

Transcript:

Olivia Newman

A10

28mm54s

Interviewer: We'll just start by talking a little bit about what you can remember. I know you were born in 1938, right?

Olivia Newman: Uh-hmm.

Interviewer: So pre-war, you were very young?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. I remember in the morning, my dad kissed me goodbye. I was an only child. My mom and I went to a friend of hers, to just visit with her. I had my doll that I got from my dad, my teddy from my last birthday when I was three. That was pretty much it I don't even remember that this girl came and gave my mom a little note. The note I left here. I only know that right after we visited with my mom's friend, we were in this big train and having such a long, long, long train ride. There were so many soldiers on that train. I remember that. I don't know because I was very sleepy and I couldn't understand why my dad wasn't with us. I thought maybe he's coming later.

Interviewer: We'll back up a little bit. Tell me a little bit about...you were born in Austria?

Olivia Newman: In Vienna.

Interviewer: You grew up in Germany?

Olivia Newman: Yeah, that's where my mom took me then.

Interviewer: She took you from Vienna to Germany?

Olivia Newman: From Vienna, she took me to Hamburg Germany.

Interviewer: Your father was where?

Olivia Newman: My father was taken away, but she told me my father had died.

Interviewer: Where was he taken to? Do you know?

Olivia Newman: No. This girl wrote that...mom said everyone was taken to Mauthausen, but I'm not sure about it. I think what I later found that they took him to Riga and that's where he perished.

Interviewer: He did not survive.

Olivia Newman: No.

Interviewer: So you and your mother...

Olivia Newman: My mom had a German identity card because when she was a child, that's what I learned far later that when she was a child she witnessed her parents being killed in a Pogrom in Russia. She was born in Vilna, Vilnius now, in Lithuania. There she ran away. I don't know how old she was. I just found out in her little journal that she wrote like for Sunday school. It's this little. I have that still. I should have brought it. I'm sorry. I should really...

Interviewer: I can always get it later. Just so you know.

Olivia Newman: Yeah, right. I was totally getting goose bumps when I think about it. She wrote in there like the story for children to Sunday "Today children, I want to tell you a story about a man who was very kind." I have it word for word. "He was a Jew. It was a day before Passover. He was with his wife and his little daughter in the neighboring city and was looking forward to..." So that's how she was writing it. "Then all of a sudden, there came those Russian soldiers. They didn't like Jews." It was so beautifully written I cannot tell it that way. This commander there said that they should put them in jail but they didn't do that. They beat him to death and took everything away what he had. What happened that her mom died also that she didn't know. "The little girl was I." That's what she wrote in the very last note, "The little girl was I." She ran away to...

Interviewer: She was how old?

Olivia Newman: I don't know. She was just a little girl. She had several siblings. So, I don't know. She went to Konigsberg, and in Konigsberg she got into an orphanage. I don't know how everything, but she wrote it down something in Yiddish and Hebrew script and the others and old German script and I had a hard time to

decipher everything. I don't know. It must have been terrible for her because she pretended to be not Jewish, took a different name; close but still different. She took...

Interviewer: How do you suppose she got all that? The documentation, do you know?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. She didn't have anything and she went into this orphanage and said her parents died which was true, but she pretended to be non-Jewish and said her name was [Emma Krilage 0:05:37.4]. That sounded like an East Prussian because they have a lot an AT at the end and a lot of it.

Interviewer: It's amazing she knew how to do that as a little girl.

Olivia Newman: Yeah, I don't know how old she was. Maybe she was already ten, twelve or so. I have no idea.

Interviewer: It's funny how during that time we don't find that to be so little anymore.

Olivia Newman: No. It was not. She later was trained as a nurse and she was even working in World War I as a nurse already. So starting, you know? That's how she got this German identity card, but what surprised me was that she never let go of that card. She always kept it in her purse because that's what we had when we left. With this identity card, she took us out and into Hamburg, Germany in the middle of the war.

Interviewer: She was three?

Olivia Newman: No. I was three.

Interviewer: Right. When you arrived in Germany?

Olivia Newman: Three and a half or something, about that.

Interviewer: Your last memory of your father is he kissed you in the morning?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I remembered that I had so many playmates. I just thought that they were cousins and so, but I probably think that they were different generations because my parents were already old when they had me. My mom was 42, that's what she told me, when she had me and my father was 13-years older than she. It was probably another generation whom I thought they're my first cousins but they were probably...(sigh) I just remembered that I was so sad that none of them came

with me, with us, that we were the only ones going. I never understood. I always asked my mom questions after that and I never got an answer. She knew and she was always sad and she was never somehow happy. That's why I wrote my story.

Interviewer: When did your mother tell you? When did she find...

Olivia Newman: No, never.

Interviewer: She never told you.

Olivia Newman: She never told me.

Interviewer: How old were you when she passed away?

Olivia Newman: Oh, it was in 1964. Let's see, I was born in 1938. I was already 27.

Interviewer: When did she describe that you were Jewish?

Olivia Newman: That's then, actually, when I noticed that my father definitely was a Jewish because that's when I found the note. A little note that [Kizella 0:08:25] wrote. But about my mom, I always had the suspicion because she had something like a strange habits, cooking lettuce in cod liver oil even. Can you believe it? That was so terrible but she had to do something like that. I don't know. But I got every day in school while I got cod liver oil as soon as school started.

Interviewer: You were raised as a German girl?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. My mom refused to have a Christmas tree. Later, when I had asked my friends why they had a Christmas tree and she said it's just because we want to have presents and so, something like that. Then, later my mom had a little one just on the table. But she insisted of having only eight candles on them. Never more. I didn't question that. Later, I noticed why. So many things. A cousin of mine who was I think 35-years older than I, my mom's side, she was over at our home for a while and was watching me while my mom was working before or during the war time, not after the war was over. She had bought candleholder and some pictures. They're the only pictures I have from her. Together they did some strange things. To me, strange things. No one else did that. I was never allowed to have friends over or get close to anyone in the neighborhood. That was very hard.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about the day that you found out you were not a German girl but in fact, a Jewish living child.

Olivia Newman: I was already...

Interviewer: Thirty's?

Olivia Newman: No, I was not thirty when I found out about my father. It was not even. My mom died in 1964. I was born in 1938 so I was 26, yeah. That came out more or less together but then, I thought my mom must have been too but I never found anything. I was looking and digging everywhere but always overlooked this tiny little journal. It was just a black journal. This little. Fits easily in the purse. With a beautiful writing on it, handwriting and it was written for Sunday school. That's how I found out. At one day, that was far, far later, and I was in so much pain that I didn't know what to do. I wanted to read and I wanted to look for a book of my father's. That's what my cousin Hannah probably bought too.

Interviewer: You said it was written in an old German script.

Olivia Newman: Yeah of my mother.

Interviewer: She translated for you then?

Olivia Newman: No. It was in old German script and in Hebrew script Yiddish on some things. Only a few chapters that she was getting to Vienna so they had to figure out how everything fit together.

Interviewer: Did you wonder if she wrote that for you?

Olivia Newman: I don't know. Yeah. The very last thing was that she wrote "Now you see my child." That was so... She probably suspected that I would read it but she gave all the other little books she had. She gave them to me when I was a child and was at school because we didn't have paper to write on at school. She only had it written on one page, on one side of the page and I turn the book around and had a totally new book then. I couldn't buy them then. I have even some Math formulas and stuff like that I wrote on them. I don't know if she ever suspected that I would read it or she just left it to chance. The last thing, it was that she said "Now you see my child. I was always searching for God." That was because she probably lost her faith but not really. She was still thinking somehow, there must be some ways.

Interviewer: You said, she still hung on to it.

Olivia Newman: Yeah.

Interviewer: With the eight candles on the Christmas tree.

Olivia Newman: Yeah. Before we had ever a tree and when cousin Hannah was there, they did some strange things at Friday night. They were lighting imaginary candles [that weren't on. 13:26]. They had the candleholders up there, but it was so beautiful. They were singing. They both had a beautiful voice. My mom was an alto and cousin Hannah was soprano. It was so pretty. When they were talking, they talked in a different language too but she always told me it was East Prussian because that's where she was from. She grew up in [unintelligible 13:51], she didn't really lie but it was Yiddish that they were talking about. Later, I learned it.

Interviewer: As a hidden child, how do you feel about what she went through?

Olivia Newman: I'm totally amazed.

Interviewer: More on what we were just saying there's a sense of a lack of identity, a lack of understanding, a lack of foundation.

Olivia Newman: Absolutely. Right.

Interviewer: How do you deal with that? How do you find this sense of home and peace?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. First it happened... During my mom's lifetime, I always tried to ask and that's what I wrote in my book that the real struggle I was going through to always force her to tell me but no, she didn't. She backed off again and again. One time she broke down after I... When I was already in med school I told her that what I now heard about what the Nazis had done and everything and then she knew. How could she have known when nobody else ever admitted to have known anything.

Interviewer: So, was it until finding this journal that you found out that you are a Jewish and that your father died in the camp.

Olivia Newman: Yeah. No, with... my father died in the camp I found already...with a note.

Interviewer: How were you able to explain that knowing that it was the Jews that were round up? Did you have a sense of wonder if he was Jewish or just a victim of...?

Olivia Newman: No. That's what I knew, he was Jewish because he was...

Interviewer: When you found the note?

Olivia Newman: Oh. I was twenty-six. That's been because they were all wearing, that's what the note says, all wearing the yellow star on their clothes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that day.

Olivia Newman: I don't really remember that. I just know that I was looking through everything else. I didn't have much time. I had a big family by then. So I was married and have seven children. So I had to... but I was married to a non-Jew. That's what probably made us...he was a single child. That's why we had a big family because both of us... He was very much older than I was. He was twenty-five years my senior and she had lost his father in the first world war when he was one year old. He was very kind and very, very good person, we both had probably the feeling that we had to create a family and to have someone to hold on to. That no one would have the same problems as we did. See, my children don't have any grandparents, never had. So it was just... They were too little to remember my mom. The oldest one probably remembers her a little. I don't the other two after that. She only knew until four. Then after that she died in sixty-three, and by the end of sixty-three my fourth child was born.

Interviewer: What religion does your faith lie? At twenty-six finding out your...

Olivia Newman: I was raised by my mom always to just believe in God. That came out one time when I was in school. We had to say what religion we were and everything. I asked my mom, "What religion are we?" She said, "We are believing in God." Later I learned that even in this word in German [unintelligible 0:17:50.1] was something Hitler even invented. That was a strange kind of religion, but this was true, just believing in God that she didn't want to be anything else.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of amazement at the extraordinary conditions your mother involved you in?

Olivia Newman: Yes, especially what she was going through, she must have missed it so much otherwise she would not have held on to these ceremonies on Friday nights. When she was giving blood, donated blood, she got a lot of eggs otherwise we didn't have anything to eat. She was baking bread. She never called it a challah, it was a bread. But, it was exactly the same like a challah was.

Interviewer: She lost her parents when she was young. She lost her husband. She took you and fled to Germany and raised the both of you as non-Jew German. She managed to keep some sense of Judaism in your home without you knowing it.

Olivia Newman: Yeah, instilling that in me because I never would have wanted to be anything else to come to a religion at all if I could have chosen a religion.

Interviewer: So you raised your children...

Olivia Newman: Yeah, pretty much the same way.

Interviewer: To believe in God, to still keep some of the same traditions?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. The ones in Germany right now I don't think because one of my grandsons the oldest actually in Germany - I still have four children who live in Germany - he lives in Hamburg and he told me, "I just don't dare tell anyone anymore that I'm Jewish." It was before that or maybe a year or two years prior to that, his mom had overheard him talk to one of his friends and telling him that his friends started, "I'm actually of three different nationalities." He said, "I'm a German, I'm a Kurd and I'm a Turk. Then my grandson Carl said, "Come to think of it, I'm only two, I'm a German and a Jew." He was eight then. That's what my daughter told me once when she overheard him doing this.

Interviewer: What brought you to Tennessee?

Olivia Newman: I had already a son who lived here. Who lived before in LA, came over back to Germany for a while, and couldn't stand it and he came back to America. He was a screenwriter. At that time, one of my daughters lived in New York City and was studying at HP Studios in Uta Hagen for acting, dancing, singing and everything, but she had already studied in Germany, majored in religion. About...what is it? I can't

think of it. You know, all different religions and ethnology so that's what she did in Hamburg and she came to New York as I said.

Interviewer: Did you come to Tennessee to be with your son?

Olivia Newman: No. I was visiting with my daughter in 1998 in New York and just stayed with her for quite some time, and took my youngest daughter and my little grandson with me, and... I don't know. I just had the feeling, "This is where I have to come back to." It was before, already, when I was in LA. I was with my husband several times already in the States before, but he died already in '75 so I had to raise seven kids by myself. They're all little so that was not the easiest thing. But now, when I was visiting with my daughter in New York I thought, "I really want to go," and I knew my son was here in Nashville. I didn't want to stay in New York, but I loved New York for everything else there. It was beautiful. I went back home on November 9th. The funny thing was that the wall came down that night. When I landed in Düsseldorf that morning, I saw all the headlines, the wall came down and then I was glued all day to the TV and on the other hand my decision was made right away. I thought, no it can't be very good for Jews anymore because people over there on the other side never knew what democracy was, or is, and they'll probably claim the whole country for themselves. They'll have the foreigners out and everyone else out. That's what happened after that. They just kept it a little under wraps but it was that way for a long time.

Interviewer: It's been over fifty years. Do you have a sense of belonging yet?

Olivia Newman: Yeah. I love it here. I just fell in love here and even after my son who came was the reason for me to come to Nashville. He went back one time to finish a movie in Germany. Six years ago and he died there, but I still stay here and I have now two daughters here. The one from New York lives here, Laura is here in temple in a religious school and loves to go there. My youngest daughter lives here, has a family here, and married here. I still have four over there, but I haven't been in Germany. Not once.

Interviewer: Is it difficult for you to think of yourself as a survivor?

Olivia Newman: Yes, somehow. But my mom was one and so I thought... I was hidden during that time and I didn't even know that I was a survivor, never. That's what I was told later. I always thought... I knew that my father died in the concentration camp, but that my mom was this strong, this brave... I never understood it when she

was alive. That's what I really regret. But she didn't want me to know. She was scared I guess, very scared.

Interviewer: She had lost everybody that ever—

Olivia Newman: Yeah. One time, during one of my inquiries she said that the hate of the Jews would never go away or something like that. I thought how does she know that. It was all before... She never told me anything. When I, then, asked more questions, "Uh-uh." She just—no.

Interviewer: So now when you look back you see how a lot of things make more sense.

Olivia Newman: Yes, oh yes right away when I found this letter journal of hers.

Interviewer: Tied up a lot of things for you?

Olivia Newman: That was the first time that I really had this experience. "Oh, now I know." Everything made far more sense after that.

Interviewer: That must feel amazing on some levels to see what extraordinary strength—

Olivia Newman: Yeah. On the other hand if she had told me probably would have had, some family would find someone and so now, it's so hard. I'm on the internet with this Jewish genealogy list, and someone found me once because of my mom's maiden name which was pretty scarce I guess, or rare. It's really his. There was an economist from Harvard who contacted me and said that we must be cousins. He sent me everything about it, but he passed away three years later so I still don't have anyone (laughing). No, that's not that easy. The children always ask. They would have loved to have...now, they have cousins, a lot, a lot of cousins but...

Interviewer: The start of what you created.

Olivia Newman: Yeah. Not even grandparents. I didn't know them so I would have loved to have.

Interviewer: As a child survivor, what do you want people to know?

Olivia Newman: That it's terrible. I think it's affecting so many different generations. Then something like that happened and it always happened and it happened again. The Nazis were not the first ones, but they did, you know, the most terrible job, but on the other hand, it's been all during our time. Always it has been that way, the Jews. I don't know and I think of all the Pogroms they had gone through in Russia and then the crusades before. I don't know why they didn't like us. So...

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Olivia Newman: Mm-hmm. Thank you.