

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

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

**Interview with Herma Rappaport
May 22, 1989
RG-50.002*0045**

PREFACE

On March 25, 1987, Herma Rappaport was interviewed on videotape by Dvorah Lichtstein, and Bernard Weinstein 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 Herma Rappaport
May 22, 1989

Herma Rappaport was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1924, one of two children. When the Nazis took over Austria in 1936, life became difficult for Herma's family. Herma's father was arrested. When Kristallnacht came on November 9, 1938, the Gestapo came, and Herma's family was put under house arrest for five days. A Gentile neighbor helped the Rappaport's by storing many of the family's valuables for them, at great risk to herself. Soon after, Herma and her mother moved to the Jewish section of Vienna shortly thereafter. Herma's father returned from captivity. He had been beaten, and suffered a stroke. Herma was sent out on the Kindertransport. She rode on a train to Holland and from there went on to London, England, where she lived with a Jewish doctor and his family in the Woolwich section of the city. She also lived in a convent and stayed in Wales briefly when war broke out. During the "Blitz" she witnessed the German bombing of London. During the war, she also stayed at the home of Lady Goldsmith, organizer of the Kindertransport. Herma's mother died in April 1944 in Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Her father was sent to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland in May of the same year. He did not survive. Herma emigrated to the United States in 1948.

**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Herma Rappaport
May 22, 1989**

01:00:00

Herma was born in Vienna in 1924. Her childhood was happy until she heard of what was going on in Germany. She had a nightmare about being separated from her parents when she was about 13 years old. Herma remembers when Hitler marched into Austria in February 1938. Her father had warned the family to leave Austria, but no one believed him.

01:04:00

Herma's brother and cousin were briefly arrested after the Anschluss, but they were let go. Herma had a Nazi teacher who segregated the Jewish students. The teacher was an "illegal" Nazi, (before the Anschluss). In May, all Jewish students were transferred to a Jewish school.

01:07:00

On Kristallnacht, the Gestapo came. Herma's father had already been arrested. Jews were not allowed to wear insignia. Everyone else had to wear the Swastika. Herma's father hid jewelry, (which was illegal for Jews to own), in the tank of a toilet.

01:10:00

Herma tried to defy antisemites by advertising her Judaism. Her family was Orthodox. Her grandfather came from Poland. Herma went to Talmud Torah. She remembers the celebrations of Jewish holidays and her brother's bar mitzvah.

01:13:00

Except for the aforementioned Nazi teacher, Herma never felt ostracized for being Jewish until 1938. Most of her friends were Jewish. She moved in a Jewish circle. Her mother came from Czechoslovakia and her father from Poland.

01:16:18

There was a great deal of activism. Herma was a Zionist. Her family was ready to go to Shanghai, China, (no visa was needed), when her father was arrested. Herma was supposed to go to Palestine. She later went on the Kindertransport (children's transport).

01:19:00

On Kristallnacht everything was burned. Herma was under "house arrest" for five days. A Catholic neighbor let Herma's mother store things in her apartment. This woman fed Herma's family for five days. The Nazis observed them when they brought things to the woman's apartment. This Catholic woman faced great danger in helping the family.

01:22:00

Herma moved with her mother to the Jewish section of Vienna. The apartment was bare. The Nazis took virtually everything the family owned. They did not know when her father would be released.

01:25:00

The Germans gave Herma 50 Marks for the furniture. They owned only that, which they could carry to the neighbor. They asked the neighbor to watch for Herma's father. He returned, but he had been beaten and he suffered a stroke shortly after his return.

01:28:00

Herma's mother's brother died in Dachau concentration camp in Germany. His ashes were sent back to the family. Herma made make-believe curtains from tissue paper. The family stayed for a few months. They never left the apartment.

01:31:00

Herma does not recall her non-Jewish neighbors. She feels she may be shutting out something she doesn't want to remember. Herma doesn't remember her brother being with her, although he was. He left after she did.

01:34:00

Herma thinks her mother sold some jewelry to get food money. Herma's mother died in Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia in April of 1944, and her father was sent to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland shortly thereafter.

01:37:00

Herma's brother was probably still going to school, but Herma no longer went. Her parents decided to send her to England where her grandmother lived. She was told she was going.

01:40:00

Herma remembers a "scary" train ride with the SS accompanying them. She still cannot get over saying good-bye to her mother. Everyone who came to their apartment later perished. Herma remembers her mother's face. She crossed the border and felt "free." The children were of all ages.

01:43:00

The children were singing and Herma felt human. They landed in Dover, England, and then went to Euston Station. Herma sat in a big room, she could neither speak nor read English. She was one of the last to be picked up. Herma was picked up by her cousin, her grandmother's nephew. She couldn't stay with her grandmother because her grandmother could not afford it.

01:46:00

Herma met the people she was to live with, Dr. and Mrs. Coleman. At first she resisted going. They lived near Woolwich Arsenal. Bombs were being exploded there.

01:49:00

Herma feels that she never gave her host parents the affection that she should have. She remembers wanting a hat and not getting the one she wanted. Herma went to a convent for a few months. The nuns there were very respectful of her religion.

01:52:00

When World War II broke out, she was taken to Wales for a while. She was in London when the "Blitz" was on. Herma remembers the Thames river being on fire and remembers "Molotov Baskets," clusters of bombs exploding on the streets. She also remembers bomb shelters. She was periodically "farmed out" to her grandmother.

01:55:00

Finally, Herma refused to go to the shelter. Her grandmother lived through the war. Herma's brother had a visa to go to America, but he was interned in England for a while. A cousin also came to England. The rest of Herma's family perished. Her father had relatives who had lived in Poland. In 1939, Herma was accepted as a "charity case" in a boarding school.

01:58:00

Herma was sent to live at the home of Lady Goldsmith, who had organized the children's transport. She also stayed with Dr. Coleman's brother for six to eight months. Herma wanted to be a doctor, but as an alien, she was only allowed to be a nurse.

02:01:03

Finally, her brother insisted that she come to America. Herma learned about the fate of her parents from a neighbor in Vienna and a cousin. Her mother died in 1944 on the operating table in Theresienstadt concentration camp. Her father was sent to Auschwitz concentration camp in May 1944. Herma was sent a letter which stated that anyone who was more than 50 years of age did not survive Auschwitz.

02:04:00

Herma's parents were able to write letters from Vienna until 1942. Herma never knew precisely when her father went to Auschwitz. Herma came to the United States in 1948. She wants to return to Vienna to visit some graves, but she doesn't think that she would be comfortable.

02:07:00

Herma's future husband was a fraternity brother of her brother. She has three children, two daughters and a son. Herma also has one grandchild. It is too painful to talk about her experiences, even now. She wonders why she was spared and feels guilty. Herma thinks she would have done the same for her children. Her only message is "don't forget."