were promised the jobs, my father was promised the job and it offered an opportunity for at least some beginning economic stability.

SENATOR: For how long were you with your parents in Birmingham?

MAXWELL: Not very long, because my father was eminently unsuccessful. And, um, left, and I can recall his boss, who was the manager or the owner of the insurance company, was forced to fire him because all of the other insurance salesman threatened to quit. Since my father was the laughing stalk of Birmingham and that was rubbing off on their ability to do the work.

SENATOR: Why was he the laughing stalk?

MAXWELL: Because he was not from Birmingham, he had a German accent, he looked Jewish, it was 1937, and he clearly was not a good, you know, did not fit in and didn't even attempt to fit in terms of his cloths, his demeanor, everything his whole approach. Couldn't, he couldn't...

SENATOR: How did he feel about that?

MAXWELL: How did he feel? He was extremely depressed when he came back to New York as I later found out. But in front of my mother and me it was stiff upper lip and uh, I can recall in Birmingham when we

went to the train station to say goodbye to my father who was going to New York and my mother and I and my father's boss were there to bid my father goodbye and good luck. And my father's boss gave me a doll which I promptly shattered and threw away turned my back to him and said, "I won't talk to you, you fired my daddy." And refused to talk to the man. And then went home with my mother and shortly thereafter, was put into foster care because she couldn't keep the Black nanny.

SENATOR: What did your mother do after your father left and you were put into foster care?

MAXWELL: She continued to work at Kreskys. My father came to New York, was given a job by friends of the family, by a man who had an undergarment manufacturing business and had no other job but could offer my father at least a job in the shipping department. So along with other refugees from Puerto Rico, who didn't speak English, my father would go to work in the shipping department and carefully wrap every piece in his three-piece suit, with his pack lunch, his meticulous nature, but it was a job. And this was the man who later became my father-in-law, who then, and once my father had a job and things were stabilized then it was a matter of my mother getting a job and things getting stabilized and it took them two years in order to do that.

SENATOR: And when did you get back together with your parents? Move up to New York to be with your father?

MAXWELL: Okay, my mother, and my father and myself together, all right. When I was five, I was sent to a camp from the orphanage and I can remember being at the canoe area and being called to meet some people who were visiting me and I never got visitors. I never understood why other kids were homesick or anything like that because I wasn't, I never had a visitor. And so, I came and I saw four people standing there, two couples, and I wondered why the woman was crying and I didn't recognize them. And I looked at this woman who was crying and then it dawned on me, this was my mother. And then I remembered my father and the other couple were friends of the family who drove them out there and after I got to know them, then at the end of the camp season, I was reunited with them in Jackson Heights and we all lived in one room with a woman who rented out a room and had two children of her own for a year. And then I went to camp again and was picked up by that same man, who had the car, was the only one with a car, who drove me to this unknown place, house. It was a two-story house and he, we went into the porch and he said, "climb in the window." And I didn't want to climb in the window, I didn't know this place. But I looked and some of the furniture looked vaguely familiar and so I did what I was told, climbed in the window and that was the house, and my parents were there and I surprised them and that was the house that I grew up and my landlady, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kush, my landlady is now 90 years old and yesterday we went to visit her. And she said, "Do you remember how you came to this house?" (she laughs) And that's where I grew up from first grade through high school until I left to go to college.

SENATOR: Where is this house located?

MAXWELL: 257 East 4th street Brooklyn, New York and I left it forty seven years ago and some of the people are still there, some of the neighbors are still there.

SENATOR: Can you describe the neighborhood?

MAXWELL: Yes, it's a rather unique neighborhood. Two-story row houses and it was a neighborhood that had, that particular street had a lot of stability. And many of the people, the children still bought some of the houses and are still there. So with that kind of stability and neighborhood watch, it has maintained its clean appearance, its neighborhood feeling, it was its own community, and still is. And it had, some of the houses were one family and some were converted to two families. The one we lived in was two-family with a landlord living either downstairs or upstairs. And, with a two-bedroom flat and there was, a small, a very, between two houses, there was a narrow driveway with a single car garage in the back.

SENATOR: Of which ethnic groups were the people in the neighborhood?

MAXWELL: Mostly Catholic, mostly Irish Catholic with, I think there were just three Jewish families. And at the time there was some anti-Semitism.

SENATOR: Can you describe any instances?

MAXWELL: Of anti-Semitism? Being told to go home, that I didn't belong there. Or in school certainly, as usual cutting-up or something and being sent to the principal's office or the teacher's office and being told that I, as a Jew, should appreciate this country more than anybody else and therefore, I did not have the right not to behave myself in assembly. And being called a kike.

SENATOR: Did you have any close friends that you...

MAXWELL: Oh, lots of them. My best friend was Mary Coil, who I yesterday learned died last year, who lived in that house, owned that house until she died. And it was bought by another kid of the block who was ten years younger than we whose mother is still there. And she, her mother, her father wasn't there so her mother brought her up alone. And Mary was Catholic and I was Jewish and as I said we went to Immaculate Heart and we went to Garfield Temple together. (they laugh)

SENATOR: That's wonderful.

MAXWELL: And there were other kids there who were very close friends of mine. We grew up together, we played on the streets.

SENATOR: Describe how you learned English.

MAXWELL: I learned English in Birmingham and I learned it very quickly with a good southern accent. (she laughs) Starting out in foster care and in the orphanage, I spoke English.

SIGRIST: We have about five minutes.

SENATOR: Okay. I guess just, tell me about when you started to understand what you had left in Germany.

MAXWELL: When I got back with my parents it was very clear what I had left. What I had left in terms of what they lost, what we lost in terms of family, the disruption of the family, the destruction of the family. Ah, it ended up that I had, my mother had one brother who also survived and emigrated to Israel. And I had one boy cousin, who had two children, and those were only living relatives. My mother died at age forty seven when I was twenty one. My grandmother died when I was twenty six and my father died I was twenty eight. At the time I was twenty eight, I did not know my uncle and aunt or my cousins because we were in different countries and I had no one. And that would not have been true. And again, my parents, especially my father mourned so much what he lost, what could have been, what would have been. Not just the material things but the traditions, the feeling of a continuity of family. Of the disruption of a whole generation or more. And recently we were together with my cousin and we are going to rebuild that family tradition in this generation for our next generation.

SENATOR: That's really wonderful. So, in just the couple minutes we have left can you just tell me about the course of your life, what happened after you left your home in Brooklyn.

MAXWELL: The words on the Statue of Liberty are really true for me. It gave me a real opportunity, this country. That in a country where there was such evil and such destruction, this country was the opportunity that did not allow that to succeed. Not only with the direct intervention, during World War Two, of people who fought but the opportunity here. I was brought up clearly poor, my parents were not wealthy. Although my mother became the first woman, assistant purchasing director of Sunanborn and Sons Incorporated and ended up with an obituary in the New York Times and my father went back to Columbia, became a sound engineer and did some of the original work for Al-Tech lancing on the voice of the theater technology. I was given the opportunity to go to school here, to get a full scholarship to Bennington College. I have a PHD. I

became successful and my children are Americans through and through. And we had the opportunity to regrow and go beyond what was in Germany.

SENATOR: When did you get married?

MAXWELL: I got married to the father of my children, and we are not together anymore, but I got married in 1955. And one of the reasons, quite frankly, that I got married at the time that I did, he was the son of the family that helped my family. And my mother was dying of cancer. And I was the only child and for me to get married and nine months and two weeks later, I had my son and my mother died when he was ten months old. So for my mother, after her mastectomy, to be able to see me as a bride and to see her grandson and be halfway through a knitting project, for his, to have a little suit. And having him on her deathbed, crawling around as she was in her last illness, that was probably one of the motivations for me to drop out of college and do that. And of course, it was a decision made somewhat in haste but that's when I did get married and had two children, Dan Andra Neterman and Halta Marie Neterman. My daughter was born after my mother died and named after her. And I now have four grandchildren.

SENATOR: Great. Well, this was absolutely fascinating and I thank you so much for coming and sharing your story with us today. This is Krista Senator signing off in the Ellis Island recording studio. And the date is the 22nd of July 1999 and I'm with Marianne Maxwell.
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