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Childhood in the Shadow of the Holocaust

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1 hour, 5 minutes, 8 seconds

Interviewee: Trudie Richman-Wilder

Interviewer: Margrit Frölich

Transcribed by: Stephanie Duncan

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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[Childhood in the Shadow of the Holocaust](#)

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Time	Transcription
00:00:01	[The Library UC San Diego]
00:00:04	[A Childhood in the Shadow of the Holocaust]
00:00:05	Margrit Frölich: All right, we are ready to start. Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to this event tonight in the series of the Holocaust Living History Workshop. And I would like to welcome everyone here tonight, on behalf of the organizers of this series, on behalf of Dr. Susanne Hillman, who was just here a minute before. And maybe you'd also like to say a few words? Ok? Sorry!
00:00:43	Susanne Hillman: Sure, yes. I didn't want to interrupt - that's ok, no problem. I would also like to welcome everybody to this very special event. We have never had the pleasure of welcoming Mrs. Trudie Richman, from Vienna originally. So, I can see quite a crowd. I'm very pleased. I would just like to draw attention to what you see behind you. Some of you know, of course, that this program was started to advertise - or to draw more attention I should say - to the Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation. And recently I found out that Mrs. Richman also gave her testimony. So those of you - I have a loud voice - those of you who like to know more about, not only the experience of Mrs. Richman, but 50, almost 52,000 other interviews, you are most welcome to contact me, and I can help you use this wonderful database, this really great treasure trove of historical knowledge and - You can come to campus, we can meet. But now I think I don't want to take any more time, and I pass the microphone to Professor Margrit Frölich.
00:01:54	Margrit Frölich: All right. Thank you. I also want to welcome you in - on behalf of the other organizer of this series of Professor Deborah Hertz, who cannot be here tonight because she is on sabbatical this term and is far away on the East Coast. Thank you, Dr. Hillman. She already introduced me, my name is Margrit Frölich, and I'm a new visiting professor in the History and Literature departments here at UCSD - sent through the German academic exchange service. And so it's my pleasure tonight to welcome Ms. Trudie Richman-Wilder from - originally from Vienna - and a San Diego resident for this very special evening tonight. And also, let me take the opportunity to welcome all the students from my course who are here tonight, and there's quite a few from the Holocaust as Public History. And they're all working on research papers using the Visual History Archive that Dr. Hillman just pointed out. And I understand, that's what Dr. Hillman told me, that there is also a testimonial there in the Visual History Archive by you, right?
00:03:20	Trudie Richman-Wilder: I don't know, I'm not aware.
00:03:22	Margrit Frölich: Okay. All right, and the reason we're making this effort here with the technology and speaking into the microphones is because that the session here tonight is being recorded. So, just to let you know. And yeah, it's going to be pretty much an informal conversation. So the way we thought about it is that we're going to have a discussion, and then soon, you can jump in and ask all the questions you'd like to ask. I also want to point out to you that Trudie Richman-Wilder is the author of this book in which she also wrote down her life experience, and if you get interested, understand that we do have a few copies here tonight that you could purchase and probably also get signed afterwards.

- 00:04:21 Margrit Frölich: But now, let's begin. As Dr. Hillman just already said, you were born in Vienna, and you were a very young girl when Hitler took over and Austria became annexed by Nazi Germany. You were very young, but you were old enough to have memories already of what Austria was before, and how drastically it changed. Maybe let's begin with this, like your childhood experiences in Vienna before and then after Nazi rule.
- 00:05:09 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, life was just ordinary life as it is in Europe. Vienna is a very beautiful city, and I come from a lower, I'd say lower-middle-class family, economically, and my father was an immigrant from Poland. And he never had the opportunity to really get any formal studies, though he was very intelligent and he wanted to become a lawyer, but Jewish people had very little entrance to higher education - except people like Freud and other luminaries from Vienna. But the Jewish people of a lower-middle-class - I mean, people who came with wealth found a way to get educated. Can you hear me?
- 00:06:04 Margrit Frölich: Yeah, is this loud enough?
- 00:06:05 Audience: No.
- 00:06:14 Margrit Frölich: So, and you were in the middle of school, in the middle of attending public school?
- 00:06:19 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Right. Seventh, eighth grade. And when Hitler marched in, that very day, I was no longer allowed to go to school. And it was very painful because I didn't know why. You know, I was an ordinary child. I wasn't exceptional, on the other hand, I wasn't deficient either in my studies. I went along well, and then all of a sudden the school was closed to me. And I remember very clearly running home, crying, and saying to my mother, why, why? And she says, that's a very good question. I cannot answer this question. I don't know why.
- 00:07:00 Margrit Frölich: So what did you do then?
- 00:07:03 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Nothing. We couldn't go to school. Jewish children were not allowed to go to school. I, my school was a girls and boys separated. I don't know about the boys, but I think it was the same. And all of a sudden, my life was changed like day and night. We couldn't have electric lights in the evening. I couldn't play the piano. I always liked the piano, and that was forbidden. So as you know, I don't need to elaborate. It was just a complete change.
- 00:07:43 Margrit Frölich: Very painful.
- 00:07:44 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Very, very painful, and an adult at least knows the history of oppression, but a child, they can't. It can't penetrate their understanding.
- 00:07:57 Margrit Frölich: So do you remember how you tried to make sense of it all?
- 00:08:02 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yeah, I remember very well that it's just one of those things that your parent tells you they can't help you, and you just take it in. I think children have a way of accepting difficult situations more even than adults. But it leaves a scar.

- 00:08:29 Margrit Frölich: Yeah, I'm not sure if I'm going too fast now. Please stop me if there are some more things that you would like to add, but you told me that you left Vienna. You were lucky that you were able to leave, but you left on a very traumatic, and scary, and also risky circumstances. When was that?
- 00:08:54 Trudie Richman-Wilder: When was this? As soon as I got a visa. That was very difficult to get a visa. We had to spend several nights in line to get to the people who issued the visas.
- 00:09:08 Margrit Frölich: To the United States?
- 00:09:09 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yes, to the, yeah, I had a, I had an uncle. He's no longer alive, and he - I had never met him in my life, so I didn't know him. He was a stranger. And he made an affidavit for me, but to obtain the affidavit was not easy. As I said, as I mentioned before, we had to stay in, stand in line, and uh, several nights to get the visa. I don't know if that answers your question.
- 00:09:35 Margrit Frölich: And you - yeah, yeah, yeah. So you finally have the visa in your pockets, and you were able to leave. When was this exactly?
- 00:09:44 Trudie Richman-Wilder: 1938. October. October 6th, that is.
- 00:09:48 Margrit Frölich: On like October. October 1938. And so, how exactly did you leave? Where did you go?
- 00:09:59 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, it just so happens that the day that I left fell two, three days before a Jewish holiday. And my father being observant - not extreme, but observant - didn't want me to travel on Rosh Hashanah, which is the beginning of the year, the Jewish New Year. So he said, well you'll just have to wait. I was supposed to go on a boat in Bremen [unclear].
- 00:10:36 Margrit Frölich: No, no, no. But that's really far away from Vienna. I don't know off the top of my head like how many miles away it is, but maybe like as far as from San Diego to Seattle, or something like this. And you went there all by yourself?
- 00:10:52 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Correct. Oh yes. I had previously gone to Romania where I had grandparents, and so I had been on a train by myself when I was a little younger. And so the only thing was, it was very, very scary to know that I may never see my parents again. I have seen them again, but I did not know that. And that was incredible. And it's funny because at that age, and on the one hand I said to myself, wow I have a new life. I'll discover a new country, a new continent. On the other hand, there was this sorrow, to know that I may never see my parents again. So I was battling between these two extremes.
- 00:11:42 Margrit Frölich: Yeah, yeah. And you also had a number of siblings, right?
- 00:11:46 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I had a number of siblings, but they had left. They had left their home. Most, most all of them were in Israel. This was before Israel was a state. And yeah, you see my mother died when I was two and a half years old, and my father remarried fairly soon. But my siblings - I was the youngest. I was two and a half. And I immediately fell in love with my stepmother. She was a lady from Russia. Loved music and she was a very warm person, but my older siblings

couldn't relate to her, so it was a difficult time in our household. And, so finally they decided to go, to immigrate. Little by little - not all of them - but they were [unclear] and so I hadn't suggested [unclear].

00:12:49 Margrit Frölich: So, were your parents - your father and your stepmother - were they at this point hoping that they would be able to join you, to follow you at a later point? Or was it clear that they couldn't?

00:13:02 Trudie Richman-Wilder: No, that, that seemed impossible. They couldn't expect my uncle to help them. And he helped me, rescued me, really. No, that didn't come into question. So they tried various avenues, Brazil, different countries to go to. But finally, they did make it to Israel. Eventually.

00:13:34 Margrit Frölich: So, let's go back to your trip when you left Vienna. So you must have been perhaps more sad than scared going on this train trip and the, what was it like? I can't really imagine - was, for instance, border patrol between Austria and Germany on the train, or was it not the case at this point?

00:14:02 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, naturally this was so painful that, that it's very vividly etched in my mind - saying goodbye. And there were soldiers on the train, marching back and forth. Doors slamming, you know how the train doors, the noise they make. And my father was too ill to see me off, but my mother did, my stepmother. And that was a very hard day in my life. Maybe the hardest. Because as I left, my father collapsed. And then my mother, when I waved to her goodbye, I saw her collapse. So I know it was very hard for all of us. But at the same time that it was hard. I was looking forward to my new life. And there was a feeling, a duality of feelings.

00:15:02 Margrit Frölich: And then you finally made this - on this boat that was leaving from Bremerhaven and yeah. How long was this trip then?

00:15:14 Trudie Richman-Wilder: It was 12 days.

00:15:17 Margrit Frölich: Twelve days from Bremerhaven to New York? Yeah. What was it like on this boat? Who else was on this boat? And what went on there?

00:15:28 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I slept in steerage and I mean it was okay. There was actually one family whose child had gone to school with me, but she stayed with her family and did not contact me. But, the boat was ok. I remember one German waiter being very nice to me. You know, he saw a child alone. I must say my father imprinted on me, he said that maybe a hundred times, don't talk to strangers, especially not men. He says, always annex yourself to a family. But that's not so easy if you don't know any. You don't know people. You don't, at that age I wasn't that poised to go and say, I'm Trudie and this and that. So I wasn't, naturally, it was difficult. But that waiter who was pleasant to me, a little bit nicer, he turned up later as you will see. He helped me later on. It was a very, very precarious situation.

00:16:41 Margrit Frölich: Yeah, so twelve days on a boat. You had a place to sleep, although it wasn't very comfortable, I imagine. You had [food] to eat. There was the waiter who was friendly to you. And then you got to New York. What was your impression when you arrived there?

- 00:17:04 Trudie Richman-Wilder: If I had known what it was like to land in New York, I think I might have stayed in Vienna. It was hectic, to say the least. Lots of people getting there, lots of people are nervous, having their luggage, bumping into each other, and the immensity of the crowd. I was just overwhelmed. So many people.
- 00:17:27 Margrit Frölich: You must've been nervous too!
- 00:17:29 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I was nervous. I was scared. And I had pictures, I had pictures in my mind. I would get through New York, and I'd get out, and somewhere near me would be my uncle. But that was not the case. There were just hoards of people, crowds, noise, tumult, confusion. And I said to myself, how am I going to find my uncle?
- 00:17:58 Margrit Frölich: The uncle that you've never seen.
- 00:18:00 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Never seen before.
- 00:18:01 Margrit Frölich: Maybe you had a photo of him, at best?
- 00:18:03 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yeah, I did have one.
- 00:18:05 Margrit Frölich: So, and then, of course, you were really frightened and nervous when you didn't meet the one person that was your contact here in this new country.
- 00:18:16 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Exactly.
- 00:18:18 Margrit Frölich: And then what happened?
- 00:18:19 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, I started looking around, and in the back of my mind I knew that I knew right away, that this is going to be trouble. Because thousands of people, how am I going to find my uncle whom I've never seen? Who's never seen me. He was looking for somebody, a teenager. But anyway, so after a while, I got really scared and very weary. Can you hear me?
- 00:18:49 [Audience replies.]
- 00:18:51 Margrit Frölich: Better now?
- 00:18:52 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Oh, thank you, thank you. So I just said to myself, well what are my options? If I can't find my uncle - and I didn't have much money, very little, just a little change. So I probably thought, I'll have to go back on the boat and go back home. Or go to Frankfurt and try to contact my family. So I was trying to think of different ideas. Well, what are my options? I can't just walk out in New York, that big city, without any money, without a language skill. So I started to get very heavy feeling in my heart. And after a while, I got very tired. I was also very hungry. Anyway, I sat down on my valise, and after a little while, to my great fortune, the German waiter, the waiter who waited on me on the boat, said oh, this is Trudie, right? And I said yes. And he says, why are you so downhearted looking? And I said, well I have good reason because I'm stranded. I don't know what to do. We spoke in German, of course. So he said, look at me. He says, your troubles are over. I said, what do you mean? He says I have an idea. I'm going to take a cardboard. I'm going to say Trudie Wilder is looking for Bernard Miller. You

can imagine how relieved I was. And he did that. And he went with the cardboard - whatever you call it - plaque. And sure enough, after an hour - an hour, the longest hour that I ever lived- he comes back and says, guess what? I found him.

- 00:20:51 Margrit Frölich: So he found him for you. Wow. And then you still had to go through immigration, the whole administrative procedure everything was okay?
- 00:21:02 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yeah, but everything, everything was - I felt I wasn't really stranded anymore.
- 00:21:10 Margrit Frölich: And, yeah, let me ask you one more thing. So was your uncle, was he living in New York, or did he take -
- 00:21:20 Trudie Richman-Wilder: He was in Albany, New York, so about a three-hour drive.
- 00:21:21 Margrit Frölich: So upstate New York, yeah. And, yeah, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the kind of culture that you ended up in here, in the United States. Was, were you part of a Jewish immigrant culture, or not so much?
- 00:21:42 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well I don't really know what immigrant culture means cause there's so many cultural levels. My uncle was a cantor in temple. He had been an immigrant himself from Romania, and he is [unclear]. And he had two children: a boy, twelve, and a girl, five. My uncle is no longer alive, and the boy is no longer alive either. But my cousin, Miriam - Mimi we called her - she lives in New Jersey and remains in close contact. So what happened was the first night, I slept with a, slept - stayed at a cousin's house, and I remember I was so amazed when I went to the bathroom, that the toilet was in the bathroom. Because know in Europe, it's separate. And to me, that seemed so primitive. I couldn't believe it. I said, is it all right for me to use the toilet?
- 00:22:50 Margrit Frölich: So it was much more modern here?
- 00:22:53 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well I wouldn't say - different, different.
- 00:22:56 [Audience laughs]
- 00:23:00 Margrit Frölich: All right, yeah. Maybe so far. Now I would like to invite you to join in and ask questions or comments.
- 00:23:09 Speaker 1: I already have several if you don't mind. How cohesive was the Viennese-Jewish group at that time? Did they all recognize that the children better get out or all of them should get out? It sounds as if your parents wanted you out, but they were - they were desperately seeking exits at that point. And part two, I have friends who got out on the Kinder train. I don't know what year it was, but was that before or after you left?
- 00:23:40 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I don't know. I think -
- 00:23:42 Margrit Frölich: Did everyone hear the question?
- 00:23:44 Speaker 2: No, can you repeat or paraphrase the question? Can you repeat the question?

- 00:23:49 Margrit Frölich: All right, ok. So I'll try to. The first part related to the environment in Vienna, and the lady was surprised that there wasn't more concern and fear within the community in which Trudie Richman grew up - that the parents let her go, but didn't feel so much for themselves the threat and the necessity to go. That was part number one. And now part two.
- 00:24:20 Speaker 1: The Kinder train.
- 00:24:21 Margrit Frölich: Oh yeah. Ok, so the train with the children, rescuing the children from Vienna to - to where?
- 00:24:28 Speaker 1: To England.
- 00:24:29 Margrit Frölich: London. England. Was that - whether that was before or after Ms. Richman's departure.
- 00:24:37 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, I don't know the exact dates, because I was so concerned about my own way to escape. But I can say this, at the time, when Hitler marched into Austria, into Austria they - every Jewish family was trying desperately to find a way out. And whatever they could find, they went. They didn't compare is this better or is that better, you know? I think because it was an emergency situation. We all feared for our life. I remember a cousin of mine tried to teach me English, and I had to walk several blocks, and my parents were petrified for me to walk because girls were raped right and left. So it was very dangerous to live. But you know when you're young, you don't realize the danger so much. Even though you know it's there, you still, I think it's the force of life that moves you to go, and do, and not just stay home.
- 00:24:44 Susanne Hillman: Mrs. Richman, you've surely seen the pictures of Jews having to scrub the pavement in Austria, in Vienna actually, after the Nazis moved in. Did you see that personally, scenes like that?
- 00:25:58 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yes, I did. I never did have to do it myself. Yes, I think one of the worst things about this whole experience was the fear. You know, I think we all have lots of fears when we grow up, but all of a sudden this force of fear entered our lives. Every step you went, you didn't know if you were going to come home. And I was especially afraid for my father because they just took people, men, off the street. And it just happened so that one time, my father was moderately observant and he used to go to a little shul - from the German word schule. At temple, he used to go to pray. And one time, and every time he left the home my mother and I were just petrified that he would not come home. And one time, the SS [Schutzstaffel] wagons stopped in front of our house, and my father was coming and they grabbed him. And luckily, we had an ice cream parlor right beneath our house, and the daughter of there, she was half-Jewish, they didn't know that. She ran out, and she confronted the SS man. And she took him by the lapel, and she says, what do you want of this man? He's such a good man. He helps so many people. What do you want of him? Let him go. She shouted at him, and sure enough, he let him go. That was the only time though.
- 00:27:49 Speaker 3: What was the age when you actually got on the train? And from the seventh or eighth grade, when you could no longer go to school, how long was it

before you left to go? So what age were you left and how long was the time from seventh to eighth?

00:28:03 Trudie Richman-Wilder: It was close to a year.

00:28:05 Speaker 3: Okay. How old were you?

00:28:07 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I was fourteen - between fourteen and fifteen.

00:28:10 Speaker 3: Okay, thank you.

00:28:17 Margrit Frölich: Yes.

00:28:17 Speaker 4: When you went to the U.S. to live with your uncle, did he expect anything from you when you - for helping you across?

00:28:24 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I don't understand.

00:28:26 Margrit Frölich: Whether your uncle who helped you expected anything from you once you were here, like -

00:28:34 Trudie Richman-Wilder: No, my uncle was sort of a happy-go-lucky type of person. He wasn't a too profound thinker, to think whether it would work or not. He was kind of jolly. My aunt, on the other hand, she was a little apprehensive. Here comes a teenager who would eat them out of the house, and I was very hungry. And she was, she was a little more skeptical. But as it turns out, I really got to like her very, very much. As I said, one of the miracles, she was a person, she was ahead of her time. She would exercise, and she liked vegetarian food which I still like now. And she was, she was really a pleasure. And we liked each other. So, I was very fortunate.

00:29:28 Margrit Frölich: Yeah.

00:29:30 Speaker 5: How long before you saw your parents again?

00:29:33 Trudie Richman-Wilder: How long till I saw my parents again? Well, I was fourteen and a half, almost fifteen when I came. I saw my parents again when I was 21, in Israel. And I had gotten engaged and gotten married, and my husband was in the army. And when he got out of the army, we went to Israel and I finally saw them again.

00:29:58 Margrit Frölich: And, if I may add to the question, what year was it that your parents were able to escape?

00:30:06 Trudie Richman-Wilder: They escaped about two years after I left. And they went to Trieste, and now to Israel. But they had a very hard time in Israel.

00:30:19 Speaker 6: Has Austria ever made any reparations? The survivors?

00:30:23 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I get a small pension.

00:30:26 Margrit Frölich: The question was whether Austria has ever made any reparations to the survivors.

- 00:30:32 Trudie Richman-Wilder: That I don't know. I think every case is different, but I do get a small pension.
- 00:30:44 Margrit Frölich: Okay.
- 00:30:47 Speaker 7: At the Anschluss [Annexation of Austria], you said that you were immediately excluded from school. And you asked your parents, they said, we don't know why. You were fourteen. You no doubt in school experienced antisemitism. Did you - because your parents didn't say it - did you yourself connect it to the antisemitism you had experienced at school?
- 00:31:21 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, of course. I was surrounded by sudden violence, intolerance, and cruelty. I mean all of a sudden, all of the things I was taught not to do were happening around me.
- 00:31:41 Margrit Frölich: Let me follow up on this, the antisemitism - did you experience this already before 1938? Or just then?
- 00:31:50 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I think as Jews, there was an undercurrent of antisemitism. But I don't - not openly. I had some friends who were not Jewish. And I led a normal life. But then all of a sudden, there was this hatred at me. And that was so disillusioning to see children who were friendly to one, I don't mean close friend, suddenly say nasty things and make you feel like you're a wild animal.
- 00:32:30 Margrit Frölich: First Susanne Hillman and then you.
- 00:32:34 Susanne Hillman: Mrs. Richman, have you gone back to Austria? And if so, could you explain a little bit how your experience was? Have you gone back?
- 00:32:44 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yeah, I was there once. I wanted to show my husband where I lived and that kind of thing. For the most part, I felt somewhat estranged. Especially, one time, I went to a coffee shop, and I asked the waiter where someplace we wanted to go is. And he said to me, why do you ask me? You are Austrian, you know where it is. I mean that was a really stupid remark. First of all, I hadn't lived there. I'd just come there. And so to me, that showed there was an undercurrent, something there. But I shouldn't generalize on that one, but -
- 00:33:28 Margrit Frölich: So what year was this? When you went back?
- 00:33:31 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I don't - I don't - quite a while ago. Probably twenty years.
- 00:33:36 Margrit Frölich: All right, please.
- 00:33:37 Speaker 8: Trudie, what was it like to be in high school? So it's a high school in the United States when English wasn't your first language? You went to a public high school, right, with regular American, high school kids. What was - that must have been very overwhelming. What was that like?
- 00:33:56 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yeah, well it was because I didn't know any English. And my cousin who was thirteen, and I was fifteen, had to take me the first day. I remember, he was so humiliated to take his big cousin to school, but I made it. And one time, it was quite amusing, it seemed that the principal learned that I

played the piano reasonably well, not very great, and he invited me to play before the auditorium. And for some reason, I got mixed up with the words, refugee, and prodigy, and I thought the principal introduced me as a prodigy. In the meantime, he said refugee, and I came home jubilant and said to my aunt, guess what? He called me a refugee. And so she says, so what else is good? So there was some awkward situations. Playing the piano a little bit was a big bridge for me because my uncle was musical. He was a cantor. And I accompanied him and other people.

- 00:35:16 Margrit Frölich: What kind of pieces did you play on the piano?
- 00:35:20 Trudie Richman-Wilder: You know, Mendelssohn, and Schubert. Light classical. Beethoven some, *Für Elise* and all those.
- 00:35:30 Margrit Frölich: Yes.
- 00:35:33 Speaker 9: Hi Trudie. You mentioned before that you went with your husband to Israel. Could you please mention what year was it, and how was it for you to be there?
- 00:35:44 Trudie Richman-Wilder: It was wonderful. I was reunited with my parents.
- 00:35:47 Speaker 9: Ah, what year was it?
- 00:35:49 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I just don't remember the exact year right now. I should. But that was absolutely incredible, wonderful. They had had a very hard time in Israel because they had, you know, they had no money. My father had heart disease. And they opened a little kiosk, and they made sandwiches. I mean, they really were poor. But they managed.
- 00:36:17 Speaker 10: That was before the State of Israel. You were probably there before the State of Israel around [19]46, right before.
- 00:36:22 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Right, right, right. And yeah, it was lovely then, Israel. We stayed, I remember, we stayed about two months there.
- 00:36:37 Margrit Frölich: And where did your parents live? In Tel Aviv?
- 00:36:39 Trudie Richman-Wilder: In Tel Aviv, yeah. In a small apartment. And then I went again when my child was born. I have one son, and I brought him there.
- 00:36:54 Margrit Frölich: And, so did your parents adjust there easily? I mean some refugees did, others had a harder time because everything was so different there.
- 00:37:07 Trudie Richman-Wilder: It was very difficult, but they like, they liked Israel. It was very hard. They were lower-middle class when I was a child, and they became really lower class, economically speaking. And my father was ill. But they were resourceful, like so many other people who have to move. Finding the strength to go on.
- 00:37:31 Margrit Frölich: And could your father still be a cantor in Israel?
- 00:37:34 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Oh no, my uncle was a cantor.

- 00:37:35 Margrit Frölich: I'm sorry, I know that.
- 00:37:36 Trudie Richman-Wilder: That's ok, that's ok. It was confusing.
- 00:37:41 Margrit Frölich: Yes, please.
- 00:37:42 Speaker 11: You mentioned that your father was an immigrant from Poland to Vienna. Why did he go from Poland to Vienna?
- 00:37:50 Margrit Frölich: So you mentioned that your father was an immigrant from Poland who then went to Vienna. So the question was, why did your father move from Poland to Vienna?
- 00:38:03 Trudie Richman-Wilder: That's a good question, and I don't know, but I think that there was an immigration from - For Jewish people, they had very little opportunity in Poland to make a living.
- 00:38:16 Margrit Frölich: Yes.
- 00:38:17 Speaker 12: Trudie, you were very close to your parents when you were young. Why, why did you, why didn't you move to Israel so that you could be with them full-time?
- 00:38:30 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Oh, I wanted to. I wanted to go with my parents very badly, but there was no opportunity for me to go. And you often, also have to remember, when Hitler moved into Austria, there was a general feeling of helplessness, hopelessness, confusion. People were scrambling to get over to China, India, wherever they could. I remember in our house there was a Jewish neighbor, the only Jews in our, in our apartment house. Every night, they would huddle together. You couldn't have any electric lights anymore in the evening. No lights. So they huddled together and talk. Did you hear, somebody went to Shanghai? Did you hear, somebody went to England? Somebody went to Israel. How then, people would ask, how do you get, where did they get the papers? In other words, people were desperately trying to find a way out. Not a question of choosing where to go.
- 00:39:27 Speaker 12: But you could've chosen later on in life maybe to, you know, after World War II. Couldn't you have chosen to move to Israel to be with your parents there? How come you chose, you didn't choose to live with them?
- 00:39:45 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, you know, life had a way of going on. I was lucky that I won a scholarship and I got to college. So, and then I met my husband. So, things evolved. It wasn't that I chose what to do with my life. Good question.
- 00:40:03 Margrit Frölich: Yes please.
- 00:40:04 Speaker 13: Did your parents talk about how they escaped?
- 00:40:09 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Did my parents do what?
- 00:40:10 Margrit Frölich: Did your parents talk about how they escaped?

- 00:40:15 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, somehow when you, when you survive, you try not to talk too much about the sadness that you've been through. But they did. And what was funny was - I don't know how that happened - they happened to, were able to take the piano somehow on the boat to Israel.
- 00:40:37 Margrit Frölich: Really?
- 00:40:38 Trudie Richman-Wilder: How they did it, I don't know. And it was a very beautiful piano. And when they came to Israel, they sold the piano. And in the first year, they lived principally from the money from the piano.
- 00:40:58 Margrit Frölich: And were, was there communication between you and your parents? I imagine this was also difficult at the time.
- 00:41:03 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Oh yes. I wrote them letters. As a matter of fact, one letter that I wrote to my parents in Israel was one reason that I got an opportunity to go to college because the teacher, my English teacher, was so moved by the letter. I started out saying I'm sitting outside waiting for the mailman. And so it went on, and I told my life story. And she, for some reason, it touched her. Why I don't know. But she eventually helped me get a scholarship, this English teacher.
- 00:41:45 Margrit Frölich: When you were living here in the beginning, in Upstate New York, do you get the sense that people here understood what you escaped from? Or didn't that play much of a role?
- 00:42:02 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I think they understood. Don't forget there were lots of other refugees. I was not the only one. I was fortunate. But I don't think anybody can be in anybody else's shoes. We experience what we experience in our life.
- 00:42:22 Margrit Frölich: Yes.
- 00:42:22 Speaker 14: What college did you go to?
- 00:42:24 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Russell Sage College and the University of Hawaii.
- 00:42:29 [Unclear speech from the audience]
- 00:42:29 Margrit Frölich: Well, now that [unclear].
- 00:42:30 Speaker 14: That opens up a new chapter.
- 00:42:35 Margrit Frölich: You want to talk more about this? How you got from Upstate New York to Hawaii.
- 00:42:40 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, my husband was a professor of engineering. Then we went to Israel. He worked for one year for [unclear]. And then he got a job at Honolulu and we were there for fifteen years. I was very fortunate. Honolulu was a beautiful place. And that's where I, then I went back to school for my master's degree. And then I decided, I don't know, it just came into my head, that each country has their own lullabies. And I was in a place where there were many nationalities, many ethnicities, so I started pursuing that. And I now have two recordings in the Smithsonian Institute. One is *Lullaby and Goodnight*, and that is

lullabies from around the world, especially in the Pacific region. So I did that for two years. I pursued that and I was very lucky.

- 00:43:47 Susanne Hillman: I would just like to say that at the end of the talk, we will be able to play some of Mrs. Richman's recordings. She couldn't bring the guitar in, we don't have a piano here, but luckily her two collections are digitized. And so I asked her if it was ok, and we'll hear beautiful guitar and singing at the end of the talk.
- 00:44:08 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Thank you.
- 00:44:10 Margrit Frölich: Yes please.
- 00:44:11 Speaker 15: The horror of what was happening to the Jews, what was it like in the United States. I was a baby; I don't know what was going on. What was really told to the people in the United States? Did the information get here, and when?
- 00:44:25 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, I'm not an authority on that so I couldn't - but there was a different world. You know, you come here and I didn't feel any antisemitism.
- 00:44:36 Speaker 15: No, I meant did you know what was going on?
- 00:44:38 Margrit Frölich: Were you reading the papers, and were they reporting what was going on?
- 00:44:41 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yeah, sure. I don't think completely, no. Good question.
- 00:44:53 Margrit Frölich: Yes.
- 00:44:54 Speaker 16: As someone who has read your memoir, and I think - I'm sorry, what's your name again?
- 00:45:03 Margrit Frölich: Margrit Frölich.
- 00:45:04 Speaker 16: Margrit. What Margrit alluded to, being on the train. What most people associate with being on the train is German soldiers getting on and demanding to see your papers. And in your book, it doesn't talk about how, how you eluded. Did you pretend you were sleeping? How did you elude the German soldiers from demanding to see your papers and questioning you? How did you handle that on the train?
- 00:45:41 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Good question. Well, I got on in the early evening, and during the night there weren't that many interrogators. Maybe that had something to do with it.
- 00:45:54 Margrit Frölich: But, you did have the proper papers, or - to leave?
- 00:46:00 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, I had the railroad ticket. That's all that was asked of me, the railroad ticket.
- 00:46:08 Margrit Frölich: Did you have to pay tax in order to leave, or was that not the case because you weren't an adult?

- 00:46:18 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I don't remember. I know that we stood in line several nights to get tickets. That was very difficult. My father and I took turns. I think sometimes people ask me, do I have any scars? And I would say, yes. I'm more fearful of some of them [unclear].
- 00:46:53 Audience: We can't hear you.
- 00:46:53 Speaker 17: Trudie, speak into the microphone.
- 00:46:55 Trudie Richman-Wilder: I'm more fearful, you know, in those situations. So then I don't think you can go through experiences of this sort and not have scars. Though I've been very, very lucky in many, many ways.
- 00:47:15 Speaker 18: Were your siblings able to get out of Vienna?
- 00:47:20 Margrit Frölich: Were your siblings able to get out of Vienna?
- 00:47:24 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yes, they were. And each one has an interesting story. I mean my family are very individuated if there is such a word. Each one is very different from another one. And unfortunately, all of them have died, all five of them, and I'm the only one that's still alive. Yeah. It's very hard.
- 00:47:55 Margrit Frölich: One question.
- 00:47:56 Speaker 19: Were you ever reunited with any of your siblings once you came to the United States?
- 00:48:04 Margrit Frölich: Were you ever reunited with any of your siblings once you came to the United States?
- 00:48:08 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yes, I was. Yes. That time when I went to Israel. And then I lived three years in Israel with - My husband got an overseas State Department job and we lived there for three years. My son was six years old. We were there until he was nine, and he loves Israel. My son is a jazz guitarist. Would you believe that?
- 00:48:34 Margrit Frölich: So another musician in the family?
- 00:48:38 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Yes.
- 00:48:40 Speaker 20: How much did you talk to your son about your experiences?
- 00:48:46 Margrit Frölich: How much did you talk to your son about your experiences?
- 00:48:50 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, yeah. He knows. And the thing is, this was the nice thing about it is, my record *Lullaby and Goodnight*, he was not the guitarist then. He was just studying at Berklee College of Music at that time. But my other recordings, he did all the guitar work. So we had a close, we have a close relationship.
- 00:49:21 Speaker 21: I think what she meant is, did you discuss with him your harrowing experience in the [unclear]?

- 00:49:29 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Not so much because of, you know, he was surrounded by, he heard me talk to other people. I didn't want to burden him, but he's been a very empathetic son, I can say.
- 00:49:46 Margrit Frölich: So let me ask you what made you decide to write this book?
- 00:49:52 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Well, my husband had a consulting job in Hawaii after we had left for two to three months or something. And I said to myself, I'll be living in a hotel. I won't have any cooking to do. How can I use this time best? And I decided that I was going to write my autobiography.
- 00:50:16 Margrit Frölich: He wants another question.
- 00:50:17 Speaker 22: Trudie, I've seen you many day, times in shul. Never spoken to you. Wonderful story, and wonderful having you bring it and share it to us. You know, you see someone and it's a lesson for all of us. You don't know who those people are. And you know, I can't believe I get to talk to you about it. Thank you for being here.
- 00:50:29 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Thank you. Thank you so much. That's very kind, thank you.
- 00:50:49 Margrit Frölich: Yes. That's something I'd also like to say. It's very courageous to come here and I think you opened, gave us a lot of insights in your very complex and difficult life experience. And yeah, so glad you came here. And I think everyone is now really curious to experience the musician that you are, and listen to some pieces of music.
- 00:51:10 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Thank you.
- 00:51:23 [audience claps]
- 00:51:30 Susanne Hillman: Are there any favorite songs that you would like me to play from your collection?
- 00:51:35 Trudie Richman Wilder: No. Maybe you could play, do you have the lullabies too?
- 00:51:39 Susanne Hillman: Yes. I, the work and, *Songs of Work and Play* and the lullabies.
- 00:51:44 Trudie Richman Wilder: Maybe a little bit of each.
- 00:51:46 Susanne Hillman: Okay. I was listening in earlier and I thought, for this occasion, we might want to listen to the Israeli song, *Zum Gali Gali*. Is that all right?
- 00:52:09 [*Zum Gali Gali* plays]
- 00:52:14 Trudie Richman Wilder: My son plays the guitar.
- 00:54:19 Trudie Richman Wilder: The lullabies were my master's thesis.
- 00:54:23 Margrit Frölich: Yeah. So you got a degree in music.
- 00:54:27 Trudie Richman Wilder: In American Studies.

00:54:29 Margrit Frölich: Oh, American Studies.

00:54:31 Trudie Richman Wilder: [unclear]

00:54:34 Susanne Hillman: Okay, we have something in Hebrew, *Numi Numi*. And then I thought everybody would probably enjoy hearing, *Raisins, and Almonds*. Is that all right?

00:54:44 Trudie Richman Wilder: Oh yes, sure. *Numi Numi* means go to sleep.

00:54:47 Susanne Hillman: Oh, okay.

00:54:48 Margrit Frölich: Oh so it's [unclear].

00:54:57 [*Numi Numi* plays]

00:57:31 Trudie Richman Wilder: I think the other album might be a little livelier.

00:57:37 Speaker 23: I think it's beautiful.

00:57:38 Speaker 24:...go to sleep.

00:57:39 Speaker 25: I think it's pretty.

00:57:41 Margrit Frölich: I think it's the time of the day where everyone one can listen to some lullabies.

00:57:49 Trudie Richman Wilder: I tried to make it as authentic as possible, so it's a little bit raw.

00:57:58 [*Raisins and Almonds* plays]

00:58:24 Trudie Richman Wilder: This is *Raisins and Almonds* which is a very classical lullaby for the Jewish people.

01:00:04 Margrit Frölich: Beautiful words. It was very beautiful.

01:00:07 Susanne Hillman: Shall we do one more lively one?

01:00:09 Trudie Richman Wilder: No, but how about from the other -

01:00:11 Susanne Hillman: Yeah, definitely - that's what I meant. Okay.

01:00:19 Susanne Hillman: Which one would you like to play, of those? *Samoan, Fisherman?* Is that American, *Sing Stephanie Sing?*

01:00:36 Trudie Richman Wilder: Well, that's a song I wrote myself.

01:00:39 Margrit Frölich: *Sing Stephanie Sing?* Okay, let's listen to it.

01:00:43 Susanne Hillman: Is that a good one?

01:00:44 Trudie Richman Wilder: Yeah. That's a Russian one.

01:00:48 [*Sing Stephanie Sing* plays]

- 01:02:16 Trudie Richman Wilder: When this is finished, I want to say a word about this song.
- 01:02:57 Trudie Richman Wilder: I just wanted to say that I had a friend in Hawaii. She was in the Department of Early Education in Hawaii, and she came to visit me one Saturday afternoon, and we talked about how she was so sad because she couldn't carry a tune and she was in early childhood education. Tears were in her eyes, and it was rather tiring because she stayed a long time and when she left, I was very tired. And I took a nap and when I got up, this song came to me, *Sing Stephanie Sing*. The whole song. But that's how the song came to be.
- 01:03:39 Margrit Frölich: All right. Okay, thank you very, very much. We don't have any of the recordings here, but we do have a couple of your books here so if you'd like to take a look at them.
- 01:04:00 Speaker 26: I just wanted to say that you can go to TrudieRichman.com. It has her memoir, *Escape from Vienna*. You can also buy it on Amazon. Just go on Amazon.com, search *Escape from Vienna*. And also TrudieRichman.com, you can buy her recordings.
- 01:04:19 Margrit Frölich: All right, thank you.
- 01:04:20 Trudie Richman-Wilder: Can I just, excuse me. One - I just wanted to say a special thank you to Judd Handler who is a very sensitive young man who does physical education, and what else too? He's a writer, a very gifted writer. And helped me get the book in shape. I want to thank him publicly.
- 01:04:40 [audience claps]
- 01:04:44 Susanne Hillman: Thank you to all of you for coming. Thank you very much, Professor Frölich, and especially Mrs. Richman and for sharing your beautiful voice with us. It's really lovely, it's lovely music. Thank you, have a good evening, and I hope to see some of you at our event after Thanksgiving. There's new fliers, so please come help yourself. Thank you, have a good evening.