

Int

All right. Okay, let's go. So good afternoon, Dany lovely to see you

Today is the 16th of June 2023. And I'm here to interview you which is very nice of you. So normally how we start, Dany is to ask you an embarrassing question is when you were born, and what your name was when you were born?

Dany:

Right, I was born in 1942. And my name was Danielle Kahn. And I think my mother wanted a French name. And she thought of Danielle Darrieux, who is a French actress at the time. And my middle name was Jeanette, which was my grandmother's name, who was Yentl.

Int:

And so where were you born?

Dany:

In Montpellier, in France in the south of France.

Int:

Lovely. So, and what did your parents do?

Dany:

Well, they were mostly hidden at that time. And they did various jobs. My mother was a dressmaker. So, she moved about with her portable sewing machine in different farms. And my father was a handyman, he did everything that was needed to be done. He was part of the Maquis at that time. And they had false papers.

Int

Would you like to explain what the Maquis was?

Dany:

Well, the Maquis was an underground organisation that existed to sabotage the German occupation, basically. And my mother and father both spoke German, so they had to pretend they came from Alsace Lorraine, because their French was really not good at that time. So I was born there. And then they went on being in hiding until the end of the war.

Int: So were you in hiding with them?

Dany: Well I must have been Yes. When I wasn't in my incubator for two months, first of all, Oh, my goodness, right. Even though it's pretty hot in Montpellier.

Int:

Right. So why, what weight were you when you were born?

Dany:

Apparently, I was two and a half pounds?

Int:

Oh, my goodness, you were a premature baby.

Dany:

I was a premature baby. Yes. And my mother and father weren't married. But my father recognised me as being his daughter. And then I was made legal in a few months later when he got their own papers to marry in a registry office in Montpellier.

Int

So where had they moved from?

Dany: Well, from my mother had moved from Vienna. As it so happened. And my father had moved from Germany.

Int: Right. And so how did they meet?

Dany : Well, they met in the South of France in a little place called Mialet which was in the Cévennes. And it was a sort of halfway house for people who were trying to flee to Spain, mostly Jewish people. Right. And the house belonged to one of my father's sisters.

[Mialet is a little village in the Cévennes where Robert Louis Stevenson from Edinburgh wrote 'travels with my donkey'

There was a big house with little farm attached that was well hidden among the chestnut trees and it was used as a half-way house for refugees on their way to Spain and Portugal . My aunt and uncle kept the house and lent it to us for fourteen years where we went on holiday with the children. They themselves spent February there before going to Nice for a month and they lived in Paris, Geneva and Metz. None of their own

children wanted to be there and when they died in the late 80s the house was sold to a dog breeder.

It was full of information about the war with maps etc as it was used by the 'Maquis'.] (Edited from an email from Dany 2nd August 2023)

Int : Right.

Dany: And so my mother had gone there to sew, and my father happened to be there. And that's how they met.

Int :So when you said that? So when they got together, and they had you, did they marry later on?

Dany: Yes.

Int: Right. Yes. And so that would have been quite difficult at that time as well, I suppose.

Dany: Yes. Because they must have married with their own papers. But they had other papers too, for everyday life there.

Int

Right. So do you think you're recorded in different ways than.

Dany : Well, I'm only recorded in the official way.

Int : Right. And so you were born and have you siblings as well?

Dany: Yeah. My brother was born in 1945. Just after the War.

Int: Right. And where were you living by then?

Dany: I think, although he was born in Limoges I think we were living in Montpellier again.

Int : Right. Right. And was your mother still working?

Dany: My mother was still sewing. And my father had been given money by his brother-in-law to set up a grocery shop in Montpellier. And that's where we were living.

Int: So do you remember much of your childhood?

Dany: Quite a lot. I don't know if it's because of photographs. But I do remember quite a lot. But in 1948, my father died. He was very young, but he had a hernia operation. And I think he had an embolism.

Int: Right.

Dany: So I remember visiting him with my mother, because she was asked to bring ice and, and his cigarettes. And then he died very suddenly.

Int : Right? So what age were you?

Dany: I was six and a half,

Int: Which is very young.

Dany: And my brother was three years younger than me.

Int : Very difficult for your mother.

Dany: Very difficult.

Int: Did they have any other relatives that were around to help?

Int: Her parents or his parents?

Dany: Not really, my mother's parents were in Vienna, and they perished in the Holocaust. And my father's parents were in the north of France. And I think they died quite soon after that, or maybe before, I'm not very sure.

Int: Very hard for your mother.

Dany: Well, she had some relatives in Paris, So I think she tried, she struggled on her own for maybe six months. And nothing worked out. Except another Jewish family wanted to adopt my brother but didn't want to adopt me. And she didn't want him adopted anyway. So she sort of packed us up and took us to Paris.

But in Paris, ehm I was sent to an orphanage, because that was quite normal to do. If you had one parent missing or both you were entitled to a Jewish orphanage. I remember we all thought it was such a coincidence that we'd lost a parent or two. Yeah, but that was what happened.

Int: So did your mother, did she have your brother still?

Dany: She had my brother, but my brother got TB. So, he was sent to a sanatorium. And then she just managed by sewing

Int: Your poor mother, poor you as well. So how long were you in the orphanage for?

Dany: I think I was in two different ones. I think maybe a year and a half.

Int: And had you started school by then?

Dany: I was at school already in Montpellier.

Int: Right.

Dany: And then, I think from the orphanage, we went to school in the local school. It was outside Paris somewhere.

Int: And your brother?

Dany: Well, my brother was in that hospital somewhere, as well.

Int: How long was he in the hospital and sanatorium?

Dany: Can't really remember. But...

Int: So did your mother eventually manage?

Dany: My mother eventually married again. And then my stepfather got a job from his cousin's brother-in-law, something in in Scotland. So, he moved to Scotland first. And the uncle who was this very rich uncle, my father's brother-in-law, my original father's brother-in-law. He came to visit me in the orphanage in a big American car.

So they [the people in the orphanage] said, if you're so well off, we don't need her here. So out, you know, so I was checked out of the orphanage and then my uncle decided he would pay for boarding school. Because my mother was working and couldn't look after, you know, children at home.

So, eventually my stepfather and my mother, after learning English with great difficulty on the wrong speed of record, my stepfather went to Scotland. And then one of my mother's friends had also remarried somebody in London and they thought they would be together.

My mother thought she would be with a friend because they hadn't a clue where Scotland was and they heard the word 'London ' and thought we'll all be together, we'll be in Britain together. So, and by then I was in a boarding school in France, near Paris as well,

Int : Yes. And was that a Jewish boarding school?

Dany: No, that. was a very Catholic boarding school where I learned all the old Catholic prayers and everything...

Int : Which must have been really not only traumatic again, you're still away from your mother, but also from going from a Jewish orphanage to a Catholic boarding school.

Dany: Yeah. I don't think as a child you notice the trauma. It's just another thing that happened.

Int : And but your brother was, surely he must have been out of the sanatorium by then. No?

Dany: I think he was. And he was back with my mother. But I was still in the boarding school, In that boarding school where we got home every fortnight, overnight and one day when I was due to go home, I was told that I had misbehaved and I wasn't to go home, and I was incredibly upset because I was terribly goody goody and I never misbehaved. But it turned out to be the weekend for my mother married my stepfather, and she and the headmistress had arranged that the best way for me to stay there would be to ...she had misbehaved. I remember that right

Int : but. So do you remember going to your mother's marriage?

Dany: No, I didn't go. I didn't get to go because I was told I'd misbehaved. So, I couldn't go home that weekend. I would say excuse for her not to attend the wedding.

Int: So, yeah, sorry I picked that up wrong.

Int : So why did they not want you to attend the wedding?

Dany: Well, I suppose my parents had no money and they would probably be at home and I just wasn't there. So I remember that distinctly. You remember things that were unfair.

Int : Absolutely. Absolutely. Sorry I misunderstood.

Dany: Yeah. So then my stepfather went to Motherwell for six months, first of all,

Int: Which is quite different from London.

Dany: Quite different from London, quite different from Paris.

Int : Absolutely.

Dany: And I think he had been under the impression I would stay in boarding school and my brother would be sent to boarding school. But my favourite uncle again said you're married now. I'm not paying for them. You've to go where you're going. So my mother and my brother and I packed up and went to Motherwell. And it was heavenly.

Int : Really?

Dany: Yeah.

Int: Really. What did you like about it?

Dany: First of all, we were at home, we had a bath. People were incredibly nice to us. We were the stars in Motherwell. People were lovely. They couldn't quite understand why we said we were French, and we spoke German at home. Or why my father and mother had a different name from my brother and I, different surname. But people adopted us and it was lovely. It really was.

Int: So you continued to speak German at home.

Dany: Yes.

Int: And obviously learnt English.

Dany: Yes.

Int: And what about..... So did your mother continue to do sewing?

Dany: Yes.

Int: And how did she find kind of communicating as well. Did she pick up English?

Dany: She was already good at picking up English. And I think if you have.. she already had German and French and apparently if you have a couple of languages, you can pick up a third one more easily. She was very good.

Int: And your stepfather. Did you? He must have been bilingual as well or trilingual.

Dany: Yes, yes.

Int: And so you were very happy in Motherwell.

Dany: Very happy. Yes.

Int: That's lovely. Yes. And yes, you're right. And to be back with your parents.

Dany: Yeah.

Int: And in a kind of settled environment must have been such a difference. And so by that time, you would be coming towards the end of primary school as well?

Dany: I was almost at the end. And the headmaster...my brother and I went to school almost the day after we arrived. And we wore very odd clothes for Motherwell. Well, we had leggings and we held hands which people didn't do. The headmaster. was very, very nice. And for my 11 plus because I couldn't speak English properly, he devised another exam. And we were sent to Hamilton Academy, which was a selective school.

Int: Absolutely. What a lovely thing to do, actually, because it was a very prescriptive exam.

Dany: He didn't make me do it. But he thought I should. So, and my brother started swimming there and became a champion, swimming champion. So we had a really nice time in Motherwell.

Int: And Hamilton Academy has always had an excellent name and for its education as well. So, you felt very settled in Hamilton. And so what, what hobbies did you take up?

Dany: I'm not a hobby kind of person, but my mother by that time had a workshop with sewing things and I used to go after school and work there and iron and things.

Int: So what was she doing? Was it dressmaking that she was doing?

Dany: She was doing dressmaking, but she was also doing cut, making trim. So, she got to know some of the Austrian people who'd come to Glasgow.

Int: And so did she start mixing with the Jewish community?

Dany: She started. But that was quite difficult because they were quite established and we had a van and they had big cars and that kind of thing. It was a bit difficult.

Int I think also, I mean, I think one of the things which I forget as well is that for people who grew up in Glasgow, yeah, going to Edinburgh or Ayr was regarded, you know, as exotic. And I think they sort of stayed in the one place.

Dany: And they had one set of friends called the Reiningers who lived in Bothwell. So that was their entry into rummy playing and that kind of thing. Gin rummy.

Int: Gin rummy, but that's a great way of socializing. Absolutely.

And for yourself, did you kind of meet anybody then?

Dany: Not really not till I went to university.

Int : And so you enjoyed your school days?

Dany: I think so. Yes. Yeah.

Int: Good. And so what did you decide to study at university?

Dany: French and Psychology,

Int: But to get into university as well. It's very admirable as well, because it wasn't easy. And so which university? [Was it in] Glasgow?

Dany: Yes.

Int: And how did you enjoy that?

Dany: I think I enjoyed it too much because I got chucked out. After one year.

Int: Absolutely ideal.

Dany: And I wasn't a party girl. But I would stay up all night talking about the being and the non being and that kind of thing.

Int: Did you sit with a lot of times legs crossed, and look and discuss it all, very intensely?

Dany: Yes, yes, absolutely. I think that's the way to actually do it. Yeah. But then I joined the new, the Glasgow Jewish Student Society and the Young Zionists and that kind of thing.

Dany: But also my brother had his Barmitzvah, so we met more Jewish people that way. And somebody told my mother if he joined the Reform [Synagogue], he could do it in English. So we joined the Reform

[Synagogue], but he didn't do it in English. He had to do it in Hebrew as well.

Dany: And then my mother was friendly with somebody called Gertrude Bentheim. Gilda. No, Gilda was at university with me, but Gertrude was the mother, and Gertrude was the chairwoman of Wizo and said we pride ourselves on being very inclusive and all that. When she finished, my mother stood up and said, 'well, nobody's invited me back to their house and I've been coming.....',

Int: I think that is fantastic that she did that because yes, well done your mother.

Dany: So she became firm friends with Gertrude and Gertrude was the person who introduced me to Isi.

Int : So how did that happen?

Dany: Gertrude had a cocktail party. She invited my parents and she invited me and because she saw architects through her work. She did furnishings and things, so she invited Isi for the purpose of meeting me. And it worked.

Int: How romantic is that? So you left university?

Dany. No, I hadn't left yet. I was still there, and I had gone back to it.

Int: How did your mother take to it when you dropped out of that course?

Dany: Well, she was quite upset. But I always worked. I worked in Smith's bookshop, I did translations. I always worked. I did supply teaching and I knew I was going back to university the year after.

Int : So what did you go back to study?

Dany: Still doing the same things, but a year later, Psychology. And I was doing honours. I was doing honours Psychology, but when I met Isi I was doing senior honours,

Int: Right.

Dany: And I dropped everything because I didn't want to do anymore studying. I just wanted to be with him.

Int: Love. Yes, absolutely. Was Isi at that time based in Glasgow?

Dany: Yeah, he was based in Glasgow. He was an established architect. So, my mother thought it was Isi's fault I dropped out of university so she didn't like him for a start. And then I worked for Lufthansa for three and half years.

Int: Lufthansa airlines?

Dany: In Glasgow, in the office, yeah, and then? Then I had the children and then I thought I did social work at night and studied social work at night at Strathclyde and they said to me you really should do a degree. And I said, well I've got a degree almost in Glasgow, so Glasgow allowed me to go back, to do another year and gave me a degree.

Int : Oh good. So this was really good. And so did you do a post grad and social work or?

Dany: No. And then I finished my degree, did social work for about two months, Didn't like it. I found it too depressing. Because I was sent to Drumchapel and I was sent to G-d knows where. And then I decided to open a shop.

Int: And the shop's name was?

Dany: Strawberry Fields

Int Strawberry Fields was a very famous shop. Would you like to explain what Strawberry Fields was?

Dany: Well it was continental more than anything else and my mother helped me a lot at the beginning, and it just was quite successful.

Int: It was very successful.

Dany: Succès d'estime more than money. And what did you sell?

Dany: Children's clothes.

Int: It was, it was a beautiful shop. You always had beautiful windows at the front of the shop.

Dany: Well, that was a very good friend of mine who is an artist who did the windows and so that took care of the next 33 years.

Int: that's a long time. So I was going to ask, so when you got together with Isi. And did you immediately settle in the West End of Glasgow or not?

Dany: He was difficult to settle. He wouldn't settle. So we were always in the West End because I was.... I was with friends that in a, you know, shared flat.

Int: Which was regarded.... that would be regarded as quite unusual as well.

Dany: Yeah. And another point that my mother didn't like.

Int : Bohemian. Yes, it's a good name it's a good expression

Dany: Yes... We moved in together. Which was even worse.

Int: Absolutely. Absolutely. And was your mother still living in Motherwell?

Dany: No. She was living in Hamilton by then, in what she called the 'bungaloff'. Which she'd always wanted.

Int Yeah. And with your stepfather?

Dany: With my stepfather.

Int: Right. Yeah. And, was your brother.

Dany: He'd gone to Ireland to open the business that my stepfather was in, by then.

Int So he went to Ireland. You were leading an interesting lifestyle in Glasgow.

Dany: Yes.

Int : And I imagine that it would be quite fun as well, sharing a flat.

Dany: Yes.

Int: Well, yes, absolutely.

Int: And the West End has always been known as a fantastic, trendy area.

Dany: So, you know, you weren't conscious of that. You were just there. It wasn't. .. And my mother was really miserable with the man she didn't want. So that was the only thing that wasn't good.

Int: No. And so did that sort of start during the marriage,

Dany: Almost instantly. Yes.

Int: Right.

Dany: Yeah.

Int : Which is very difficult as well. And the fact that you weren't kind of at home to help would be difficult as well for her.

Dany: Yeah. But she actually moved in with me for a while in my flat that I shared with other people.

Int: That would have been interesting,

Dany: Yes.

Int : And so did she spend time saying I don't know how you can live like this. I've just tidied up this room.

Dany: and yes yes [she] cleaned up for me. And then when I moved in with Isi, she again was quite annoyed. But she was, and then she was very pleased when I got married, eventually even though it was registry office.

Int: So when did you get married to Isi?

Dany: In 1967,

Int: And so tell me about your children as well.

Dany: We had Mark in 1969, and then we had Saul in 70. 70 and Ruth in 73. And it was nice

Int: So. and did you find it quite difficult because you were by that time you had your shop as well?

Dany: No, I didn't have my shop until Ruth was about four, And she said when you've sold everything, will you come home again, that wasn't so easy, yeah.

Int: And was Isi away working quite a bit sometimes.

Dany: Yeah right. Yeah. Yeah.

Int : And so how did you like being married with young children living in the West End.

Dany: Well we had a lovely life and my mother once I had the children was lovely to my children and by that time my stepfather had died so she was there very often. And it worked out.

Int: And so did you mix much with the Jewish community then in Glasgow or?

Dany: I think I had a few friends from university who were Jewish and that's the way I mixed with them, but most of my friends were West End people who were..... Rather déclassé, not religious, and probably arty.

Int: And people that you'd met along the way.

Dany: Well, a lot of Isi's friends as well. A lot of architects, yeah.

Int: And so when did you move into this beautiful house

Dany: In 1982.

Int: It's absolutely gorgeous. It's a lovely house. And I think you and Isi....., it has a very strong aspect of happiness. I think you and Isi had a good life here. I

Dany: think, yeah, we had a really nice life here.

Int: Yes. And you have a wonderful view as well. And so when you look back, you've really done a huge amount. I know that you kind of have understated very much, Dany, really. To come here at such a young age and to have gone through living in an orphanage and the death of your father and moving countries. That's really a lot to cope with as a young child. And I think you have made a wonderful life for yourself.

Dany: I think I've been very, very lucky because my life started off not really very good, but it became better and better. So I'm very grateful for that.

Int : Yeah. So if you met somebody for the first time, what would you say were the highlights? Do you remember, for example, your first meeting? Do you remember very definitely your first meeting with Isi.

Dany: Yeah. I think probably that was my highlight, the highlight of my life, Yes.. And probably having the children.

Int: And your children went to local schools as well,

Dany: Yes.

Int: And so they don't live in Glasgow.

Dany: They don't live in Glasgow.

Int: So one lives in America, you said. And so do you get a chance to go over?

Dany: Either I go or he comes and I think he will be coming more often than I go now because I'm finding it difficult.

Int: And what does he do? He's a geneticist?

Dany: Right.

Int: Which sounds very impressive. So is he attached to a university?

Dany: Well, he went to university, he went to Cambridge, and then he went to MIT and then Stanford and then got married and they needed a lab each and Salt Lake City had a lab each for them. So they ended up in Salt Lake City.

Int: I mean to have been to Cambridge and MIT and Stanford is very impressive.

Dany: Yeah, but he's very, very bright.

Int: I think he picks [that] up from his parents as well. And your next son, Saul?

Dany: Saul went to Cambridge as well because he did architecture, first of all. But he knew he didn't want to do architecture; he knew he wanted to do films. So, he did his first degree there. And then, I think he went to New York to do a filmmaking course in the summer and then started as a runner on films and just got on with that.

Int: Wonderful. And your daughter.

Dany: Well, Ruth she has started lots of things, but. She's a journalist. Eventually she became an editor in a newspaper. But she's recently had a little boy; four years ago almost, and has not been working in that field. But she is going to do so again in London.

Int: And he is super cute because I bumped into one time outside the deli.

Dany: Oh yes.

Int: And I thought, really gorgeous.

Dany: Yeah..

Int: And I would imagine he brings you a lot of pleasure because they're great fun.

Dany: Huge amount of pleasure. Yes.

Int: So thank you very much for the interview.

Anything that you would like to ask for now, Myrna, because I think Danny's done incredibly well.

Int 2: Yes, I would. And you would be able to shut me up. So absolutely not. The only thing that strikes me. Right here is I don't hear any bitterness coming from you and that I just think is wonderful. You're not. You don't appear to be bitter and I think that's wonderful.

Dany: I've no reason to be bitter.

Int: I think I totally agree with Myrna actually. I think you have a wonderful attitude about life and you're incredibly positive, Dany, which comes over throughout our chat this afternoon. Because as I said, what you went through as a young child was really very traumatic and I just think it's incredible.

Dany: But I think as a young child, you deal with it differently, you know, and I don't know, it's in the past and. ...I think my mother had a much harder time of it,

Int: I think you have a wonderful attitude to life and your children are a great credit to you. And any time I saw you with Isi, you both just looked so happy together. It's lovely, it's lovely, and I think in these days it's unusual to find that as well. To find out your life's partner is quite something.

Dany: Well, I was very, very lucky.

Int: So was Isi.

Dany: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Int: Thank you very much for giving us your time today. It was a real privilege.

Dany: Thank you,

Int. Thank you.