

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives

Oral History Interviews of the
Kean College of New Jersey
Holocaust Resource Center

Interview with Lilly Gottlieb
February 7, 1989
RG-50.002*0034

PREFACE

On February 7, 1989, Lilly Gottlieb was interviewed on videotape by Bernard Weinstein and Dvorah Lichtstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

Summary of the
Interview with Lilly Gottlieb
February 7, 1989

Lilly Gottlieb was born in Vienna, Austria on May 20, 1925. She did not experience overt Antisemitism until after the Anschluss. Following Kristallnacht, her mother's wool yarn business was taken away and several Jews were taken to Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany. Lilly's great uncle was deported to a concentration camp at this time. His ashes came back in an urn with a note explaining his supposed attempted escape. Since her parents had money in banks in the United States, they were able to get visas. Her father left for Belgium in March 1939. In May 1939, Lilly and her mother traveled to Belgium. After the invasion of Belgium by the Germans, her father was shipped to St. Cyprien, then Les Milles and Gurs, all concentration camps in France. Her father was saved from Gurs by his American visa. At the time, Lilly considered this an adventure, but she now realizes how horrible the experience was. Her family had safe passage documents and they were able to leave for Casablanca in January 1942. They then went to Cuba where she lived for six years. She first came to the United States in 1948. Then she returned to Cuba in 1952 and met her husband there. She left Cuba in 1961 to escape Fidel Castro's regime.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Lilly Gottlieb
February 7, 1989**

01:00:00

Born in Vienna, Austria, 1925. 1988 marked 50 years after the Anschluss. Several colleagues who experienced it had a reunion. All were in the same class in Jewish school. Those who survived the Holocaust gathered together. Many memories were rekindled by the reunion. She wanted to go to a Jewish school. At first there was little overt Antisemitism. Anschluss resulted in many Jews coming into Jewish school.

01:04:00

Zionism attracted her. Gave her a sense of belonging. Came from Jewish rather than assimilated family. Parents not strictly observant, but ancestry was Hasidic. Mother was a businesswoman. Shared holidays with grandparents and extended family. Antisemitism was more verbal than physical. She preferred to be with more "Modern" Jews. Father in import/export business. Mother in wool and yarn business.

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After Kristallnacht, her mother's business was taken away. Lilly was an only child. She went to a Jewish Gymnasium.

01:10:00

Felt endangered when Germans marched into Austria. Remembers a song with words. "When Jewish Blood Runs Off Our Knives." Felt taunted, degraded. After Kristallnacht, several Jews were taken to Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany; some didn't return. At that time, her teacher cautioned them to take off their glasses, so that glass wouldn't get in their eyes if stones were thrown. One of her great uncles was taken away twice. The second time, an urn came back with his ashes. Note said he had tried to escape. Lilly didn't believe this.

01:13:00

People didn't really believe these things would happen. Parents had money in the United States and were able to get American visas. Some people got legitimate, some got bogus American visas. Many felt this couldn't last. Parents were Polish Jews. Many Polish Jews identified with the Kaiser. Family members left gradually after Kristallnacht. Her father left in March 1939. Mother and she left in May. Mother tried to settle her business.

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01:16:00

Belgium was the only place they could go to. It was not their choice. Mood was sad as relatives were leaving. She feared being stranded in Germany. Took plane to Brussels, Belgium. Parents had some money. Had an apartment. Encountered Antisemitism in Antwerp, Belgium. Went to school that taught in Flemish. This was on a lower level from the school she attended in Vienna. Jewish students stuck together.

01:19:00

After invasion of Belgium, father (A German National) was shipped to camp (St. Cyprien) in the south of France. She was later sent to Les Milles. With her American visa, she went to Brussels. Mother made contact with guides who took them to Paris then to territory controlled by the Vichy government. From there, they contacted her father. Occasionally he was allowed to go on leave. Les Miles was a holding camp for prisoners. The Vichy regime sent most prisoners to Gurs, then east. Luckily, her father was saved by his American visa.

01:22:00

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Lilly and her mother probably still had some funds. Lilly had to stand in line for food. At the time they were there, the Vichy government left them alone. At one point, they could have been taken to Gurs, but managed to use their money to get visas. This saved their lives. At the time, she was about 15 years old.

01:25:00

She was actually proud of herself at the time. Not as horrible as it seemed later. Saw it as an "adventure" As she thinks about it now, it was "life or death." Many didn't believe, had little foresight about what would happen. The things she did were minor compared to what her parents had to do. They were in Marseilles, France. Because of money they were not hungry.

01:26:00

Had a "safe conduct" document. Left in January 1942 and went to Casablanca, Morocco. They stayed in a beach resort. 800 people went to Cuba from there. All crowded together. In Jamaica, one person was taken off who was believed to be a German spy. She spent six years in Cuba and then went to the United States. Her sons were born in Cuba. Father's relatives in Poland were most likely killed.

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01:29:00

Most relatives who stayed in Vienna were gone; so were those who were in the south of France. In Cuba, news came to them rather slowly. Jewish community in Havana, Cuba marched in solidarity with their co-religionists. But little else was done. No schooling in Cuba. Went to college in the United States. Got credit for life experiences.

01:32:00

12 years in Cuba overall. Came to the United States in 1948. Went back to Cuba in 1952, then in 1961 left to escape Castro. Met husband through her mother. The Holocaust comes up very often in discussion with children.

01:34:00

Husband thinks about the Holocaust all the time. At first, it was necessary to forget as a "defense mechanism." Those who dwelled on it too much suffered greatly. For her, it wasn't too traumatic. She was always so Jewish oriented. Most assimilated Jews had a tougher time.

01:37:00

Thinks more than half of all Austrian Jews escaped before the final solution. These were Jews who were forewarned. People were proud at that time of speaking German without a Jewish accent. She considers this ironic.

01:40:00

In her case having Jewish friends gave her a stronger identity. Yet she and her family had Gentile friends before things got worse. One uncle consorted with Gentiles. Shocked when they didn't want to associate with him anymore.

01:43:00

Thinks there is stronger identity among Jews today. She has been back to Vienna twice since. Sensed Antisemitism the first time, but not the second. This was after Waldheim. Austria now more prosperous. She doesn't feel she would boycott German/Austrian culture, but she doesn't consider being Austrian a compliment.

01:46:00

Talks about her Holocaust experiences with her children. Especially husband's story. He is a survivor as well. Wonders how

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people could behave with blind obedience. She was against the Vietnam war and would have stood by her children if they had resisted.