

EI-933

HILDE FRIEDMAN

BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 21, 1899

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 10, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 98

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: MELANIE DANIELS

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AUSTRIA, 1941

AGE: 42

SHIP: US VESSEL

PORT: SPANISH PORT

RESIDENCES:

- **AUSTRIA: VIENNA**
- **THE US: NEW YORK**

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service, Ellis Island Museum. I'm here at The Woodcrest Center with Hilde Friedman. Mrs. Friedman came from Austria in 1941, and she was forty- two at that time. Correct?

FRIEDMAN: Correct.

SIGRIST: Yes. Mrs. Friedman, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

FRIEDMAN: Birth date?

SIGRIST: Yes.

FRIEDMAN: August 21, ninety-nine

SIGRIST: August 21st, 1899.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

FRIEDMAN: Vienna, Austria.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about your birth? Did you ever hear a story about the day you were born?

FRIEDMAN: My very early age? I don't know anything.

SIGRIST: But did someone ever tell you a story, a family member or,

FRIEDMAN: I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Okay. should also say, for the sake of the tape, that there is a sound I hear, a kind of a droning sound.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That will be picked up on the tape. Mrs. Friedman, could you give me your name when you were born? What was your full name when you were born?

FRIEDMAN: Hilde, the first name.

SIGRIST: That's H-I-L,

FRIEDMAN: H-I-L-D-E.

SIGRIST: Yes.

FRIEDMAN: Is -- my maiden name was R-I-D-E-G.

SIGRIST: Rideg? Rideg. And did you have a middle name?

FRIEDMAN: No.

SIGRIST: No. Tell me some of your earliest memories of Vienna.

FRIEDMAN: There is so many late memories. They're all extinct, into the old memories!

SIGRIST: Well, when you think about your early childhood, what are the types of things you think about?

FRIEDMAN: I remember this building of the school I went to, public school, high school.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the building?

FRIEDMAN: The room.

SIGRIST: What did it look like?

FRIEDMAN: Like -- like a schoolroom. It's hard to describe.

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SIGRIST: Do you have other memories of your life when you were a child?

FRIEDMAN: No.

SIGRIST: No? What was your father's name?

FRIEDMAN: Joseph.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

FRIEDMAN: He was a – he was a business man

SIGRIST: What kind of a business?

FRIEDMAN: I – I cannot tell.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you tell me what your father's personality was like?

FRIEDMAN: Very weak memories.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

FRIEDMAN: First name, Anna. A-N-N-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

FRIEDMAN: Weinberg.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

FRIEDMAN: W-E-I-N-B-E-R-G.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about your mother, when you were a little girl?

FRIEDMAN: That we had a very good relationship, in short, to say. (laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

FRIEDMAN: I'm the only child.

SIGRIST: You were an only child. Can you tell me a little bit about the house that you lived in?

FRIEDMAN: Not that far ago, not that long ago, no.

SIGRIST: I see.

FRIEDMAN: There was many other things happened afterwards when I stayed in Vienna. I remember the building where I lived later on when I was married.

SIGRIST: Well, talk a little bit about what you do remember about Vienna. The important things that you have memories about.

FRIEDMAN: Well, I had a very good education. What they called public school, high school, college, languages.

SIGRIST: What languages did you speak?

FRIEDMAN: I started French, English and later on a little Italian.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite subject in school?

FRIEDMAN: I loved languages.

SIGRIST: Could your parents speak different languages?

FRIEDMAN: Well, I mean, they speak Italian. I begin to forget. In French, I can still read, you know. But I have no, no occasion to practice.

SIGRIST: What religion were you in Vienna?

FRIEDMAN: Jewish.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about practicing your religion?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, we went to the synagogue regularly.

SIGRIST: Was there a certain holiday that sticks out in your mind, the way that you celebrated?

FRIEDMAN: Well, the main holidays like Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.

SIGRIST: Was there a special way that you celebrated Yom Kippur at that time?

FRIEDMAN: Well, in Yom Kippur, you fast. And New Year's, I mean, you have nice meals together with the family.

SIGRIST: Did you get married in Austria?

FRIEDMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the man that you married?

FRIEDMAN: Otto. O-T-T-O.

SIGRIST: And obviously his last name was Friedman.

FRIEDMAN: Friedman, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you met Mr. Friedman?

FRIEDMAN: Through my friend.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married?

FRIEDMAN: The dates?

SIGRIST: Yes.

FRIEDMAN: Um ... December '22. The day, I don't know.

SIGRIST: The year you mean?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Not sure of the year. Did you go to live with your husband after you were married?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your life as a newlywed in Vienna?

FRIEDMAN: I had a good life. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Did you continue your education later on?

FRIEDMAN: Yes, I always went and took all sorts of courses later – even in America.

SIGRIST: Always were interested in that?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. I kept – kept learning all those. (laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, that's a good way to be.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what you remember about, just prior to the First World War? I'm sorry, the Second World War?

FRIEDMAN: Before? Fourteen is a long ago!

SIGRIST: Yes, that was a long time ago! Well, do you have any memories of the First World War?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What can you tell me about the First World War in 1914?

FRIEDMAN: There was a shortage in food! (laughs)

SIGRIST: Yes?

FRIEDMAN: And very limited, what you could get.

SIGRIST: What could you get?

FRIEDMAN: Children could get milk and prices was limited to ration, rationing. They had cards, you know, for food -- food cards. And none of us was not affected the war itself, but just the life was a little limited, you know?

SIGRIST: Did you ever see soldiers in Vienna?

FRIEDMAN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did any family members or friends have to serve in the German army at that time?

FRIEDMAN: I cannot, I just don't remember, no.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what you remember about, just prior to the Second World War?

FRIEDMAN: After ninety-five?

SIGRIST: Well, sort of the rumblings of the Second World War.

FRIEDMAN: My -- my memories here? The memories I have here in America, you mean?

SIGRIST: No, before, before you came here. Like the political climate in the late 1920s and early thirties in Austria?

FRIEDMAN: Well, I was very happy. I could speak English fluently.

SIGRIST: You spoke English before you came to America?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, yeah. And it helped more my family, too! And my children who could not speak English started school here.

SIGRIST: Before you got to America, though. I'm talking about before you came.

FRIEDMAN: Which – but between what years?

SIGRIST: The late 1920s and early 1930s. I'm just wondering what the situation was like for your family in Vienna at that time...just prior to Kristallnacht.

FRIEDMAN: I don't -- just can't find anything special to remember. It was before World War – before World War II?

SIGRIST: Just before World War II, yes.

FRIEDMAN: Is a little clearer -- getting a little clearer in 1914, you know, when the war started, no?

SIGRIST: That was the First World War.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. I'm -- no. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. I mean the Second World War. I wasn't in – in Vienna in the Second World War. It started in — when did the Second World War start?

SIGRIST: Well, it didn't, it didn't start until the late 1930s. Where were you living--

FRIEDMAN: Thirty-eight. Hitler came in thirty-eight.

SIGRIST: That's right. So where were you living in the 1930s?

FRIEDMAN: I was living in Salzburg when Hitler came.

SIGRIST: In Salzburg?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When did you move to Salzburg?

FRIEDMAN: When did I move to Salzburg?

SIGRIST: Yes.

FRIEDMAN: In 'twenty-four.

SIGRIST: So you were married when you --

FRIEDMAN: I was married, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see! So you lived a long time in Salzburg.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit, before we talk about Hitler, can you tell me a little bit about what your life was like in Salzburg?

FRIEDMAN: It was very good up 'til the time when he, until Hitler came in thirty-eight.

SIGRIST: What did your husband do for a living?

FRIEDMAN: He was a specialist. He was in -- in philatel-- philately. You know what means?

SIGRIST: I don't.

FRIEDMAN: Stamps.

SIGRIST: Oh! Ah, ha.

FRIEDMAN: But at that time, he was actually -- no, at that time, he was not. At that time, he was representing a firm in Switzerland. Buying lumber, which is a big product in Austria. And he was the buyer.

SIGRIST: I see. But he always had this interest in stamps?

FRIEDMAN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did he always have an interest in stamps?

FRIEDMAN: This was a hobby.

SIGRIST: Really?

FRIEDMAN: First.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting. Are there any stories you can tell me about your husband's stamp collecting? Or maybe finding a very rare stamp?

FRIEDMAN: He had some very important customers. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: So he dealt—

FRIEDMAN: But I don't remember the names of the customers.

SIGRIST: Ah huh. Well, tell me what you remember about Hitler's rise and how that affected your family?

FRIEDMAN: What Hitler when [not understood] ?

SIGRIST: When Hitler became prominent and how that affected your family?

FRIEDMAN: Well, in the beginning -- I mean -- get threatening telephone calls. 'We come and get your husband'. And they did get him, he was put in prison. And finally they released him. So we were continuously afraid. We lived in our own building. It was taken from me, a very beautiful building. We had a wonderful -- we had this Mercedes car [not understood]. We were in very good shape. Everything was taken. We lost everything -- the money, the house, the car. This is in short. I don't want to get into much details.

SIGRIST: I understand. I'm just trying to get a sense of your own history. Did your parents remain in Vienna when you went to Salzburg?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did, how was their life affected?

FRIEDMAN: Very good. The life in Salzburg?

SIGRIST: No, your parents life in Vienna when Hitler came into power.

FRIEDMAN: Well, it was, I was in the same situation as over — they were afraid. And they were killed...when concentration camp and then...

SIGRIST: Well tell me how it was that you got yourself to America? How did that happen?

FRIEDMAN: How did he get to America?

SIGRIST: How did you get to America? How was that arranged for—?

FRIEDMAN: We had a very good interview, I mean, our affidavit it was very important to us. I remember, what's the name again? A big hotel in – in the---. Anyhow, very good affidavit. I mean, we got the -- without any problem our entry.

SIGRIST: Was your husband out of the prison by that point?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. My husband was, no, one time he was in prison then they let him go out again. And then he left illegally. no? Over the border, no? Left me with the children.

SIGRIST: How many children?

FRIEDMAN: Two.

SIGRIST: Two.

FRIEDMAN: And my – my son lives in Buffalo and my daughter lives here.

SIGRIST: So when your husband got out—

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: - illegally, where did he go?

FRIEDMAN: To Switzerland.

SIGRIST: And how long did he stay in Switzerland?

FRIEDMAN: Until I came when he [not understood].

SIGRIST: So you met him in Switzerland?

FRIEDMAN: Met him later, yeah. I went also illegally.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the trip from Austria to Switzerland?

FRIEDMAN I had, I was all alone. And I had to leave my own house. Everything was taken away what I have and I had to be very careful not to be seen or to go through the -- to the railroads. And I got to the border; everything was arranged over there. I went illegally to Switzerland. Then I was together with my family again.

SIGRIST: Where did you have to go to get on the ship?

FRIEDMAN: In Spain.

SIGRIST: You had to go to Spain?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about leaving Switzerland and going into Spain?

FRIEDMAN: Just not – not to be arrested in the meantime. I went with my, first went my husband, and then went my children, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship that you came over on?

FRIEDMAN: It was sunk during the war. It was not an -- an American boat. I can't---

SIGRIST: Well, maybe it will come to you as we're talking.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, it will come to my mind later.

SIGRIST: How long did you have to wait in Spain before you could get on the ship?

FRIEDMAN: A couple weeks.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about those couple of weeks in Spain?

FRIEDMAN: There were no danger there. I was safer there than in Austria. Just hoping to get a transfer, get on – get on the boat.

SIGRIST: What about your children? Can you talk a little bit about your children at this time and what they're doing?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, my daughter was too young to understand anything.

SIGRIST: How old was she?

FRIEDMAN: Ten years. Now children are different than they were then. They were children, you know? Now they know too much, they would know everything. And my son was four years older.

SIGRIST: What were the children's names?

FRIEDMAN: Margaret and Alfred.

SIGRIST: Margaret and Alfred. So your daughter was ten and your son was fourteen at that time?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you had with you? Did you have any—what did you, what were you able to take?

FRIEDMAN: Very little.

SIGRIST: What, specifically?

FRIEDMAN: A suitcase with just a few things.

SIGRIST: When you got on the ship, where did you stay on the ship?

FRIEDMAN: You mean in the cabin?

SIGRIST: Yes, but where was the cabin in the ship? Do you remember?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, there was a cabin only for women; there was a cabin only for men. I slept with some strange woman with my daughter, and my son stayed with the – son -- in another part.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about the trip across the Atlantic on the ship?

FRIEDMAN: I didn't [not understood] the question

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the trip on the ship across the Atlantic?

FRIEDMAN: My daughter got seasick. [Laughs] I didn't.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what, if they had food to feed you?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, it was a German boat. It was, it was good, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long it took?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, I think much longer than I stayed on. I don't remember, maybe sixties, seventies. I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Were you allowed on the deck of the ship?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. There was no limitation, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the other people, any person that sticks out in your mind that could have been on that ship?

FRIEDMAN: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: So, you're traveling with your husband and your two children?

FRIEDMAN: Not with my husband, my husband – husband went earlier.

SIGRIST: Oh, when did your husband go?

FRIEDMAN: I don't know that – don't remember the date he did.

SIGRIST: But he went before you left?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see, so he's already in America when you get here?

FRIEDMAN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Do you have both of your children?

FRIEDMAN: I have both of my children.

SIGRIST: You have both of your children with you.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ship coming into New York?

FRIEDMAN: It was a very -- it was July and it was very hot, steaming hot. And there's also much food. There was so much limitation in Europe. I remember what impression made on me, Horn & Hardart. I don't know if you've ever saw, it had those steam tables. Horn & Hardart was excellent because it had so much food. And that was the biggest impression because it was so limited in food.

SIGRIST: You're saying Horn and Heart?

FRIEDMAN: Horn & Hardart.

SIGRIST: And what was that?

FRIEDMAN: This was a chain, and they had, like restaurants, but with automat. Yeah? And you could and also be sim-- steam table, you would help yourself. It was a very big enterprise. It's gone.

SIGRIST: But what impressed you was how much food there was?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, it was quite an impression, the difference between Europe and America.

SIGRIST: Were there any foods that you had never seen before?

FRIEDMAN: No, not really.

SIGRIST: Tell me where you went to live with your family?

FRIEDMAN: In New York, for a while.

SIGRIST: And what were some of the other things that impressed you about New York City?

FRIEDMAN: The noise.

SIGRIST: Did your husband get a job?

FRIEDMAN: No, later on he had a job here. I don't remember. Several -- he did several things, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Did you get a job?

FRIEDMAN: Ah, not -- not when I was in New York. Later on, later on I had jobs here.

SIGRIST: Did your children go to school in New York?

FRIEDMAN: My son knew a little English, my daughter didn't know any English. It was very hard for her. It's a very funny thing. She went to school and after a month, the teacher calls me and says, 'Tell your daughter not to speak so much'. Because she spoke fluently after a month! (laughs) She was so happy to speak, and she was kept speaking! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: She learned it very quickly, I guess.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit, you spoke English before you got here, but did you have any problems with the language?

FRIEDMAN: Not at all.

SIGRIST: Not at all. What was the hardest thing to get used to in America?

FRIEDMAN: I forgot it. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Okay. I know you want to go, so I just, I only have a couple more questions for you. One is did you ever go back to Europe?

FRIEDMAN: I went several. The first time -- it was well after the war, of course, I went back to Vienna.

SIGRIST: And how did you feel when you went back to Vienna?

FRIEDMAN: I loved it.

SIGRIST: Did it seem different to you in any way?

FRIEDMAN: Hmm?

SIGRIST: Did it seem different to you in any way?

FRIEDMAN: And it was enti-- entirely different than America. (laughs) Not so much difference there itself, no?

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen in the United States?

FRIEDMAN: After five years.

SIGRIST: In five years.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, how did you feel when you became a citizen?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, very happy. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: When you think of yourself in terms of nationality, how do you think of yourself? What—

FRIEDMAN: I don't understand your question, how I think...

SIGRIST: When you think of yourself in terms of your nationality, do you think of yourself as American or as an Austrian or— how do you think of yourself?

FRIEDMAN: I don't think myself as an Austrian, but I still love Austria. I know I'm an American, that's all. I'm happy that I'm an American. And I still love Austria, too.

SIGRIST: Before we end this, there's something in German that you could say for me on tape, like a prayer or, could you speak a little German for me on tape? Perhaps recite a prayer or a poem that you learned when you were young, in German?

FRIEDMAN: I can't tell you a prayer; I don't know what I should tell you. Tell me in English what you think I should—what subject and what.

SIGRIST: I was just wondering if there was something you may have learned as a child that you still remembered in your native language? Maybe a song that you learned or something like that?

FRIEDMAN: Now I shall speak German?

SIGRIST: Yes, if you'd like.

FRIEDMAN: *Ich bin immer sehr gern zurück nach Österreich, gern zu besuchen. Ich hab's immer sehr gern.*

SIGRIST: And what was that?

FRIEDMAN: I always liked it very much and I always would like to go back to visit.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Friedman, thank you very much for letting me ask you these questions. And I hope you have a good time at the zoo later on.

FRIEDMAN: [Laughs]

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Hilde Friedman on September 10, 1997, on a Wednesday. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

SIGRIST: