



Interview mit

Joan Frome

InterviewerIn: Niko Wahl

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Verwendete Kürzel: NW Niko Wahl
JF Joan Frome

Teil 1

NW: This is an Austrian Heritage Collection interview with Mrs. Joan Frome, conducted by Niko Wahl on June 23rd, 1998, in New York.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

JF: My grandmother was Austrian. She was born in Graz. She was a gentile, an Aryan, whatever you call that. My grandfather was Jewish. I really am not sure where he came from. He came from somewhere in Eastern Europe, but I do not know where.

NW: This is your mother's side?

JF: That is my mother's parents. And I was born in that home. In the 7th district.

NW: It was in Zieglergasse, right?

JF: Zieglergasse 57. That was my family home. We built it.

NW: Your grandparents?

JF: My grandfather built it. And it is still there.

NW: And from your father's side?

JF: My father came from Hungary. And my grandmother lived in Hungary, but her husband moved to the United States. When my father was a young child, he left them. And he came here. And he sent for me, and that is how I came out.

NW: What did he do here? He was a--

JF: --he was an insurance broker.

NW: Your father, when was he born?

JF: My father was born September 3rd, 1889 in Hungary.

NW: 1889?

JF: I mean 1889! [Beide lachen.]

NW: When did he come to Austria? To Vienna?

JF: As a child...very young, I do not know, I cannot really say. He was raised in...the early years, in Hungary or Czechoslovakia, or whatever it was, and then I think they lived in Vienna for a while. Then he went...was in the war. And he was a war veteran...injured.

NW: He was in World War One?

JF: First World War.

NW: What did he do before World War One? What was his--

JF: --he was in banking. He wanted to be a physician, but he never got to that.

NW: Your mother was...she was born when, and where?

JF: My mother was in Vienna, Viennese, raised there, went to school there, and was prepared to be a middle-class housewife, which she was.

NW: But you...because you said middle-class...you also had servants in Vienna?

JF: Yes.

NW: Did you have other family members also living in Vienna? Because you said--

JF: --yes. My mother had two brothers, we all lived in the home, in the family home...and they had family. So we all lived in the house, in separate apartments. It is an apartment building.

NW: The house...there was a family...an apartment building, but with--

JF: --but with other people...and downstairs was the business my grandfather owned, and my uncle [unklar].

NW: What kind of business was it?

JF: Elastics. Showrooms of elastics. The address itself is in a more business area. It is not a commercial...it is not a residential street that I lived in. I lived in a business area, which is still like that. I was there recently, and I saw business as usual. Same thing.

NW: Your home...you lived in a big apartment?

JF: Yes. Very big.

NW: And you had one servant or several servants?

JF: The time I remember is...we had one sleep-in help, one sleep-in person, who took care of me as well, when I was little. And then I had a French...I do not know what you call it...*mademoiselle*, whatever that meant. She taught me French, and she taught me things.

NW: Like an au-pair.

JF: I guess so. And we had other people coming in, to do work. Like they used to do then: We had a laundress, and we had a....it was a middle-class household.

1/00:05:10

NW: Can you remember to...what also concerns your family: how you...special weekend programs...just to get a picture of your family life...holidays?

JF: It was a very conservative life. We did not have a weekend place or anything like that. We were in the city. My father was not well. He was injured in the war, and he was...I guess, veteran they call him...he got injured. He was not well, and we were around him a lot. He did not work...could not work too much.

NW: But he still had his business...he was a banker.

JF: Yes, but he could not work too much. He had tuberculosis, eventually. He went away to...rest homes, and he came back, and...however they tried to cure, at that time. I was home with my mother, and a nurse.

NW: Do you remember holidays, you went for holidays--

JF: --I went on holidays...when I was a little bigger, I went to my grandmother in Hungary for holiday, Czechoslovakia. I visited her there.

NW: Where was she living?

JF: In Nové Zámky, near Bratislava.

NW: You said, your mother was...only one of your mother's grandparents was Jewish. Was there a religious life, or religious tradition?

JF: No. There was not a religious life. Although my father was Jewish, and he went to a synagogue a couple of times a year. But it was not a religious life. But my grandmother in Hungary was more religious.

NW: Which synagogue did he attend?

JF: I think he attended that synagogue on Neudegggasse, or whatever that was. I think so, I am not...I went with him once a year, we were not doing anything...any rituals at all.

NW: So you obviously were also not taught Hebrew at home to be able to read the prayer books--

JF: --yes, I was! I was taught Hebrew in school. That was...religion was the first subject in Austria. My father taught me Hebrew writing. That is all. It was just something that I learned.

NW: Do you still remember?

JF: I do not remember. I can read a little, nothing major.

NW: You lived in the 7th district. The area...was it mainly a Jewish one, or was it a mixed one--

JF: --no, not at all. No, it was...very Catholic.

NW: Very Catholic?

JF: Very Catholic. Everybody was. As a matter of fact, I went to church with my nanny. I mean, Easter, and so on, I was out there, participating as a child. As I grew up, then I understood a little more, but I thought that is the way things were. I grew up in a Catholic state.

NW: But you did...this sounds very funny...at the same time you went to synagogue, and on other days to church.

JF: Yes. I think, what I was...people told me to do. Is that not what children usually do?

NW: Yes. Your mother, which religion was she...belonging to?

JF: I do not know what you mean...belonging to. My mother considered herself, I guess, Jewish. She married a Jew. And I was brought up Jewish.

NW: Which school did you attend?

JF: I went to...the...a *Gymnasium* in the 7th district, on the second street over Neustiftgasse. *Realgymnasium* it was called.

NW: This was also for...like the district, a mainly Catholic *Gymnasium*, or--

JF: --no, it was...for everybody. It was not Catholic, it was a city school.

1/00:09:54

NW: Did you have Jewish classmates, because of the religious--

JF: --Jewish what? Classmates? A few. Very few. Not too many.

NW: But you were taught...religion in school?

JF: No, I did not go--

NW: --not in the *Gymnasium*?

JF: No, I did not go to a religious school, I did not participate in that.

NW: And how about your--

JF: --we had a teacher. They taught religion in school, so...he was Jewish. But my Jewish...I was sent into a classroom, where there were five kids who were Jewish, and he taught us...whatever he taught us. I do not know what it was, but that is alright.

NW: Your friends, or classmates, were they...your closer friends...were they mainly Jewish or--

JF: --no. Nobody paid attention to who was who, but I do not...I knew a couple of people who were Jewish, and then as many who were non-Jewish.

NW: Can you remember some of your...what you did in your spare time in Vienna? Of your hobbies, or sports, or cultural activities you did?

JF: I did not do too many sports...I skated. I was skating, I remember. It was troubled times, they were not good times, my teen years. Economically, things began to go down, and I had to help out my mother, who was...had a husband who was ill, and things were going down. My childhood was not dancing to the cotillion really.

NW: Have politics been a topic discussed – if you remember – in your family?

JF: Not really. Although I know my parents were very liberal, in that thinking. And I guess that is what I remember. But it was not high on the agenda at all.

NW: So you were the...your parents had positive attitudes to the Republic, rather than to the former monarchy times, if they were liberal.

JF: Yes.

NW: Do you remember stories your father told about World War One?

JF: Not very much, he did not tell me much. I did see some of his pictures in uniform, and...as a lieutenant, or whatever in heavens he was. Not many war stories, no.

NW: Also not from monarchy times?

JF: Monarchy times? No. I learned that in school. How World War One broke out, and stuff like that. But I do remember...I think I might have been twelve or so, and there was a...we had a little chancellor, [Engelbert] Dollfuß, and I remember, that was a whole thing. There was a *Putsch* or something, they called it. I remember living...my kitchen window, a bullet got into that. I do remember that quite clearly. And I do not know where it came from. There were some housing buildings that were being bombed...I do not know what they did then...and one of the bullets came into my window. Pretty far, but...we did have that. And I must have been very young at that...I do not when that was.

NW: 1934, it was the Civil War--

JF: --so I was eleven years old. But I do remember that.

NW: So there were...yes, it was not directly on your street...the riots--

JF: --no, it was not on my street, it was much further up, in one of the suburbs, but somehow something came around our way. And my father talked about it, so I do remember that.

NW: And can you remember...if he was a liberal, he was probably against Dollfuß, was he?

JF: I do not know what we were against, that is odd...I really do not know. But I do remember my father was liberal. Yes. And I would think he was like considered a Social Democrat, I presume. I have no credentials to prove it. But I do think that he considered himself.

NW: Can you remember you friends, or classmates...were many of them members of political youth groups?

JF: Not really. I did not know they were. If they were, no one told me. I found that out later, but not while I was going...we were...quiet there.

1/00:15:12

NW: Was there already anti-Semitism before 1938, which came--

JF: --you know, I did not really feel it too much. I do not know why, but I really was not too aware...I am sure it was there, but our family, as far as I was concerned, was not really...attacked or anything. It was not a problem for us. We were just in that neighborhood for much too long. So we were very basic...the building there, that was very well-established, and I had no problem with that.

NW: In 1938, there was the Anschluss. How was your time spent during the Anschluss?

JF: I was in the house. I was...my parents would not let me out. I had to only go shopping early in the morning, I was only allowed to go at six in the morning, for one hour, and bought a few things for my family. And after that I was not let out.

NW: And your whole family stayed in--

JF: --no, my other family could go out, because they were gentiles. That was the terrible part. Living on the same floor. Except my uncles, and my cousin...my uncles had two gentile grandparents. And they were married to non-Jews. My mother was married to a Jew. I had three Jewish grandparents. My cousin had one, my grandfather. So after I came back from shopping, she went off. And she never talked to me.

NW: They did not--

JF: --they stopped talking to me.

NW: So there was no support from this other part of the family?

JF: Very little. I had one aunt, who was very good to us. She did not let anything come between. But the others were kind of afraid, because it was a threat to their safety. And they lived through the entire period and war in Vienna.

NW: Were there cousins in your age?

JF: One cousin. She is still there. I have cut off my communication with her. I could not face her ever again. It is hard to believe, is it not? You were not anywhere at that time, but it is...it was a very impossible period. It is hard to even talk about it, because it is so incredibly inhuman, that people could be that way.

NW: And it is very special for your family, as being...cut in two parts.

JF: Cut. On the same floor we lived.

NW: The other people living in your house, were they...they were mainly non-Jewish?

JF: There were one or two Jewish tenants, I remember. They could not go out either. I do not know what happened with them. They were all older, and I was a kid. I was really fifteen, when the Anschluss took...I was a teenager. My head was nowhere.

NW: Were there some confiscations of your properties, in these days?

JF: Everything. What do you mean, some?

NW: No, but I mean already in the Anschluss days.

JF: I had to turn over silver. I had to turn over everything.

NW: They just came into your apartment and stole--

JF: --no, they made me go, and I took...with my mother...I took things to a place. We had a lot of silver and stuff, and we had to just turn it over.

NW: These times, many people were forced to scrub the streets, or...humiliating stuff.

JF: --no, I did not make...I did not scrub streets. But if I had gone out, maybe...I think men, mostly men they pulled in to do that stuff. My father, of course, was not well, so he did not even go out. I did not do that, but we did get a family into our house.

NW: Into your apartment?

JF: Yes. They brought some strange family in, for us to put them up. They must have thrown them out of their house, and put them up into our house.

NW: It was a Jewish family, too?

JF: Yes.

1/00:20:28

NW: For how long were you living together?

JF: I cannot tell, but maybe a week or two. And then, I do not know what they did with them. Then they left to go somewhere. They did not throw us out of our house. I do not know what the reason was, but they did not. But they put some other family into my apartment. With us.

NW: But it was big enough to--

JF: --we managed somehow.

NW: Did you, at that time, think that Hitler's regime...that the Hitler time period would be lasting for long, or did you just think--

JF: --I had no understanding of what this was all about. I really did not understand why this happened, why I was so bad, because I was Jewish, what was so bad about our...being alive, and I did not really intellectualize it, in a sense, it was a matter of surviving, and time to...hoping it will go away, I think. I did not realize what it was going to come to. I mean, I do not think we had any...I did not have an understanding of it. I really did not. Intellectually, I was just not able to understand this kind of thing, at all. I do not know who did, but maybe there were other people, who were more...had more foresight than I, but I did not understand this.

NW: In the time before, did you...were you in contact with refugees from Germany already?

JF: No, 1938 in Vienna was...we did not have contact with German refugees.

NW: No, I mean before the Anschluss.

JF: Before 1938, no.

NW: The time after the Anschluss, you kept on attending school?

JF: I went to school, but I was beaten up in school, very badly hurt by some of my closest friends. And I refused to continue. I told my parents that I just could not continue to go to school. I mean, I was bloodied. And beaten up, and...it was crazy, absolutely crazy. A boyfriend of mine, someone I knew very well. I think his peers put him up to it. So he beat me up. So I did not continue school there. I took care of that when I came here. I could not face it. When I was about...it was in March, I think, I did not go back in September...fifteen and a half. I stayed home with my mother.

NW: But this was for a whole year?

JF: Well, I left in September [19]39, so I was home for a year, yes.

NW: What did you do then? I mean...your occupation in this time?

JF: Well, my mother did some work at home. Things got very difficult, and my mother was able to...she made leather gloves, and leather things, and I helped with it, and she trained me. So she was able to...because my father was getting sicker and sicker, and no one would take him to take care of him. He was Jewish, aside from being sick, so he could not get medical care. So, I helped my mother, before...he died in the next year, March, at home. So I was home with her.

NW: And he could not go to work anymore?

JF: No, he did not. He became bedridden, and he died.

1/00:25:08

NW: In November 1938, there came this big pogrom called *Reichskristallnacht*.

JF: Crystal Night.

NW: Do you have...remembering?

JF: Yes, I do remember. I remember...I am trying to think how it worked, but...was that a holiday? I think it was on some holiday, Jewish holiday that they did this. I do not know what holiday that was, but they burned...I do not know if they burned the synagogue, or they bombed it or something...and that is when it all started. And from the next day on, we were in terrible shape. And I think we had earphones...we had some kind of...we listened to the radio for some news and information, and what to do, and what not to do. It was horrible.

NW: But there was only German...or were you able to listen to any other--

JF: --I think we were able to get some other stuff. I know my father was trying to get information. And then, one aunt brought us some information. She lived on the floor, and she came in and told us sometimes what to do, and what not to do.

NW: Was there a synagogue nearby? Because you said you it was burning--

JF: --no, we had to go quite down, and it was a little away from us, the synagogue. But I do remember it quite well. And then, of course, there was stuff in the street, they arrested men and made them scruff the streets with tooth brushes, and all that stuff. But I saw that from my window. And then there was an election, and everybody voted yes, I remember that. It was a ridiculous time.

NW: But this time...you mainly saw it from out of your window?

JF: Yes, I could.

NW: What was...remembering of the elections? This was also a big thing--

JF: --there was no competition, it was yes. Everybody voted yes. If you voted no, I guess they would have killed you. How could you do anything? I did not vote, youths did not vote. But for some reason, I never had a yellow band. I do not know when that came. That must have come after I left. But I never had that. But somehow, everybody knew I was Jewish. I do not understand. I mean, I took a bath every day, I was clean, and I do not know why people thought or knew I was Jewish. I do not understand it.

NW: You mean on the streets?

JF: Yes, on the streets. Because I had dark hair and dark eyes. That was my...identity. I was told that is how I looked Jewish.

NW: That is tough. Were you forced to do things like...not scrubbing the streets, but other things, because you said that they knew you on the street?

JF: The people knew me, they knew whose child I was, everybody knew. No, they did not make me do anything. My parents did not let me out enough to be pulled in anywhere, to do...or to be...approached in any way. It was not safe out there, that is for sure. I do remember when they came in and brought a family into my house that they pushed my father very badly, and he was quite ill already. He really was manhandled, and he would not let them get near me. They tried to do something with me, some SA [Sturmabteilung] in uniform. He got right in between them. That is...some altercation, but I was protected, in a way.

NW: As you said he was a war veteran...was he protected by this in a way?

JF: I think so. I think he was protected, in a way. I think there was an untold code of...that he was a more respected Jew than the Jew who was not in the World War. Why, I do not know, but that is the way it was. It did not help very much, but at least they did not throw us out of my house, at the time, in 1938. That came later.

1/00:30:21

NW: In 1939, you...did your emigration from Austria to America. You started in the end of 1939?

JF: Yes, I got my passport, and I got my visa. I waited all that time.

NW: Can you remember, when did you start to apply for it?

JF: Well, I think...I did not, but I think my parents applied for it in [19]38, I think. [Sirenen im Hintergrund.] I think my grandfather did that from here, and he was vouching for me, he was my... I came in under a quota. You could not just come in here. You had to be vouched for. I think he must have started that as soon as this happened, in [19]38.

NW: Have you been in any organization, which also--

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

JF: --the *Joint Distribution* [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee] thing? No, we did not have any connection to that at all. I mean, no one reached out and we did not reach out to them.

NW: So it was mainly your grandfather – the Hungarian one – who had already left--

JF: --who was here. But--

NW: --he supported your...he vouched for you?

JF: He vouched for me.

NW: And you had contact to him already before?

JF: Yes, he wrote to us. We got his mail, and he...during that year, he sent some funds so we were able to live a little better.

NW: So he supported you, and also your family at that time.

JF: He helped, yes.

NW: Can you remember your...how did you leave Austria? You went by train?

JF: How did I leave Austria? I left Austria by train. I went through Cologne, and then I went to Belgium.

NW: This was in September 1939?

JF: September, yes. I went to Antwerp. And there I got stuck. I had four dollars they gave me in Vienna. That is all I was allowed to take out. And I got to Belgium, and there was a strike, I could not leave for the United States, and I had to live in Belgium. Then I went to a Jewish organization, the HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] and they helped me with food, because...it was crazy: the shipping line I had a ticket with put me up in a room for about ten days, in Antwerp during the strike, but they would not feed me. I think, I had no money to eat, and I had a few choices there, but I did not take them, so I went to the HIAS, and I think I had lunch at the HIAS, and then I had dinner at the hotel. I was sixteen, I want you to know. I did not know very much about life. But I did that.

NW: It was good luck that you were speaking French.

JF: I learned to speak French there. I spoke a little French, and then spoke only French in Belgium. Now I forgot it, but it was okay.

NW: Can you recall your feelings when you left Austria?

JF: Oh, it was terrible. I had terrible mixed feelings, but I wanted very much to leave, even though I left my mother. And I never realized I would never see her again. I thought I would, but I did not. I wanted out. When I got to the border, I could not believe it...how I felt when I got into Belgium, it was remarkable.

1/00:34:54

NW: Did you believe you would come back to Austria at this time?

JF: I did not think of it. I did not want to...I did not want to be part of these people at all. I thought they were all very bad, and I had no good feeling about it at all. I did go back a few years ago the first time. I could not go back for 50 years. But 50 years later, I did go back, on a trip. Just to resolve some things in my head. But I could not go back. There are some people who have gone back, and back, and back.

NW: Was there anything you could take with you at that time except for the four dollars?

JF: I could only take the clothes on my back. I could only take...things that I needed for the winter and the summer, and my mother set it up for me. I had very little...I remember having a little gold ring my father gave me, and some SS [Schutzstaffel]-men gave me a good push at the border, and took it away from me. A little stupid...little thing, that meant a lot to me. And they were terrible.

NW: Was it possible to stay in contact with your family after you left?

JF: Yes. I wrote to them, to my mother. And I had a boyfriend there, he wrote to me. He was not Jewish. I mean, he was...another mix-up. His father was a judge, who became a gentile...and changed his religion to whatever. And he married a non-Jew. So he was the result of that. He was three quarters non-Jewish, that was his...and he was in the army.

NW: Later on he was in--

JF: --yes, he was pulled into the army, and then he was...I think he was Catholic. So he was put in some kind of Catholic camp. He became a very well-known scientist, who later on came to the United States here. I saw him here.

NW: You had contact here with him, too?

JF: Yes.

NW: Except from that, you could...writing to your mother and writing back was possible?

JF: Yes. Until I lost contact with my mother.

NW: For how long have you been in Belgium?

JF: I was there ten days, almost two weeks.

NW: And then you directly took a boat to the United--

JF: --whenever the boat...there was a strike of the...sailors. And they would not go on the ships, so we could not come over. I got on the boat, and I had a very nice reservation, and of course they bumped me. I had to go down in a...down, while the Americans were going back, because war had broken out in Poland. So I was down on the bottom, where the Jews were. I did not understand the whole thing. I do not know why any of this was going on, but I was leaving. I was happy about that.

NW: Did you actually leave in a group or completely on your own?

JF: It was not a group but it was people...we were all detained, we were all held up. There was a whole group of people leaving Vienna going to Belgium to make this boat to go to America. We were all stuck. So we were stuck together. A few of us, different kind of people. I remember a boy, younger than me, about ten, twelve, alone. I do not know where...he was coming here. And an older man, who did a number with me. I do not know what he was, but he was smuggling jewelry. And he put it under my seat at the border, I did not know it. The seats were removable. After we got out of Austria, or Germany rather, into Belgium, he lifted the seat, and he took out bags of jewelry. And I looked at him, and I said: "You risk my life for your jewelry?" That was one of my horrible experiences. So it was really...people were saving their butt, in every way.

1/00:40:30

NW: But you did not know anybody you emigrated with actually?

JF: No, I did not know anybody, at that time.

NW: But this group, or this slowly forming group--

JF: --it was not really a group. I did not know these people, but once we got on the train, we were all going to the same place, so we became sort of...I guess, attached to each other.

NW: But you were going to New York together, all of you?

JF: Yes, all of us were eventually coming to New York.

Ende von Teil 1

Teil 2

NW: New York. You arrived here also in September?

JF: I arrived in New York in September. The middle of September.

NW: What were your feelings, being in America?

JF: I was totally overwhelmed. I did not really know, but I did know I was supposed to be in a safe place, which was nice. I came to Hoboken. There was no Ellis Island anymore. I think it was Hoboken. And on the boat...I had to be picked up by somebody. I was vouched for. So someone had to claim me. I was a minor. So they called out my name, and I stepped forward, and there stood a woman. She said: "I am your grandmother." And I said: "I do not have a grandmother here." She said: "I am your grandmother." She was German, not Jewish. "My name is so-and-so. I am your grandmother." She took me to my grandfather.

NW: Can you – to go back once more – recall your feelings when the boat came into New York? I mean, there was the skyline already at that time, and there was the Statue of Liberty--

JF: --it looked wonderful, it looked fine, I thought, the Statue of Liberty looked bright, and I thought...I had read a lot of books about America. [Hustet.] My grandfather had sent me a lot of material on the future of New York, and the skyscrapers...the usual stuff. So, I was very pleased to be here but I was overwhelmed.

NW: Your grandfather had married a second time here to--

JF: --he did not marry, but he had a common law...he could not marry, he was married to my grandmother. Could not marry twice. So he left her there, and he came here, but he lived with some other lady, a woman, and she was my new grandmother, she said.

NW: And from this moment on you lived with them?

JF: For a while. Not too long, but for a while.

NW: But they also lived in New York?

JF: Yes, they lived in New York.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

NW: For how long did you stay with them?

JF: Two years, until I was eighteen. Then I got married.

NW: When you lived with your grandfather, for two years...you said you had to learn English obviously.

JF: I had to learn English, very much. Because people here were very intolerant of people who did not speak English. It is not like now, where nobody speaks English. But when I came you had to speak English to get anywhere. And so I made it...and that was very important to me. So I went to day school – to high school –

and I went to night school, to business school. I did everything together. I became fluent within a year. But I was young, and I was like a sponge.

NW: There was also, I think – in the time of your arrival – a big group of German-speaking...from German and Austrian origin people here.

JF: They were, but I did not associate with them. I was very...I mean, at a breakpoint of trying to drop my origin. Not that I forgot about it, but I was not proud of being an Austrian, in any way. And in a way I was fortunate, I thought, because I married an American. This is my second marriage, my first husband died. But both of them were Americans, and I just never spoke German again. I really have not spoken German. When I went back to Vienna, I could not talk. Although I knew exactly...I understood everything. But I had like a...locked door, I could not get it out.

2/00:05:16

NW: Since 1939, you were only speaking English more or less?

JF: Yes, I spoke English.

NW: And how long did it take you to go to school?

JF: Well, I went to high school here, and I went to business school, and then I went to work. I had to make a living. My grandfather died, and he left all his money to his so-called wife, and she cut me out of her will.

NW: You did not get on with each other very well? It sounded already...when did your grandfather die?

JF: I do not know. Maybe 1943, [19]44. I came here in [19]39, [19]41 I got married...maybe a year or two later.

NW: But you had already moved out?

JF: Yes, I moved out.

NW: So you married in 1941?

JF: Yes.

NW: And you married – as you said – an American.

JF: Yes.

NW: Your American citizenship was granted with the marriage, probably?

JF: Right. When I was here, I think, after three years or so, I was able to apply, and then I went down, and I passed the test, and...who knows, the whole thing. I did it all very legally and legitimately. So when I became a citizen I was pleased.

NW: Were you ever confronted with anti-Semitism again?

JF: Here?

NW: Yes, in America.

JF: I try to think...I do not think so. The only thing...in the beginning, they did not like refugees. They did not like refugees here very much. I mean, they were like second class, we were not...but then the American Jews became more aware of what was going on, and I think they became very...good about us. And I was taken in, as a matter of fact...while I was living with my grandfather, a family kind of took me in, and I went to their business school – they owned the school – and they gave me an education, in that school.

NW: Your grandfather owned this school?

JF: Not my grandfather, this family. And they educated me in their business school, and...it was a good thing to do at that time, to take a young person from Europe. But then, I tried to get my mother over, and I could not. I just could not do it.

NW: You did send her an affidavit?

JF: I could not send her an affidavit, I did not have that kind of means, to do an affidavit, but we tried all kinds of things, and...she was sent to Auschwitz, and killed.

NW: When was this?

JF: Well, I got a letter from her in 1944, but I do not think that was...I never knew when that was written. [19]45, maybe. Because I think, I was having...I was pregnant at that time, and my husband would not give me the letter for...until I had the baby he did not want me to get upset. And she was born in [19]46, so I think it was in that period. But I do not know if that letter was written...when it was written, because I was told later, from my uncles, that they took her away on a truck. And they never heard from her again. Her brothers. While they stayed home.

2/00:10:14

NW: What happened to your aunt? The one which was so nice to you in Vienna?

JF: That aunt kept writing to me and have her mail, and she stayed in Vienna...and she stayed in the house for a long time, and they died, all of them, at a very old age. My family...they lived until their 90s. They

only...in the last ten years, maybe, or fifteen years, that they died. They stayed in Vienna. Somehow they managed. I do not know with what or how. I guess they were on pensions.

NW: But with her you kept on having contact?

JF: Oh yes, she was very sweet. I had another aunt, my mother's sister, who was jailed. I do not know if you are interested in that at all, but it is part of what life was then. She was a Freemason. I do not know what a Freemason was, but it was an organization, that I think was considered very democratic. So they jailed her. And I used to have to go visit her in jail. She did not know why she was there, but she was. But she bought her way out of there.

NW: When was she jailed?

JF: In [19]38, [19]39...in that period. She got herself out of there, and she bought herself an English passport, and she bought herself the Anglican religion. And she got herself out of there, with money. Money was very important.

NW: So were there...she was living in England?

JF: She lived in England, and then she came here, and...she was married to a rather well-to-do man in Vienna, who had died a judge, and he left her a pension for life. She traveled, that was one of my aunts. He might have been Jewish, her husband, so that she was more in the Jewish section of that family. I have a picture of her. She had no children. There were very few children in my family, only me and one cousin. My family was not very prolific, in that sense.

NW: Getting back to--

JF: --when I was in Europe, two years ago, I went to some areas, where there were...it was not a concentration camp, but it was near Prague, and I am trying to remember.

NW: Terezín? Theresienstadt?

JF: I do not think it was Theresienstadt. It was a place, where 400 non-Jews were killed, because they killed, or they shot one of the SS-men. And they were all rounded up and murdered. And it became a--

NW: --because of [Reinhard] Heydrich--

JF: Yes, Heydrich. What is that place? We drove about an hour, an hour and a half out of Prague. I do not know the name of it. But it was the most...haunting place I have been in. And there was an area that said: Auschwitz. My husband took a picture. Somebody had...there was soil from Auschwitz, which is where my mother was killed. So he took a picture of that. I took it home with me.

NW: Getting back to America...do you remember the McCarthy era?

JF: How could I forget? [Beide lachen.]

NW: Yes, and I think that it was not too...there was also quite a lot of...by far not in a Nazi-way--

JF: --it was in a more sophisticated way that they ostracized people. But it was a very terrible period as well. People could not work. Writers worked under pseudonyms. Well, you know that, probably, I do not have to tell you that. But the McCarthy period was different. I think it was a real anti-Communist period.

2/00:15:06

NW: What I was very interested in: what were your feelings? Because after you had this--

JF: --oh, I was horrified. I was absolutely horrified. And I, of course, was very much against the whole thing, and... I became a very liberal person myself, and only associated with very liberal people. My first husband was a labor editor, for labor papers, and was very progressive.

NW: So did you have problems? If he was a...working for labor--

JF: --no, I had no problem. You know where you stand, and you know what you do, and that is the one thing about America: you do have some free speech here. It is not always perfect, but it is different. However, I do get worried about the...Aryan groups here, and the neo-Nazis. It concerns me a lot, and I do give money to the [Simon] *Wiesenthal Center*, and places, where anti-Semitism is fought. So I am very aware of that...do the best I can.

NW: Another question would be...which is...because of reflecting all this past: after being persecuted, was there an influence on your feelings as being...on your Jewish identity or on your Jewish religiosity because of being persecuted before?

JF: If I had any religion at that time, I lost it, completely. I probably had some religion in me, because I did go with my father once to the synagogue. But after all this happened, I really decided to be an atheist, literally. I just do not have religion. And I was very disappointed in religion. I mean, I let people do and live, and...you know, just do not get near me with it. So if I get approached by people proselytizing, that is not for me. I have been walking on the street, and some Jewish group would come over to me, and ask me: "Are you Jewish?" And I said: "It is none of your goddamn business!" That is my attitude. But that is what came out of this. So I guess I am biased, in that sense. I do not want to have to discuss this with anybody.

NW: To Austria: Do you still feel connected to Austria in a way?

JF: Not at all. If I had a connection, it was until I came back to Austria, and tried to make some connection when I walked into that building of ours, where I spent my whole childhood, and just saw an empty building. With people who totally ignored me, and there was nothing. And I found it totally...just another place.

NW: So you would say you have an American identity now?

JF: I think so. If I do not have it, I would like to have it. But I do not have an Austrian identity. The only time I feel bad is if I read things about Austria that upset me, and I will say to my husband: "You see, that is where I come from." When I see something that is despicable that happens. When I read about [Kurt] Waldheim, and when I read about certain things, then I say: "I mean, really!" But I put myself away from this. Entirely. I find it...I guess it is a kind of defense mechanism.

2/00:20:01

NW: And you never thought of going back before?

JF: No. My daughter went back on her honeymoon. She went back to Austria. She went to visit my family, her great-uncle. And she visited our house. Her whole honeymoon was spent there. I do not know why, but--

NW: --is this part of the family still living in this house?

JF: Yes, sure, she went right there, where I grew up. They were there. I have a grown daughter, so that she...when she went back on her honeymoon, she was younger than you, probably. And she decided, she was going to do this. And she went around, and saw where I grew up. She wanted to know where I came from, which was fine, and she met everybody.

NW: This was already before your Austria visit?

JF: Oh, sure. And then she said to me: "I do not ever want you to go back alone." She said: "You could not handle it alone. You would have to go back with friends, and a lot of support." So I went back with a lot of support.

NW: When was it that you went back?

JF: This is [19]98...maybe [19]94, [19]93, [19]94.

NW: You said, you do not feel connected anymore, but it was a...mentally strong thing?

JF: Yes, well it was a kind of...brought some closure to the whole thing. I mean, I left under such terrible circumstances, that now when I went back, and we spent a lot of money, we were looked in a different light, but I mean, no one knows, really. Except, I did go into a store across the street.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

JF: I went into that store, and...because I saw the name of the store, where our showroom was. And I said: "You never used to be over there." I did not know what I was talking about, I spoke in English...he could

speaking a little English. And he said: "No, years ago we were only here." And I said: "I know that is when I came in to shop for pots and pans. You sure got big. And you now took over my family's ground floor." He shook his head...what does he know? He is a young man, he does not know what...I mean, 50 years is a very long time, but it is a big business now, there, in our house. In the house, that used to be mine...our family's house. So that I found. Then I found a little bakery there, and a few stores, that were still there.

NW: Except for these relatives, do you still have friends, who stayed there, or who came back there? To Austria?

JF: I heard about one friend who went to school with me, to high school, and who my family took care of because she was very poor, and she would eat in our house once or twice a week...to help out her family. I heard she became very wealthy under the Nazis. She stopped talking to me the day after the Anschluss, and married someone...I do not know who. But I understand she became very well-to-do. And my aunts used to write to me about it, she said...they used to say: "Is it not ironic how things turned around?" I did not answer. So I remember her very well. You cannot forget a childhood friend. Then I told you, this boyfriend of mine, who came here. He had a family, and he came here with his family.

NW: He came to live here...he emigrated?

JF: He was a professor at...Michigan? Maybe it was Chicago...*University of Chicago*. He came on a professorship. They requested him. He stayed here. And I think by now he must...he was older than I. My husband told me, he was in *Who is Who*. "You will be surprised to know that Helmut is in *Who is Who*!" I said: "I am thrilled!" So that was...he came here. And a few other people, not many.

2/00:25:26

NW: But definitely none of them went back to Austria to live there?

JF: No. I frankly do not understand why anyone would want to. But then, that is my own personal feeling. Unless you have more money living there, I would not...it is terribly expensive in Austria. I know when we were there. I do not know, maybe the dollar is different now, depends on the economy. But I found it very high, when we were there.

NW: After the war in the Second Austrian Republic, which started 1945, Austria used to declare itself as being the first victim of Nazi-Germany, and--

JF: --who said that?

NW: The Austrian government.

JF: Well--

NW: --you never heard about this?

JF: Yes, I did hear about this. I used to always think that was really playing the victim. I mean, they were very willing to accept the march into Austria. That I do remember. I remember standing in the street, seeing the troops coming in, and everybody going like this, you know: "Heil Hitler!"

NW: So you have been on the street in this--

JF: --sure, I was there. At that time they did not kill Jews yet, that came later. I did not know what this was all about, but...I guess older people did understand more what was going on.

NW: So it must have made you very angry on Austria, hearing about this--

JF: --oh, terrible! I think that Austria was an awful place, and I think that people in it were totally without...backbone, without any feeling. I am sorry to insult you, but that is the way I feel about it. It is not good, it is not good. And I always embarrass my husband when we meet someone who is German, and is fairly young, and I will say: "Where were your parents in 19...so on and so forth?" Because I want to trace back...of what did they do during that time, and what was their behavior. Because you really could not survive too well, unless you participated, in some form or another.

NW: You said you did not get anything of your belongings, of your personal belongings--

JF: --I did. My uncles, for some insane reason, saved some things of my mother's. We had a factory in Czechoslovakia, and they were able to hide some things of my mother's there. I guess guilt took over, or something. So I did receive my parent's silver, the flatware...not trays and things. I do have my mother's flatware, and I did receive some smaller items, that they were able to, I guess, take. The big items were all taken. The household...we had a very big apartment, but that was all emptied out. But some smaller things they did send to me.

NW: And did you ever try to get things restituted, which were gone by applying to the Austrian state?

JF: I did. And I am getting it.

NW: When did you do this or when did it work?

JF: When I found out that I was able to do it. Maybe in [19]91. I get social security. I think it is called social security, or whatever...from the...at the...something or other it is called in Vienna. I guess, if I would have worked in Vienna, that is what I would have gotten when I turned 65. And so they are paying that to me, they are doing that.

2/00:30:34

NW: And have you heard about the *Nationalfonds* where they try to reach to people, and where one can apply for...I do not know, they have got some money, that is given once--

JF: --yes, in certain age groups, is that the one?

NW: I am not sure if they do it in certain age groups, but they...I think it is 70.000 Schillings they get, one time--

JF: --yes, I got that. I was in that.

NW: And it made you angry, or--

JF: --did not make me angry, but my daughter calls it blood-money. She does not feel that...and I know some people, who would not take it. But I said to myself: "I will take it." Because why not? If they denied me my life there, and my education there, at least I am entitled to...whatever they want to part with now. I mean, it is very little, considering of what I lost. I could have had a good life and good potential there. I was on my way to...I do not know what, but...so the restitution does not amount to much, but I guess it makes them feel better. It is sort of getting the guilt off.

NW: Then maybe a few more questions about your children and grandchildren: does your daughter speak...you said you have got one daughter?

JF: I have a daughter, yes.

NW: Does she speak German?

JF: No.

NW: But she has got...or she had some connection to Austria, because she went back on her honeymoon?

JF: No, she just went back to see. She has no connection. She just wanted to see where...part of her heritage. She wanted to meet some of her relatives there, because I have no relatives here. And so...that is the only reason. She does not speak German, she speaks English.

NW: Has she got some Jewish identity for herself?

JF: She considers herself Jewish. But she has no religion. She has a son, and he is Irish. Her son is half Jewish, and half Irish. So he will tell you: "I am half Christian, and half Jewish." I said: "Okay."

NW: You did talk obviously...quite something about your Austrian background to your child?

JF: I told her, but I did not tell her too much. And she resented that for a long time that I was not forthcoming. But when she was growing up, and going to college, I did not think I needed to bother her, with all the pain that I had gone through. But she thought it was important...she became a psychologist, of course. And then

it became very important to find out about your mother, and your grandmother, and all that. But she is not a...she is not religious at all.

2/00:34:17

NW: As the last question, maybe: After all you went through, is there any message you would have for the young Austrians, or the young Americans in a way?

JF: I mean, it would only sound banal, and stupid, but I hope that nothing like that will ever, ever happen again. I think it was the worst thing that human beings could do to other human beings. It was the lowest form of...I mean, I just cannot imagine. I see the pictures of concentration camps, and what they have done to people. I cannot imagine human beings did that to each other. For no purpose, for no reason. And I am just hoping that humanity...might have learned something from this. I am not sure. Because I think we all go full circle. I do not know what will happen, but it was a very sad time, I think, it really was. And I was lucky. I thought I was very lucky. Because if I did not come out, I would have gone away like everybody else. And I am appalled, when I hear people say they did not think it really happened. Because you hear that, too. I cannot believe it. Or there are some people out there, who say it is all made up. I do not know if you have heard of that, but you have heard of these...of this, I forget his name...who is talking about that this is all made up, and this never happened.

NW: It is John Irving...no...[David] Irving is his name.

JF: I take him seriously. I mean, he might be a madman, but I do think he has an agenda. So I worry about people like that. But you can just do so much, and...I am hoping that people will be kinder to each other. That is my message, but I do not think it will do much good.

NW: Thanks a lot for this interview, and for your participation.

JF: You are welcome!

[Ende des Interviews.]

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