**Rachael Cerrotti:** If I do this slightly to the left so I can see Mishy a little bit better, is that…

**John Scott:** No, I can definitely do that.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Just ah…

**John Scott:** Whatever, whatever’s gonna get…

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Sorry to my left...

**John Scott:** Got you.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Yeah.

**John Scott:** This.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Yeah, that’d be better. Great.

**Mishy Harman:** Rachael, can you introduce yourself?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Sure, so my name’s Rachael Cerrotti. I am a documentarian and an educator based here in Boston, which is my hometown. And, yeah, I’ve spent the last ten-plus years now retracing and researching my grandmother’s war story which is how she survived the Holocast.

**Mishy Harman:** What’s it like to spend so much time living the life of someone else?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Hmmm… It depends on the day. *[Mishy and Rachael laugh]*. Yeah, I don’t know if there’s any person ever in my life who I will have this type of closeness that I have had with my grandmother since she passed away.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The first time Rachael Cerrotti visited Israel was on a Birthright trip. It was 2007, and she was a freshman in college.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** And it got me. *[Rachael laughs]*. I mean, to be honest, what got me was hanging out with other young Jewish people whose identity felt similar to mine, which was like ‘we’re Jewish, but it’s like not this big thing.’ It was like my first introduction to like how to be Jewish without religion being a part of it. But also just like Israel got me, like I loved it, I felt like my soul was set free a bit in that country. And I just like fell in love, it felt like home immediately, and I… sometimes it’s hard to put words on like why it felt that way, but still to this day every time I go back I have a bit of an identity crisis of where I should be living because I just… I feel more myself when I am there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The next summer, unsurprisingly, Rachael was back.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** I ended up signing up for this like religious trip and we got to Israel and they were like “you’re going to seminary.” And I was like “what’s seminary?” *[Rachael and Mishy laugh]*. So I lasted like one day in seminary, and I like think I was the rebel because I was like, ‘you can see my shoulders!’

**Mishy Harman:** Wait, what is seminary?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Seminary is like the *yeshivah* for women.

**Mishy Harman:** OK.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Yeah. So, ummm… Anyways, I ended up finding myself in like a crash-pad of sort of nomads in *nachlaot* for about three months bartending on Ben-Yehuda Street.

**Mishy Harman:** In Jerusalem?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** In Jerusalem, yeah. So I was hooked on Israel.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The following year, back in Philadelphia, Rachael and her grandmother - Hana - started what they called “storytelling sessions.”

**Rachael Cerrotti:** I would go to her apartment, and she would talk and I would write.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hana told Rachael stories about growing up in Prague, about her parents, her brother, the war. And Rachael quickly discovered that her grandmother had also once been enamored with the land of Israel.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** She was absolutely like taken by the idea of being a pioneer when she was young. And, you know, the chapter of the youth movement, of the Zionist youth movement, that she was a part of was not like political or religious, it was much more focus on this idea of pioneering and she just like daydreamed so deeply about, you know, establishing a *kibbutz* and, you know, working with her hands. And she just was like totally taken by that pioneering spirit.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** When the time came for Rachael to select a place for her junior year abroad, the choice was pretty obvious.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** And so I think when I got to Israel, I certainly had - in the back of my head, in every class that I took - that this was an extension of her story.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** In the fall of 2009, Rachael enrolled at the Rothberg School for International Students at the Hebrew University.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** I remember that year with a lot of clarity in terms of like the different stages the year took.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** She lived in the dorms on Mount Scopus.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** And, you know, I was suddenly meeting all of these people from other countries and from other places, and I just like felt alive.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Before she knew it, Rachael made many new friends, from all over the world.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** It was just a beautiful year of spending a lot of meaningful time with a lot of people who are really different than me. We knew that we also living in a very complicated place, learning very complicated histories. We knew that we were surrounded by stories that had a lot of nuance. And a lot of black, a lot of white, and a lot of gray all swilled in together. In many ways you like see the world that is Jerusalem and the world that is Israel, and everything is so heavy and so intentional in a way, but also, you know… Sometimes it feels like we’re living in like this accident of history, right? And suddenly all of us were there from different countries, from different backgrounds, connected by these kind of like thin threads of interest or family history. And we’re… we’re living in this place that the rest of the world cares so much about, and yet we just are.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But of all these new friends, there was one guy who was going to change the rest of her life.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Ummm, yeah. Sergiusz.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Sergiusz.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** So Sergiusz and I became really really close, and we ended up just… I don’t know, just kind of attaching at the hip for the year. Yeah.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Rachael didn’t know it at the time, but it would be Sergiusz - a Catholic Pole - who would become her closest companion in uncovering her grandmother’s Holocaust story.

Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by PRX, and is produced together with Tablet Magazine.

Our story today, **“We Share The Same Sky,”** is the first episode-and-a-half of a truly gorgeous documentary podcast created by Rachael, together with Erika Lantz. The series takes us back and forth in time and in place. We’ll be in Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s, we’ll cross the Baltic Sea in the middle of the night, and we’ll even visit war-torn Damascus. It’s a dazzling, devastating and deeply hopeful journey. So hold on tight.

Here’s Rachael.

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**Bent Melchior:** When the Second World War ended, I mean, we were extremely optimistic. That was still even before we heard terrible things that happened in the camps. But we thought that mankind had suffered so much that they would understand that war was not the answer. We had lived to see miracles happen on the sea. And you know, you were with me, when I am standing there at the beach, looking at that water. I see myself on the bottom of that sea. And I think of these thousands of people who tried to come over the Mediterranean today and who are at the bottom of the sea. And it is a shame upon our time that we let this catastrophe happen. I don’t know how that should be forgiven.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** In most ways, my grandmother lived an ordinary life. She had three kids. Divorced once. Married twice. She was a custodian, then a nurse, then a teacher. When her kids graduated high school, she rented out their rooms for extra income. She swam in any water she could, no matter how cold. And she ate fire. She’d do this magic trick where she’d take a match or a birthday candle, light it, and then stick the flame in her mouth, to put it out.

As a grandmother, she’d let all us grandchildren make her these disgusting concoctions that she would promise to drink. Turkey fat, milk, hot sauce, orange juice. Juice of herring. We’d pour it all in. Then we’d run over to her, drop a little garnish on top and, in front of all of our parents, present her with our “cocktail.”She’d take the glass and chug it - the whole thing - then hand it back. Anything to make us laugh.

Her face looked like mine, but older.

In 2010, she died. In her bed, at home, surrounded by her family. It felt like a normal life. A good life. But there was something different about her. In the back of her head, she knew that she shouldn’t be here.

She could be in a ditch. In a grave. Shot in the woods. Buried in an unmarked plot of land. She could have sunk to the bottom of the sea. She could have poisoned herself. There were countless ways she would never have stepped foot in the home she died in. The idea haunted her. Especially as she lay on her deathbed.

She shouldn’t be here at all.

**Shoah Interviewer:** Today’s date is March 25th, 1998. We are in Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania, in the United States, and the language of the interview is English. Please tell us your name, your date of birth and your place of birth.

**Hana Dubova:** My name is Hana Seckel Drucker. My maiden name was Dubova. The male get Dub, the female get ‘ova’ at the end. I was born July 2nd, 1925, in Kolin, at that time Czechoslovakia.

**Shoah Interviewer:** Can you spell the name of the town that you were born?

**Hana Dubova:** K-O-L-I-N.

**Shoah Interviewer:** And where is this located?

**Hana Dubova:** It is like fifty kilometers east of Prague. It takes like one hour by train.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** My grandmother sat down to tape this video when she was seventy-three years old, more than twenty years ago. She’s sitting in front of the camera. It’s zoomed in on her, like a headshot. Her bookshelf is in the background. The interviewer’s off-screen. The video’s a recorded testimony, and it sits in an archive of thousands upon thousands of testimonies of Holocaust survivors. It’s four hours long.

I knew a version of her story as a kid. I knew she survived the Holocaust. That she was the only one in her family alive at the end of the war. That she escaped over and over again. I knew her home was covered in paintings and photographs of Prague. Masks and paperweights and postcards from different places. Pictures of family she lost and those who came after. Every piece of art in her house had a story. Sometimes we would break her stories. Sometimes at holiday meals we'd knock over the precious stemware. The sharp edges of the thick, red glass would cover the floor. The disposable pieces of her childhood memories laid out in front of her descendants.

I took her stories for granted at the time. But that’s the role of the grandchild. To accept what came before as normal. My grandmother was stateless for seventeen years. And the last time she saw her family was when she was fourteen.

I was twenty-one when she died. But in a way, I've spent more time with her after her death than I did when she was alive. Her history has become a delicate spider web, woven together by the thin threads of family stories, passed from one generation to the next.

In these stories, time isn’t chronological. The retelling of family memories has become the history itself. And, I want to invite you to come with me. Into the homes of strangers. To the places where people saved her life. Where a story of war is experienced by the next generation.

But first, I want to introduce you to my grandmother - Hana Dubova. Dubova means Oak Tree in Czech. My grandmother was strong like an oak tree. She knew that too.

**Hana Dubova:** I am extremely independent. I make my own decisions. I take my own consequences. When my grandchildren says, you know, “this isn’t fair, life isn’t fair.” I says, “nobody told you life is fair.” Life is not fair, but you have to deal with it.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** I grew up far from my grandmother. In Boston. But I went to college in Philadelphia, and it was during these years that my grandmother and I became close. She lived in the suburbs right outside of the city. I had asked her one day if she would tell me her story. She asked me why I cared. She told me I’d heard it before. I told I wanted to write it all down. Not the shorthand version, which she put like this.

**Hana Dubova:** Somehow for the good or for the bad, somehow it always worked out for me. Not always pleasantly, but it worked out. Everything works out if you live long enough.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** I wanted the whole story. So that’s what we did together. We told stories. She’d lie in bed. Underneath an oil painting of her mother as a young woman. I sat in a chair next to her. Looking at the two of them together. She talked. I wrote. I thought that that was the closest we’d ever be. During those fragile years at the end of her life. But then she died. And that’s when our lives became entwined.

Hana died in 2010. In the years after her death, I uncovered an incredible archive of her life. She’d left behind boxes upon boxes of letters and photographs and diaries. There were preserved albums dating back to the 1920s, and letters she’d sent to lovers. There were report cards and deportation papers and love notes from her parents censored by Nazis.

Then, amidst all of these papers, I found a plain manila folder. It had a note on it, written in red ink in her shaky cursive handwriting. She’d written my name. The note read, “For Rachael, so you’ll know a little about my life when I was your age.”

That’s how it started. After that, I spent hours on my bedroom floor reading her journals. Hours turned into days, into weeks. Then years. I organized everything she left behind. I copied every word from every page. I rewrote every diary. I scanned every photograph. I became the curator of my own museum. I was captivated by her story. I don’t know why. Maybe it was the journalist in me.

For years I did this. During this time, I moved back to Boston and was working as a photojournalist. I was living in a three-bedroom apartment with two girlfriends and traveled a lot for work. I’ve always had trouble staying in one place for too long.

All of my friends were making bold decisions for themselves, but not the kind of decisions like kids and marriage. We weren’t there yet. Some of them were moving to different countries and cities to follow their careers. Others were following romance. Some settled into more conventional jobs. You know, the kind that provides security and a steady paycheck. We were all just figuring it out. Barack Obama was president and change was happening. Life was moving and love was flowing. And my life was on the edge of exciting.

So that’s when I made a decision. It was 2014, four years since my grandmother died. I’d spent too many years buried in her story to not let it take me somewhere. So, I decided to literally follow in her footprints.

I decided I’d sublet my apartment, pack a backpack, and go live in every country she lived in. I would travel the way she did. I’d try to live life as closely as I could to the way she did. And I would track down all of the characters from her journals, all the names listed in her letters and documents. I would try to find the people who saved her life.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** How do you feel about this food Sergiusz?

**Sergiusz Scheller:** Are you making a video? Are you serious right now?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Umm hmm. I want you to open the last one and tell me about how you feel about more of the fried cheese.

**Sergiusz Scheller:** I feel morbid.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** You feel morbid?

**Sergiusz Scheller:** Yeah.

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Why do you keep eating it?

**Sergiusz Scheller:** Because it is so bad, but it’s so good. I mean it’s not good.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** So there’s this guy. This guy’s name is Sergiusz. Sergiusz and I met in August in 2009. In Israel. It was just a month after my grandmother and I started our storytelling sessions, the year before she died. Sergiusz and I were both studying abroad at Hebrew University.

It was one of the first nights at school and we were sitting on this playground by the student dorms. We were searching for free internet because we hadn’t set that up yet in our apartments. And it was that time of the school year where everybody’s becoming friends with everybody else, but you don’t quite know who will last. And we just hit it off right away.

He was this quick-witted Polish guy. When we met he was wearing a bright yellow t-shirt that had a cartoon of a clown vomiting a rainbow. We had a funny flirtation in the beginning of the year. We hung out a lot. And on occasion we would watch a movie and snuggle. Kiss. But we never talked about it. And then sometimes we’d be walking in a crowd of people and be in the back and, like by mistake, but not really by mistake, we would hold each other’s hand for like ten seconds and then walk away.

We developed this big group of close friends. We all came from different countries and spoke different languages. Some of us, like me, were Jewish. Others of us, like Sergiusz, were not. I think we were very much in love then. But we just weren’t at that place in our lives. He was twenty-one and I was twenty. We both had a lot of the world to see. But, we always stayed close.

Fast forward a few years to 2014, I told Sergiusz I was going to move to Europe to work on this documentary project. I told him I was going to retrace my grandmother’s refugee story.

I’d start in Prague to research the early years of her life. He was living in Poland then, and he immediately said he’d come see me while I was there. We began talking every day.

We sent songs back and forth. The first song he sent me was “Disclosure’s Latch.”I listened to it all the time.

I was in Boston, he was in Poland. He didn’t care about the six-hour time difference. He would stay up until like two in the morning so he could Skype with me while I ate dinner. And, within an hour of seeing each other in Prague, he said to me, “fuck it, I think I’m in love with you.” I said to him, “I think I love you, too.”

And it was decided. We were partners. That’s what we called it. Not boyfriend or girlfriend. Partners. We told each other one day we’d have the same passport.

The first night of our new relationship, we wandered Prague with some random Czech guys and drank homemade slivovitz. I remember sitting on the grass of a steep hill. In the distance we could see the Old Town Square and the river.

I whispered to Sergiusz, “isn’t it wild that this is where my grandmother is from.”

On that trip to Prague, I visited synagogues and cemeteries. Every corner was a landmark. In museums and concentration camps, I found my family’s name on the list of the murdered. I visited all of these places in the weeks after Sergiusz and I started dating. It felt like an obligation. Like the first step on my journey. I had to acquaint myself with the darkness. I had to acquaint myself with my grandmother’s loss. I felt guilty, though. Because as I toured each of these places and took pictures, Sergiusz texted me. I smiled everywhere I went. I blushed in the face of death because I felt loved.

The Holocaust is the most well documented genocide. From both the side of the perpetrators and the victims. Maybe that’s why so many of us find it so fascinating. There are so many stories to study.

**Hana Dubova:** I knew it was bad. But you know, nobody ever ever ever ever in the wildest dream thought about what we know today. About concentration camp. You know horror movies existed, Frankenstein existed, but nobody would ever ever ever imagine anything like this. Ever. It was beyond, beyond understanding. Beyond comprehension.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** In this story, Hana never sees her family again. They are deported to extermination camps. Her parents are murdered. So is her younger brother. And so were her grandparents. And her aunts. Her uncles. Her cousins. Her neighbors. Her classmates. But Hana lives. She remains one step ahead of the Nazis at each turn. She is never deported. She is saved by the kindness of strangers.

I became obsessed with this notion. Who are these strangers? What stories do they tell? What do they remember?

Sometimes it felt like a puzzle. My grandmother did have a thing for patterns. And dates.

We’ve always said that she would have gotten a kick out of the date of her funeral - October 10, 2010. Ten, ten, ten.

She had a thing for letters and for words and for languages. She spoke over six of them. In each country she lived in, she changed the spelling of her name. In Europe Hana was spelled H-A-N-A. In America it was spelled H-A-N-N-A. And she didn’t care when someone spelled it H-A-N-N-A-H. She always appreciated a good palindrome.

I’ve been researching the story of this podcast for the past ten years. There are a lot of patterns. A lot of recurring dates and places. There’s one date in particular that haunts me: September 29th.

This date changes my grandmother's life in 1938. And then again in 1943. And it changes my life in 2014. And then again in 2016.

I didn’t notice it at first. To be honest, it only became clear when it was all over. Maybe this date it is just a coincidence. Maybe it’s something more. Sometimes I don’t think about it at all. Sometimes it’s all consuming.

On September 29th, 2014, I packed a backpack of clothes and a suitcase of camera gear and moved to Europe. I went on a pursuit of my grandmother’s memory.

At the time, I didn’t recognize the significance of this date. I didn’t intentionally continue the pattern. And I certainly didn’t think that on another September 29th. One yet to come, one that seemed so far in the future. September 29th, 2016. That I, myself, would meet death.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey guys, it’s Mishy. We’ll get back to the story in just a minute, but I wanted to tell you about our new members only, private Facebook group. You all know we have a public Israel Story Facebook page, that’s where we post links to our episodes, make announcements about shows, and all kinds of things like that. That page has more than ten thousand ‘followers’ and will continue to operate just as it has thus far. But that page is more like an online billboard, a place where we talk *to* our fans. And we wanted to add a place where we talk *with* our fans. A place for a conversation to happen.

Israel Story began as a podcast for friends and family, and we still see it that way — the only difference being that our family has now grown by a few hundred thousand people. And we want you, our community of listeners, to have an Israel Story home - a closed Facebook group where you can safely discuss new episodes and old ones, ask us questions, and form connections with fellow listeners from around the world. It’s sort of the exclusive club of Israel Story fans.

So check out our new Israel Story Community group on Facebook! We can't wait to meet you and for you all to meet each other. Just head to Facebook, search for Israel Story, look for the pinned post at the top of our news feed and join the group. See you there!

And now, back to the story. As you’ll recall before the break Rachael Cerrotti - a Boston-based photojournalist - was about to set out in her grandmother’s footsteps. Here’s Rachael.

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**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** My grandmother once told me - the difference between her travels and mine was that she had to burn all of her bridges as she moved forward.

**Hana Dubova:** That bridge always burned. Or was destroyed. There was no way to go back again. Once you made another step, you couldn’t step back.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** On September 29, 2014, I moved to Europe. First I went to Poland to see Sergiusz. He gave me a home base during my travels. Someone to come back to. In the back of my head, it felt unfair. I had support when my grandmother didn’t. I was supposed to be doing this alone.

Then I went to Prague. I moved into the home of a stranger - a young woman from the Jewish community who was kindenough to let me live in her spare room. If I was going to live the way my grandmother did, I had to rely on people the way she did.

The nightmares came quickly. I dreamt I came home to Boston, and my friends looked through me like I was a ghost. One night I woke up certain that the building was on fire. My body burned. I ripped off the blanket. I curled my legs to my chest and rocked back and forth, like the Orthodox men I’d seen in prayer at the old synagogue earlier that week.

It was just the beginning of my trip, and already the loneliness was so deep. Already I couldn’t exactly explain to anyone what I was doing. Or why. I had no money. I’d given up my home. I’d separated myself from my friends. I felt isolated from everyone - even Sergiusz.

It was just me and my grandmother.

But I was committed to her. And her story. It felt more important than anything. Even my relationship with Sergiusz. Even though these two commitments never came into conflict - I knew.

September 29th, 1938. It’s a Thursday, and it’s raining in Prague.

Hana’s thirteen years old. Her brother’s nine. His name is Petr. They live with their parents in a modest second-floor apartment. It has a wrap around balcony that connects them to their neighbors and the communal toilet. It’s a school day. Her father sits at the breakfast table, and reads his favorite newspaper. It’s written in German, the most influential liberal-democratic newspaper in Czechoslovakia. The paper hides his face even as the corners fold over. Hana reads the headlines on the other side. It says something about Hitler wanting a part of Czechoslovakia, but she’s distracted by her own thoughts.She can’t stop thinking about a boy. A boy named Dasa.

**BBC Reporter:** We were waiting all very happily just now about twenty minutes ago with a rather threatening sky but not a particularly bad one. Suddenly rain began to fall and it got harder and harder until the tarmac of the airport is skiddy and flooded and everybody’s looking a little wet.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** When it’s time, Hana gathers her bag and takes the streetcar to school. She and her classmates bow to the teacher as they enter the classroom. Then they take their seats and sit straight with their hands behind their back. It’s the mandatory posture. In history class, she learns about the Great World War, which feels ancient. She’s taught that Czechoslovakia was created in 1918 at the end of that war. She understands that before her country gained independence, that it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And, she knows that her father fought in this war. But, it all feels irrelevant. It happened before she was born.

Hana goes directly home after school. She has to finish her homework before she can meet her friends at the gymnasium. And, maybe at the gymnasium she’ll see Dasa. She likes him so much.

At the end of that normal Thursday on September 29, 1938, Hana lies in bed. It’s become common to fall asleep to the sounds of her mother shushing her father as they listen to the radio. They’re listening to a news report. She hears the radio’s static, but can’t make out the words. She closes her eyes. She tells herself stories built from today’s memories. She narrates the stories with the words she keeps hearing from her parents and grandparents.

“It could never happen here.”

**BBC Reporter:** And now they bring her up. The police are coming forward and the Lord Chamberlain is seen down there. Waiting to greet Mr. Chamberlain. I believe he’ll be the first person to meet him as he steps out of the machine.

**Neville Chamberlain:** I want to thank the British people for what they have done. Next. And next I want to say that the settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem, which has now been achieved, is - in my view - only the prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace. *[Audience cheers]*.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Hana didn’t know it yet, but this is what happened on that September 29th, the Thursday in 1938: There was a conference held in Munich, Germany. Hitler had now been in power for five years. It had only taken him the first six months to consolidate power. He turned a democracy into a one-party dictatorship. He drafted emergency legislation that suspended civil liberties. He got rid of habeas corpus. He deputized the storm troopers. He targeted communists, socialists, state delegates, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witness, the mentally disabled, Germans of African descent and Jews. He over filled the jails. And then used schools and gymnasiums for his prisoners. And then when those were over capacity, he built concentration camps. He murdered his opponents. He burned their books. And he amended the German Constitution and gave himself emergency powers.

All in six months.

**Neville Chamberlain:** This morning I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler, and here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** In 1938, Hitler annexed Austria. Now, he was demanding to take control of a German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia called Sudetenland. He was threatening a European war if he didn’t get what he wanted. So,his fellow Europeans complied.

**Neville Chamberlain:** We, the German Führer and Chancellor, and the British Prime Minister, have had a further meeting today and are agreed in recognising that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for the two countries and for Europe. *[Audience cheers]* We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German naval agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again. *[Audience cheers]*.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** The leaders of Great Britain, Italy and France signed what was called the Munich agreement. They agreed to let Germany annex a part of Czechoslovakia. In exchange for Hitler’s pledge of peace, they gave away their neighbor. The Czech government wasn’t even invited to attend the negotiations.

Everyone knew what this meant. At least everyone in Czechoslovakia knew what this meant. The Munich Agreement? The loss of land? Getting annexed by Germany? This was a death warrant.

**Hana Dubova:** We were told there was going to be a war so we were exercising with gas masks and how to crawl under the school desks and so on.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** That’s Hana again. My grandmother.

**Hana Dubova:** Because we were told that either the English are going to gas us or the German are going to gas us. Somebody is going to gas us.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** The Nazis paraded into Prague six months after the Munich Agreement was signed.

Czechoslovakia was no more.

**Hana Dubova:** Everybody was trying to get out. Even my parents were trying to get out. Everybody was looking for a relative outside of the German Reich and my grandmother had a step-sister in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** So Hana’s father wrote to this relative. He asked them for an affidavit - basically, a pledge of financial sponsorship if he could get them to America. This would help them get a visa.

**Hana Dubova:** And they said it’s not so easy for us. And I knew that they were trying to get out. We all were trying to get out and they told that I should learn, they bought a knitting machine, that I should learn how to knit sweaters on the knitting machine so we could make a living wherever we would immigrate to.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Hana’s mother was reschooling herself in baking and sewing. Everyone was prioritizing learning a trade.

**Hana Dubova:** And the country which they applied to said “no, no, no.” But the one country they said we are going to go to Uganda. Uganda is the country which wants you, which could take you, not wants you, but could take you. And I wrote it down U-G-A, looked at the atlas, couldn’t find the country, no where, find out it’s way out in Africa. But it never came to pass. They never left.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Uganda was just one of many places proposed by the Zionist movement as a homeland for the Jews. Centuries of religious persecution were now enclosed by Hitler’s propaganda and the Jews of Europe were desperate for a solution. The antisemitism had been subtle before.

**Hana Dubova:** We were always taught not to make waves. We were taught, blend into the woodwork. If somebody calls you some kind of a name, you know ‘Dirty Jew’ or something, that was about the worst. We were never physically beaten up. We were taught, let it pass. Let it go. I think the parents went through it. The grandparents went through it. They survived. So they felt, you know, don’t answer. Don’t go back. Don’t fight for yourself.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** After the Nazi occupation, Anti-Jewish laws were put in place quickly. Ghettos, ration cards, the freezing of financial assets, restrictions on professions for the parents and education for the kids. The social and financial rights of the Jewish community were stripped.

**Hana Dubova:** The war came to me in coming to school and saying Jewish students are forbidden. Not not permitted - but forbidden - to enter these premises. That is how the war came to me. Czechoslovakia didn’t exist anymore. We were the protectorate of the German Reich.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** That was in March, 1939. Hana turned fourteen the following July.

**Hana Dubova:** And there was a boy whom I liked, I got kissed the first time, on my fourteenth birthday, under the table and that was in Prague.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** The story goes that Hana dropped her fork at dinner. When she went to pick it up, her crush, Dasa, met her there and kissed her. It was quick.

**Hana Dubova:** And I thought that I never wanted to crawl from under the table. I’m going to beg. Because everyone is going to see that I have been kissed under the tableand I really wanted to be with him.

**Jan Masaryk:** No one knows what is going to happen within the next twenty-four or forty-eight hours. I don’t think that either Chamberlain or Hitler knows at this minute.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Jan Masaryk - the Czech diplomat in London.

**Jan Masaryk:** But one thing is very definitely sure. If the war starts, it will be Hitler who is the guilty party.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Everything was changing. Hitler had lied. Sudetenland, the part of Czechoslovakia he got in the Munich Agreement, was just the tip of the iceberg in his quest to conquer Europe. Now there were threats of other countries being occupied.

**Jan Masaryk:** We may have war ever before I finish this little talk or we may have another attempt at negotiations. If there is even a vestige of the Munich spirit left to initiate these negotiations,they are doomed to be a dismal failure. The only possible chance of success without bloodshed is for Hitler to climb down from the Trojan Horse on which he has galloped from Munich to Berlin, and then to Vienna, and Prague and so forth. And now towards Warsaw. From now on he must walk, even walk backwards a bit. Let me be perfectly frank (I believe I have the right to be so): If Hitler attempts another bloodless victory for vulgar gangsterism and the world, including the United States of America, let him get away with it, I have no illusions about the future of the European civilization. And what’s more, we deserve what is coming to us.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Five days later, Germany invaded Poland from the west. A couple weeks after that, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east. The war had begun. It was obvious now. Neither Hana’s family nor Dasa’s family would be able to get out.

But there were some options for the children. Rescue missions were set in motion. The Kindertransport is probably the best known. That was organized by the British and saved about ten thousand Jewish children by bringing them to England.

In America, a senator from my home state in Massachusetts proposed a bill to congress for a similar plan in the United States. But public opinion said no. The wife of the US Commissioner of Immigration, who happened to also be the cousin of President Roosevelt, publicly stated about the Jewish kids, quote “twenty thousand charming children would all too soon grow into twenty thousand ugly adults.”

Such racism didn’t feel unique at this time. Walls were being built around borders. In the cases of some countries, like Czechoslovakia, the walls kept people in. And in other places, like America, the walls were built to keep people out.

But Hana was lucky. And so was Dasa. They were members of the Zionist Youth Movement. And that gave them an option to leave.

**Hana Dubova:** Let’s go. Let’s go to *Hachshara*. *Hachshara* means preparation to toil the land in Palestine. If the British would allow that.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** The Zionist movement applied to an organization called the ‘Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.’ And it was because of them that my grandmother’s group of friends was saved.

**Eva Bergmann:** I actually know the backstory of this. I found it. Do you know the story behind all this?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** I don’t know. Either way it might be a different story. So I would love to hear your...

**Eva Bergmann:** OK, it was so amazing. One time, I…

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** That’s Eva Bergmann, Dasa’s daughter. Dasa, Hana’s first love.

Our families have been friends for four generations, but I only got close with them when I started researching my grandmother’s life. On this day, we are sitting with her brother Michael and his son. We are at Michael’s home in Copenhagen, eating cake and drinking tea while reading the letters and memoirs written by Hana and Dasa. So here’s the story.

**Eva Bergmann:** I, I have lived a lot abroad and one time there was a little private library in the place where I was, it was a big place with a lot of people, and I think someone put it by my door, *Female Saints East and West*. And then it spoke about all these women who were really amazing women in Christianity and Hinduism and all this stuff. And then there was one little chapter about Judaism. It said, in Judaism there are no saints. It doesn’t exist. But there is one woman, if there should be. And she went with her dad to Palestine like maybe a hundred years ago. A little bit earlier than that. And there was no infrastructure. There was a lot of malaria. And it was really really poor. And so she took it upon herself to help people. And so what she did, she went back to the US and raised money to educate some nurses.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** This woman, Henrietta Szold, was born in Baltimore in 1860. At the age of forty-nine, she began campaigning to establish health and social welfare services for the Arabs and the Jews of Palestine. This was her life’s work. And it extended to protecting the persecuted children in Europe during World War II.As Eva continues the story, you can hear her brother Michael murmuring responses in the background.

**Eva Bergmann:** And what happened was when Hitler took over. She realized that she couldn’t save everyone. But she could try to save the children. And at that time the British had a deal with the Ottoman Empire that there could only be this many Jews coming to Palestine a year. So they went to Denmark and from there they would then go to Palestine.

**Hana Dubova:** I was one of the chosen ones. I learned later that you were not just picked to go. The parents paid quite a large sum of money to get their children out. My brother couldn’t go because he was young. Too young.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** My grandmother said it was like receiving a lottery ticket to be allowed to leave.

**Hana Dubova:** We stood in front of the Gestapo for night and days to get exit permits. To leave. The war already was declared. But we did leave. We did go by train through Berlin to Denmark.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** Hana had no idea that this would be the beginning of nearly two decades as a stateless person. It was just the first stop in her refugee story.

**Hana Dubova:** I for one thought that I’m entering a big adventure. I was really sort of, almost happy that I at this age, am going to this adventure, being alone, and going to a strange country and going to make it on my own. I never believed and I don’t think they ever believed, that this is the last time that we see each other.

**Rachael Cerrotti (narration):** In Prague, I spend hours at the train station. I watch the trains come and go and imagine Hana’s departure. I see it in a string of black and white snapshots. Hana’s head peeking out of the train window.Her family on the platform.She waves at them furiously. Her mother wipes her eyes with a handkerchief. Her father stands with one hand on his wife’s waist. The other handon his son’s shoulder. No one is sure what comes next. I imagine all of the parents as they stand there. They exchange glances, seeking approval from each other. They need to know that they’re doing the right thing by saying goodbye. They need to believe it’s safer to send their children into the unknown than to have them stay home.

The grief fills the station like a thick fog. The whistle blows. The train jumps forward. It begins to move. First slowly. Then faster.And now to full speed. The still frames of the train become a blur. But Hana’s parents remain frozen. They are the last frame in Prague.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Rachael Cerrotti. Erika Lantz co-produced.

**Mishy Harman:** So Rachael, we just heard the first episode-and-a-half of a seven-part series. What are people gonna hear next?

**Rachael Cerrotti:** Yeah, so… It’s not gonna go where you think it’s gonna go. I’ll say that.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Rachael’s spectacular podcast, called *We Share The Same Sky,* documents her decade-long journey to retrace her grandmother’s World War II story. You can find it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts and anywhere else you find your podcasts. You can also find it on Facebook and Instagram under “Share The Same Sky.” Each episode comes with photographs, videos, and a curriculum that can be used in the classroom. Learn more at sharethesamesky.com.

*We Share The Same Sky* was made possible by the USC Shoah Foundation. Hana’s story is just one of nearly fifty-five thousand testimonies of Holocaust and other genocide survivors and witnesses in their archives. It’s also supported by Echoes & Reflections, a program for Holocaust education thoughout the United States.

Now that you’ve heard the first episode-and-a-half, I’m absolutely sure you’ll run to download the rest of the series. I listened to it in one go. Episode after episode after episode. And, I simply cannot recommend it enough. It’s a true work of art - poetic, informative, enthralling - and just like the best binge-worthy TV series, it’s full of countless twists and turns that will rattle your soul. So, go and download it - *We Share The Same Sky.*

You can hear all *our* previous episodes on our site,israelstory.org, or by searching for Israel Story on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or anywhere else you usually get your podcasts. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story.

And there’s something really simple you can do right now that will make a big difference. We’ve already more than doubled our audience this season. And it is, in large part, thanks to you. In the Apple-centric world in which we live, the single best way for a podcast to grow and reach new ears is to have as many reviews and ratings on Apple Podcasts as possible. So, if you like our show, go to Apple podcasts, give us those five shiny stars, and write a rave review. It’s easy, it works, and it literally takes less than a minute.

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Israel Story is brought to you by PRX, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine.

Our staff is Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Yoshi Fields, Shai Satran, Maya Kosover, Roee Gilron, Joel Shupack, Sharon Rapaport and Rotem Zin. James Feder and Niva Ashkenazi are our wonderful production interns. Jeff Umbro, from The Podglomerate, is our marketing director. Sela Wasiblum mixed the episode.

I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back very very soon with a new Israel Story episode. So till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

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