



Interview mit

Mordechai Sella

InterviewerIn: Arije de Haas

Weitere anwesende Personen: Chaya Sella

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Verwendete Kürzel: MS Mordechai Sella
AH Arije de Haas
CS Chaya Sella

Teil 1

AH: Today is the 18th of February, and I am here with Mordechai Sella. And perhaps you could start off with your family history, to give us a picture?

MS: As far as I know, our grand-grand-grandfather served in the Austrian-Hungarian Army, with...I think, I am not sure...it was the army of Prince Esterházy. When he finished...when he was released, he probably got some sum of money, and then, he bought for the family grounds in Burgenland, in various places. And the family's grandfather settled in various places. Our grandfather settled in an estate...on grounds in a small village in East Austria, in Burgenland. It was called Pilgersdorf. Then there were...my grandfather and grandmother bought a house and a shop, so there we had some...a small estate, a house, a shop, a yard, with horses, and so on...and some woods. As far as I found out, it was something around 4,000 acres in all, not more than that. Other families...other members of the family lived nearby, in [Unter]rabnitz, and in a town, and on the other side of the Hungarian border, which was there in 1918 [Anm. d. R.: meint 1921], after the First World War. They lived on the other side of the border in Hungary, like in Szombathely and so on. It was quite a close family. The distances were not far, so they met a lot, and went on holidays to visit each other. In Burgenland, we were the only Jewish family [Anm. d. R.: in Deutsch-Westungarn/Burgenland gab es zehn jüdische Gemeinden], so on holidays, we went to other parts...other members of the family.

I was born in 1933, and in 1936, I had a sister, which was born. And the family name was not Sella, of course, it was Kopfstein – quite a common name. We lived there until after the Anschluss. Immediately after the Anschluss, in April 1938, we had to leave everything and move to Vienna. I did not mention that we had an apartment in Vienna as well. We lived most of the time in Burgenland, but part of the time we spent in Vienna. So, when we came back to Vienna, and wanted to go into our apartment, the neighbors just laughed at us and threw us out. And we had to look around and find another place. Of course, we could not take with us...nearly nothing. We had a small car...what you can take, a few suitcases, a minimum of belongings.

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So, we came to Vienna and started to look for an apartment. We found a small apartment in a very old building, in...*verlängerte* Löwengasse...I cannot remember the number. I remember the street, because our apartment was in the same street as...in Löwengasse 29, where my uncle and my aunt, and their children lived. We could not go into this, and we had to rent another place, in the same...so this went on, and of course, my father tried to find how to live, how to make a living, but could not find any work. He tried to learn something he could do. He took a course with a driver, but he did not get a driver's license. At the time, of course, as I said, that was after the Anschluss, everything was closed for Jews, so--

AH: --so there were no plans of leaving? You were still looking for jobs and the family was not planning to leave Vienna?

MS: Yes. No, not yet. I do not know why. We tried to...I do not know why they did not want to leave, if they did not have the means to leave, or somewhere to go. So, it was not very...at the beginning, it was not very...how to say...the right expression would be...it was not too bad. It was bad, because there were...the Jews already had been persecuted, and teachers were out of school, doctors out of hospitals. This is common knowledge, I do not think I have to repeat it...the situation. Until the Kristallnacht, which was between November 9 and 10, 1938.

After the Kristallnacht, just immediately in the same night, the Gestapo arrested my father, and he was not...we could not find him. We had been looking for him, and we had some relatives in France. Nobody knew, and no one would tell us where and what became of all the Jews that were arrested.

AH: Do you have personal memories of that night?

MS: Yes. Actually, quite before it started...it started immediately after the Anschluss in 1938. Jews were not only forbidden to have jobs in schools and so on, but even on the street, they were persecuted. And on Jewish shops, there was written, "Jude", and sometimes windows were broken, and then everything on the street was very rough, let us say. You could not go around, places were closed for Jews, like theaters and schools, and amusement, cinemas, theaters and so forth. We could not go in there. And there were a lot of marches of the SA, who went on the street and shouted against the Jews, broke windows, and then the parades of the *Hitlerjugend*, with songs and flags of the *Hakenkreuz*. It was quite frightening. And it got worse from day to day...against the Jews.

1/00:10:24

Well, I am mixing a bit with German...but my German is not good, as well. So it got worse from day to day. I do not remember atrocities until the night of the Kristallnacht, which afterwards my father, and other Jews, were arrested and disappeared. In that night, shops were burned, the synagogues were incinerated and burned down, books thrown everywhere, furniture was broken, and there was a lot of chaos. It is a little hard to explain and comprehend all the stories from this period, because you have to take into account that I was only five years old at the time. I did not understand everything. Not everything was explained, we did not talk about it too much. My parents talked between them, and did not want to involve us. So, we were not...I am quite...let us say, these are only headlines. It is not a story I can tell in full, only headlines with various things which are very engraved in my mind.

So, my father was arrested, and we started to look around to find him. We did not have any knowledge what happened to him. After a time...I do not remember how much, but a few months, maybe half a year or so, he was released, and we had to sign that we would leave Austria. On condition that we would leave Austria, he was released. Then we started to find a place where to go and emigrate to. No country would give us a visa. And so we ran around, and it took us more than two years till we found the opportunity...a ship was going out to Palestine, but no visa could be granted. So the intention was to go illegally to Israel.

At the time, we went to look for other opportunities, and we were told somewhere that, if you do not leave in a year or two, the only thing would be to go to Poland to a work camp. That was quite clear, because it was quite a shock for us. Our parents thought that we would emigrate somewhere in the Western world, not to the East. After we had this opportunity, it was matter of going out...the passports to go out. We had...our passports were...

1/00:15:00

At the time, when we came to Vienna, shortly afterwards, they took my parents' passports. And they gave us new identity cards with names extended. The men were all called Israel, and the women Sara. It were German passports with a red "J" printed for the Jews. It was more difficult to get any permit to leave. At last, somehow, I think...I am not sure, but my father paid quite a lot of money to get a stamp to emigrate to Uruguay. It turned out it was forged. So it did not work. But we could not go, with this passport, to Bratislava, or to leave Austria. And we export, which went from Vienna to Bratislava, on the Danube, to the Red Sea...the Black Sea, sorry...where supposedly some ships would wait for us to go further. It took us about ten days. On the way, there came more Jews from Danzig and from Czechoslovakia. And so we went on the Danube, and it took us about ten days to reach Romania and the Black Sea. Three ships waited there for us...boats, ships...it was not actually a ship...old ships, which were actually designed for cargo. They had made planks all the way up, and put us on a ship. It was very crowded, of course. On our ship, there were about 2,500 people – it was only a small cargo ship. And two other ships, that I think had the same number of people...after a time of repair of the ships, we went to...it started to flow in the Black Sea, and we went through the Dardanelles to...into the Mediterranean. Everyone knew that we were trying to go to Israel – Palestine at the time –, and against the permission of the English government, the English mandate, which was here at the time in Israel, named Palestine at the time. The crew of the ship, which was Greek, knew well that the ships would be confiscated. And they tried everything to bring us to our goal, but we paid a lot of money, of course. So they threw the coal into the water, and afterwards we had to pay for new coal. It went around the Greek islands, from island to island, until we came to Cyprus.

1/00:20:04

AH: They were waiting for the right time to--

MS: --no, they were just wasting time, and coal, and energy...our ship, of course. I do not know what happened to other ships at sea. Our ship was called...what was the name...*Atlantic*. It was the *Atlantic*, and there were *Pacific* and *Melk*, the other two ships. When we came to Cyprus, we took on more coal, and at the moment we left Cyprus – on the way to Haifa – came two British brigades and caught us, and took us

to Haifa. So we were very happy, we thought we actually were at the end, we came to Palestine. But the British government decided not to let us in. So they prepared a deportation ship, which waited. The two other ships arrived before us, and all the passengers were moved to the deportation ship. Ours was the last one, and part of our passengers had already been moved to the deportation ship. But here, the people of Israel, which were called the Yishuv, the Jewish settlement here in Palestine, tried to prevent the ship from leaving. So they put a bomb into the ship, a small bomb into the machine of the ship. And when it exploded, it turned out that the deportation ship was so rotten that a whole wall fell out, it fell over and some 220 people drowned at the time. Other people, which were rescued, were put in a camp in Israel, in Atlit. We, the people which stayed on the ship, on the *Atlantic*, have been...brought us down and we were brought to Atlit as well, but in a different part of the British camp.

We stayed there about ten days, and then we were told that they were going to send us away, but not where and when. It was a great panic and cry out. They decided to participate with the British government. They brought their army in and took us, and brought us, after ten days, to Haifa. Two other ships waited there. We were put without...dividing families. Part of the men on one ship, the women on the other ship. There was no selection or trying to put families together. We were put on the ship without knowing where we are going. The ship started to move, and we were not allowed to open windows or to go up on the deck. Only after two days, after we passed the Suez Canal, we could go up and saw nothing. I think, I peeked out at the time we went through the Suez Canal, and I have a small memory of the canal itself. But after a while, we knew we were going southwards. And we arrived at a port, we were told that we arrived at the isle of Mauritius. Nobody of us had ever heard of this island. The men have...they had prepared...the men, women and children were divided. The men were put in an old French prison – a prison as you see in the films: black stone, three stories high, cells on every side, surrounded with a very high stone wall. On the other side of the wall, they had built a camp of wood and aluminum barracks, and there, the women and children were put.

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It took us about two weeks or so, that we did not know where the men are, because we did not see them, we had no explanation and no information at all. After this period, we were told that the men were on the other side of the wall. And women and children in the barracks, were about 25 in each barrack. And there, we stayed. We got a few meals a day, of course, something like rations for British--

AH: --do you know what that place was called?

MS: Yes, it was called...we arrived with the ship at the harbor of Beau Bassin, and the camp was located in...sorry...the port was Port Louis and the camp was at Beau Bassin. After, it took us about some weeks, the women and children can go into the men's camp for two hours a day. There was a small gate between the two camps, and we can visit, but only outside, on open grounds. We could not go into the cells.

AH: And that was only your mother? Or could you also go see your father?

MS: The whole family: my mother, my sister and me. The whole families could go together, of course. It was not much...few children. I think about...we came to Mauritius about 2,500 people. We were about maybe twenty or 25 children. Most people were young and unmarried...most of them unmarried, and only a few families with children. Most of the families were from...the married families with children were from Austria, Burgenland. Other families, they were married, but quite a lot of them were single people.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

Okay, we were speaking about the camp and life in the two camps, women's and men's camp, in Mauritius. I told you that some families, with children, especially from Austria, from Burgenland, demanded to have kosher food. So they opened a small kitchen to cook kosher food. There was no meat, of course, no fresh meat. The only meat we had, from time to time, was when a ship came over from South Africa, and the Jews of South Africa sent us kosher food. You have to remember that the time was between 1940 and 1945, the time of the Second [World] War. Ships could not move in the ocean freely. They would try to sink it, so we were quite isolated. And not only we, the inmates, but also the small...the population...and the government of course.

1/00:30:27

We were there...it was quite fair, you could say. There were no limitations of moving around between the camps. There were limitations the first two or three years, two and a half years, but later on, they opened and we could move freely. We could even move into the cells, but you could not live there. The cell was about one and a half meters long and two and a half meters wide, so the men were separated. There was no family life. Men, women and children have been separated all the time, and actually there was nothing to do. You can imagine people at the age of 30, or around 30 or less...they had no occupation. You did not have to do anything, but you could not...you were in prison anyhow. But in the camp you were free to move. But you had no occupation. Everyone had to occupy himself the best he could.

AH: Was there any information coming in? Did you know what was going on?

MS: We had newspapers. All the news came from the government of the island. There were, of course, some news of how the war went on, where there was occupation, the British and the Americans progressed here, and in the oceans, and there were fights sometimes...nothing of what was going on in Europe came to our knowledge. We had been separated from the world outside, and nothing of what

happened to our families or relations, or the Holocaust, came to our attention. We had no idea at all what was going on, until we came back here.

So we spent about five years there. And after five years, the British...we were told that they are allowing us out and bringing us back to Palestine, where the British mandate was still on. They brought a large ship and we went over to the ship. At the time we were on the way, the Second [World] War ended, even the war with Japan. Japan surrendered. And on the way, a lot of soldiers...we went into the harbor of Mombasa, took on soldiers on the way back to England, then came back to Haifa, they let us down...and we came back to, at the time, Palestine. So that is...those are more or less the headlines of what happened during...from when I was born to 1945. I think it was July or August when we came back. Do you have questions?

1/00:34:45

AH: Yes. Perhaps you can tell me a little about the time before you moved to Vienna? Some of the memories you told me before, if you want to.

MS: Before we came to Vienna? No, I cannot remember...I can remember quite clear our house, and the gardens, and the horses we had, and the wagons, and how the shop looked. I can even remember where the shoe paste was, because I played with it and smeared it all in my face, and then got hit. But from the surroundings...

AH: Do you know if there was contact with...were there social contacts? Did your family have non-Jewish friends?

MS: I do not think they really had friends, but good relations with our neighbors. Yes, I can remember, there was one of our...two of our neighbors from both sides. One of them was quite a rich farmer, which had a big farm and lots of animals. I can remember the yard with the pigs going around, and...all the animals. After we came back in...I think in 1952 or so, my father came back from Israel to see what could be sold. The house was sold already, but the area was occupied by the Russians. And they used the house for a headquarter, so it was quite in ruins, and it was much worse. My father sold what he could. It was a very low price...and the fields, and the woods, and the acres we had, so...and this farmer bought the remaining house. He bought it. I can remember, on the other side, there lived a family. When my sister was born – she was born in the house in Pilgersdorf –, I was sent out to our neighbor. His occupation was to build...how do you say...wells, water wells. And how did he do it? There was long log, wood, of...it was very long for me, I think about five or six meters...it was a big drill. And by hand, he drilled the hole...all through. And to keep me occupied, I was to take the fallout, and put it on the side. And all the time, “You forgot one! You forgot one!” So those pictures were engraved in my mind. I cannot remember much more from Pilgersdorf.

AH: Did your parents perhaps ever tell you, was there an anti-Jewish attitude among the neighbors, among the people coming to the shop, or something like that?

MS: I was told...my father told me that quite a lot of the people were in the Nazi movement from nearly the beginning in Germany. There were quite a lot of them who were in the Nazi...not all of course, but some. I asked him what people, so he told me, there were quite a lot of them, who were very proud of it...a lot of people of Burgenland, because when...after the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria to Germany, it took only a few days, or a week or so, to expel all the Jews. And a month later, after the annexation, a Nazi commander wrote Hitler, "Burgenland is free of Jews" [Anm. d. R.: Anfang November 1938 wurde das Burgenland für „judenrein“ erklärt]. So it was arranged, and they had their lists and everything ready. I do not think I remember much of Pilgersdorf.

1/00:40:53

AH: And the synagogue? Where was it?

MS: The synagogue was in Vienna.

AH: So you went all the way from Pilgersdorf to Vienna for the high holidays?

MS: No, on holidays...sometimes we went for holidays to Vienna to our apartment. When we stayed in Vienna, we went to the main synagogue, but not always. We went to synagogues of the Jewish congregation in Burgenland. I cannot remember...in Mattersburg for example was a Jewish community, and...but most of the time – sometimes – we went to Vienna for a week or so, I cannot remember. Then we went in Vienna to the main house. Other times we went near...on holidays only.

AH: And the apartment in Vienna, do you remember that?

MS: No. I cannot remember. I know that it was opposite from our uncle and aunt. It was on the other side of the hallway. They had an apartment on the first floor, and down on the street, my uncle had a shop. It is still there, but not owned by...for example, my uncle and aunt – the sister of my mother –, who lived in Vienna and had a shop, they had two sons. One of the sons went out...the bigger son, name of Robert Weiss, went out with a...it is called...children [meint: Kindertransport] went to England. A few months later, the younger one...the bigger one was seventeen or eighteen, the younger one was the age of thirteen or fourteen, and he went to Switzerland.

My aunt stayed in Vienna, my uncle managed to go out through Russia, through East Europe, to China, and lived there in Hong Kong...not in Hong Kong, in...some town in China. My aunt died during the wartime in Vienna, my uncle came back after the war to Vienna. But during the time we spent five years in Mauritius, there was no connection, we had no idea what was going on with our family. We had a grandmother in Hungary, so we lost contact. And when we came back, we looked for her, and nobody knew what

happened to our grandmother in Hungary. For the family of Weiss, my uncle and aunt...when we came back, we could not find any traces of the eldest son. The younger son stayed in Switzerland, came back after [19]45 with a youth group to Israel, and intended to join a kibbutz. But he wanted to visit his father, so he volunteered to earn some money to the Palestine police, and served in the police. Until 1948, after the breakout of the Independence War, he went...on the way to Haifa, he was killed, near the town of Tira. What happened to the elder brother...he disappeared and we have no trace of him. When we visited Vienna once, we found the grave of my aunt. The gravestone was not there anymore, because it was ruined by the bombing of the Americans. And we put another stone in the place, but we knew exactly where she was buried.

1/00:46:30

AH: When was the first time that you went back to Vienna, or also your childhood home?

MS: The first time we went back to Vienna was...well, okay...in the beginning, I did not want to go to Austria, to Germany, at all. But a few years later, in 1982 I think...or later...I had to go to Germany to present a research report, which we had with the University of Göttingen...no...it was Germany...it was Hannover. So I went there to Hannover, and took Chaya with me. And then, we told ourselves, "Okay, we had to be here, because of our research." It was in the contract, one year people from the University of Hannover came over, and one year later, to submit the report, I went there. I took Chaya with me. Then we decided, okay, since we are already here, we drive down to Bodensee, and then Austria, to Vienna, and visit Pilgersdorf. That was the first time we visited. This was around 1982 or [19]85, I think. And then we came back, I told you, a year or something ago. We were invited by the government of Austria, to the meeting there, and we participated.

AH: How was the first visit? Were you allowed to go into the house? Was the house still there?

MS: No, the house was sold and torn down, and a new house was built. The house was not there, in Pilgersdorf. It was not there.

AH: After you came to Palestine, how was the first period, the first year?

MS: On arrival, we were given a small apartment by the *Sochnut*, the *Jewish Agency* [for Israel]. It was a building, a house, of four apartments, each with one room, and a small kitchen inside. Toilets and the washroom were outside. We got a small sum of money, a few beds and mattresses, and...there was not much room, it was a small room. There we lived for some years. I started school. I did not know anything in Hebrew. I could not understand what was going on. It took quite a few months, but still I started...I was at the age of twelve when we came back, and I was put into, I think, third or fourth grade, because I did not understand it.

1/00:51:05

We had no regular schools in Mauritius, so people from the camp tried to educate us. Someone who was not a professional teacher tried to teach us a little bit of mathematics, another literature, but no proper, regular education. So we lost quite a...five years of the crucial age of learning. So afterwards, after a few months, we could not stay all the time. There was no work. My parents could not find any work, because it was very...the economy was led by the British. They were not interested to develop the economy, so it was quite low. And my parents had no money, because everything was lost. They had to leave Austria with two suitcases, and came back with less. So they put me into a...how do you say...an institute where other Holocaust children, which started to arrive from Europa, were put. There we stayed, and there we started learning...until 1948.

In 1948, I came...after the Independence War, I came back home and started to work, to help the family...to help out the family. I started to work as an apprentice in a metal shop. Sometime later, I started to study in the evenings. I went to work from seven to four o'clock, came back, washed myself fast, went to Haifa to study. I studied until I went to the army.

AH: Which year did you go to the army?

MS: 1951. After I finished the army, I stayed in a kibbutz, and before we stayed in a place...when we came back and had the small apartment in a place called Kiryat Shmuel, near Haifa. So there we went later with Chaya, after I went to the army. After the army, we came to a kibbutz. Chaya was in the army. When she finished the army, she came to join me, we got married and stayed a few more years in the kibbutz. And afterwards we left the kibbutz and started working.

AH: How many years did you stay in the kibbutz?

MS: Five years, and there our eldest daughter was born.

1/00:55:19

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

After the pogrom of the Kristallnacht, at the age of five, my father took me to the synagogue in Vienna to look and see what was done and what could be rescued. When we came to the synagogue, everything was ruined...all the books on the floor, some of them burned, all the Torah scrolls, they were on the floor, torn and dirty. All was in ruins, and...I could not even tell. The only thing, the reason why this synagogue, in contrast to all other synagogues, Jewish synagogues, which were burned – torched and burned –, is that

this synagogue, the main synagogue, was saved...it was not burned down, because on the other side of the synagogue is a church. The other reason might be that the Jewish community and the Jewish books of the Jewish population had been concentrated there. And the Nazis wanted to put their hands on the list of all the Jews and all the papers. For both reasons, mainly for the church, which was on the other side, the synagogue was not burned. But everything inside was torn up, ruined, dirty...the only thing we could find, when we heard that a horde of SA and *Hitlerjugend* came to the synagogue again, we had to flee. And the only thing we could take with us...there are two handles of two different Torah scrolls, which we took with us as a memory of what happened. [Zeigt die beiden Stäbe, auch Ez Hachajim (dt. Baum des Lebens) genannt.] Those were held by my father during the whole voyage from Vienna to Palestine, from Palestine to Mauritius, and back here...a journey which took us five years and some 1,700 kilometers. And we still keep them, as a memory, which will even be known to our children and grandchildren. It is a very...you can feel through these two handles what happened during the Holocaust.

AH: So you escaped the synagogue in some way, and then it took quite a while until you left. Which year did you leave?

MS: Yes, two years. Two years passed, because right afterwards, the same night, my father was arrested and sent to Dachau. We later found out, when he came back, that it was Dachau where he spent some months, until he was released, as I told you before, on condition that we leave Austria. At the time, from 1938 to 1940, before the...even after the breakout of the Second [World] War, we stayed in Vienna until November, 1940. But we looked all the time...we had to leave Austria. And all the time, we were searching for a way to get out. But no one wanted to take us in. So the two years were spent running around and looking for opportunities to leave. Otherwise, we would have been sent to Poland to working camps...“working camps”. [Deutet Anführungszeichen an.]

1/01:00:25

AH: If I remember correctly, the people who were sent to Dachau and then released again, had a time limit...they said for example, you have two weeks--

MS: --two years.

AH: It was two years?

MS: I do not think it was weeks...I am not sure how that time was limited, however, it had to be before the breakout of the Second [World] War [Anm. d. R.: der Zweite Weltkrieg begann am 1. September 1939], and as soon as possible. And there were no possibilities.

AH: And that is also the time that you went to school in Vienna?

MS: Yes.

AH: Do you have memories of the school you went to?

MS: Yes, I wanted to go to a school where we lived, in the 3rd district. Our apartment was not in the Jewish 2nd district, but in the 3rd district. A little bit away there was a school, but they did not accept me. So I had to go to a Jewish school, which was in the 2nd district, and I had to go by tram...to school and back, for quite a while.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

AH: How did you experience your visit [to Austria], and the talk you gave?

MS: Well, it was quite...I was surprised that I should talk. They told me, "Okay, we want you to talk for a few minutes." It was quite a surprise, I did not prepare anything, so it was spontaneous.

AH: You happened to have--

MS: --yes, I took [the handles] with me.

AH: But that was not on purpose? That was not for the talk itself?

MS: No, I wanted to show them to other people, and...I took them with me. Sometimes, when someone wants to speak with me, Jewish people, the rabbi...we met the chief rabbi, of course...to show the people. We had a memorial, the day before, in the synagogue itself, which was restored. We were invited to a festive evening, and a memorial...and some welcome--

CS: היינו גם באופרה, הזמינו אותנו, כן, עשו לנו שבוע משהו [hebräisch: We also went to the opera, they invited us, they made up a special week for us.]

AH: היה שבוע מרשים? [hebräisch: Was it an impressive week?]

CS: [hebräisch: Yes, yes, yes, we were received very nicely.]

AH: So they...how would you say that in English...they took care of the two of you...in a nice way.

MS: It was more than taking care. It was organized--

CS: הינה זה עם הKanzlern שאתה מדבר אותו [hebräisch: Here is this one with the chancellor, as you are talking with him.]

MS: [Zeigt etwas auf dem Handy.] It was a week...they put a lot of money and effort...it was marvelous, it was...you cannot...they put – I think – a lot of money into it. It was organized tip-top, in a way...they put us into one of the best hotels, there were three...we could take children or family with us, but the families had to pay for the flight, and the hotel. And everything, the food, and everything was prepared, so they could participate. They arranged three busses and took us around the town, from place to place. Everything was

so perfectly planned. We went to the...there was one...we had been invited to parliament. And then there was another memorial in the opera in Vienna, which was open not only to us, but to the whole public. And they took us around, and people who had families in cemeteries, they asked to visit, and they took us to cemeteries.

1/01:06:13

And there were of course people...who were older, like us, and older, and they were taken care of...sort of everything, even...how do you say...people who cannot walk...chairs, and everything was prepared. And when we went with the staff looking after us...they stayed the whole night outside the hotel. The food was brought in, the best food...of course kosher food. But people who did not want to eat the food of the hotel, it was no problem. It was marvelous, really. It has to be said.

AH: So it was a whole group of people?

MS: Yes, people who were born in Vienna. It started actually a few years ago, when Mr. [Sebastian] Kurz was...

CS: Kanzler.

MS: [Hustet.] איך אומרים שר החוץ? [hebräisch: How do you say Minister of Foreign Affairs?]

CS: שר החוץ? [hebräisch: Minister of Foreign Affairs?]

MS: Minister of Foreign Affairs. He came to visit Israel, and he a small... מועדון [hebräisch: club]...we have a small place here in Jerusalem, where people from Vienna are coming together from time to time. And he came to visit here, and spoke with the people. He was very kind, and two years later, he was Prime Minister. He came back here, we met again, and then he invited us, the people who were born in...the Holocaust survivors, he invited us to visit. It took about half a year to organize everything. Then we were invited to Vienna. As I said, we could take family with us, but the flight and hotel had to be paid by themselves, and everything else, for us, was free, and first grade everything. Tours, museums, the Jewish Museum...we went to visit...and close to Vienna to various places, cemeteries we wanted to go to, and...it was organized tip-top...first class.

AH: Did you get any reactions from the people that you talked to?

MS: People? Everyone was delighted and marveled how everything went good.

1/01:10:18

AH: And the people that you spoke to?

MS: Yes, we did not have much time to mingle with ordinary people. But there were some reactions...very polite, of course. Everyone was polite when you spoke to them. On one occasion, we came out of a restaurant and stood outside to wait for the busses. So one man on the street came to Chaya, and asked, "Are you from the Israeli group who was invited?" She said, "Yes", gave out her hand and, "Thank you for coming", because it was all over the media, television, and newspapers. I think, all of Vienna, nearly all of Austria knew about it. They made it very, very...

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

AH: So there were a lot of newspaper people, and a lot of people taking photos?

MS: Yes...and TV people, and the office of education filmed and interviewed me about an hour or so.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

AH: Another question that I have: When your father went back in...[19]52 you said?

MS: Yes, 1952 or [19]53.

AH: Did he tell you about that, when he went back, and how that went?

MS: Yes, at that time, I was in the army, so I...he told me that he met people that he knew. Not much fuss was made about it. They were quite neutral. I do not think that they were delighted or crude.

AH: And he had papers still with him, that it was his property?

MS: Yes. Well, it was still in the books of the village...everything...and the people who still lived there knew it as a fact. And he had the papers, of course.

AH: But he probably got way less money for it than it was worth?

MS: Of course. The house was a ruin. It was not much property, because we left everything...the shop, furniture, clothing...and everything was left behind, and what happened to it...nobody knew at the time. Everything was looted. I do not think people were happy to see him again.

AH: Did your family get any other kind of money, perhaps, from the German State or from Austria? Any compensation?

MS: Yes, I think we got...we put in a claim, my sister and us, for all the property, and we got a few thousand shekel for...that is all.

1/01:15:00

The claim...there was an agency for claims for restitution. And I was told that it is a payment for the time being, because not all the money could be collected, and so it was only a small sum for everyone...which was not anything.

AH: And after you and your parents came to Palestine, how was life for your parents?

MS: After we came back from Mauritius?

AH: Yes.

MS: There was not much work. It was quite a small economy, and there was...my mother found work first, in a factory that made dresses. My father could not find any work, so he went out working as...who build houses. It was very hard. In 1948, my mother was killed in a car accident. I was away from home, so we had not much of a family life...a real home and family life since 1938...we did not have it. First in Vienna, in Dachau, in the small apartment, afterwards on the way, afterwards in Mauritius where we were divided. And when we came back, a few years later...two years later, my mother was killed and I was away in school, outside in...and after, I went to the army, and I never came back.

AH: That school, was that a--

MS: --an institute.

AH: You slept there also?

MS: Yes. Boarding school.

AH: Was it religious?

MS: Yes. I stayed from 1945 to 1948, and then I came back to start work, to help out the family. A few months later, my mother was killed, and two years later, I was...two and a half years later, I went to the army, and then to the kibbutz, and so on...married and never came back. So, I really cannot remember a normal family life, as we know today, it should have been.

AH: That makes sense. And you said all the other children in that school were also from Holocaust survivors?

MS: Yes.

AH: How was that? It seems to me like all of you were kind of separated from all the others. How was that feeling?

MS: What do you mean by separated from others? Most of the children, who came afterwards, who came here, were orphans, rescued from camps and from various places and so forth.

1/01:19:40

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

A camp in Romania, where they suffered...some from Poland, who came. You saw children with...one leg from...a group of people who were shot by the Germans...they covered each other, he was covered and got a bullet in the back and he fell into the *Grube*. But he crawled out later and was found by the army, the Americans or someone, got to a hospital, and afterwards came here. And we still saw the wounds of people. Most of the people in boarding schools were rescued after the war. [Kinder lärmen im Hintergrund.]

AH: For your father, it was not an option to not have you not in a boarding school but in a regular school?

MS: No, there was not any option to stay at home and to go to a regular school, because we had no money. Even so, I did not fit into a class of the same age, because I did not know the language and I lost regular school...in the five years. We had some learning, mathematics and...but not in a regular way, so we lost quite some time. Then I came back home and started to work in a workshop, and studied in the evening. I came back at four o'clock, cleaned myself, and from five to eight, we studied in the school.

AH: Are there any other memories from [19]48, or after, the Six-Day War, Yom Kippur? Are there some memories from this time? Where were you at that time, [19]48?

MS: From [19]48? From [19]46 to [19]48, I was in the boarding school. I remember, of course, the Independence War. I went two years to one boarding school...not a boarding school...it is actually something else, which I cannot explain. It is an institute, which was...built to accept children remaining...orphans and children who remained after the Holocaust. It was not a real boarding school. There were only children who came after the Holocaust...from the remains of the Holocaust. So it was not a regular boarding school.

AH: So most of the children did not have parents anymore?

MS: Most of them.

AH: That would be an orphanage then?

MS: Yes...at the same time.

AH: Let us see. One story that you told before, was about when you went down the Danube, and then on the next ship, on the way to Palestine...you had a story, right before you reached Palestine, where the captain, who was leading the ship...could you tell it?

MS: Well, you have to keep in mind, I was still a child. I was seven years old, so I was not very involved with what was going on. But what we heard...with people speaking between themselves and communicating...not all the time. And the Greek owner and the staff of the ship, the sailors, did not actually come to Palestine, because they knew well, that they will be arrested and the ship will be taken away.

1/01:25:40

But they had been paid, quite a lot of money. So, when we came into the Mediterranean, all went well, and the ship first...before it sailed ahead, we prepared or maintained it. Afterwards, we stood in the harbor of Constanța for about three or four days to organize everything. When the ship was ready and prepared, we started to move, and went on, and were stuck again, had to pull out and were delayed for a few days. And after we had started to go right on, and the first stop was at Constantinople, Istanbul, where we took on food and coal. From there, we went to the Mediterranean. And there, at the time, the war was on, because it started earlier, and he was afraid of the English navy. So he did everything that was possible to evade and not come into contact. So he went around the Greek islands, and in order to make more stops, he sometimes threw the coal into the water, and told us, "We have to stay here", or to float on the waves, until we have some new coal.

Then we came to an island, started again a few times, until it was found that they threw the coal into the water at night. So then we came...something between Crete and Cyprus, the crew and the captain wanted to leave the ship, and let it float where it should. But they were caught, put under arrest, and...so without coal, they tore down all the wood, and burned the wood, and tried to manage...maybe one or two of the crew members were still there and forced to do it or wanted to do it. Maybe...I do not know exactly. But definitively, most of the crew and the captain had been arrested, and were in cells under arrest. They used younger people, who were able to work, in the steam room, the navigation room, and so on. And there were young, who volunteered to keep order. You have to keep order for 2,500 people. There were some...not everyone was pleased with everyone. The food was...the bread was...how do you say...*geschimmelt*?

AH: Yes, it was rotten.

MS: Yes, and then the people suffered from dysentery. And the toilets were stuck, so they had to...the toilets on deck overboard, and everything...to wait hours sometimes before...it was terrible. People were sick, some had cholera, some people died and had to be buried at sea.

1/01:30:14

It was very crowded. [Sirene im Hintergrund.] And every time we saw an island...so the people went over to see, and when it was over, all the people would go back to the other side, on the left side. And then on the right side, because the ship was tilting. It was a very old ship. On the engine was a sign, it was built in 1867 or something...about nearly a hundred years...no...it was a very, very old ship and in very bad condition.

AH: And then you arrived in Atlit. How long were you there?

MS: Ten days.

AH: How were the conditions?

MS: Well...the men and women were in different camps. They could not meet. We were in barracks, like the British army barracks, 35 beds in one barrack. The food was the same as the British army, or something similar or less. It was food.

AH: And then it was panic, when everybody heard that--

MS: --yes, I do not think I could say panic, but we were intimidated...very...

AH: Worried?

MS: Worried, of course, because nobody knew what the future would be, but irritated and angry, and...so the people decided to demonstrate, and we were told that, on that day, do not clothe, stay naked. Everyone was naked, and the British soldiers came, put blankets on the men, put some blankets around women and children, and put them on trucks, and to the new ships.

AH: The material will also be used for students. Is there something specific that you would like to tell them? Especially perhaps to younger Austrian or German people?

MS: Well...I do not think that...a personal message...how to say? Well, they should do everything to prevent what happened, but not only what happened against the Jews, but they should be aware of other people. But such a thing should never happen again, not only in their country, but everybody around the world should learn that lesson. But I do not think that it was engraved in their minds, because you see what is going around in Syria, and Africa...and nobody moves a finger.

1/01:35:14

AH: Yes...difficult. Is there anything that you would like to add?

MS: No, I think--

AH: --of course, we still missed a lot, but at the same time--

MS: --yes, but as I told you, even when they recorded me for *Yad Vashem*, for four hours, I missed a lot, because you do not remember everything at the same time. And it is not written down like a text or lines...recording me. It is from memory and from images you can remember. Sometimes you remember this, sometimes something else comes up more clearly. Most of the time you forget things. I am sure I have forgotten a lot of things that I do not remember at all.

AH: I hope that we can make a more complete picture, if we now add *Yad Vashem* in our interview--

MS: --yes, I think it was more detailed, and not everything was included, even in the four hours...but much more details. It was not taken in one time, because it was a few times that they came. So I had time to think it over and see what I told last time, what I missed. So I sometimes went backwards and forwards. You cannot do it in one time.

AH: Well, thank you!

[Ende des Interviews.]

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