Good afternoon. My name is Selma Dubnick. I'm a member of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at the Sterling Library of Yale University.

Sharing the interview with me is Dr. Henry Kaplowitz. We are privileged to welcome Mrs. Susanne Prager, a survivor presently living in New Jersey who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Welcome, Mrs. Prager.

Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Thank you. Mrs. Prager, I wonder if you would tell us where you were born and what it was like growing up in the town that you were born in.

I'm glad to do so. I was born in Upper Silesia. The town was, at that time, called Oppeln. Now it's Poland, and it's called Opole.

I actually was, more or less, born already into the Nazi time of Germany. So my memories of Germany are not really that beautiful. However, from what I heard my parents talk about, they always told me that it was very nice before that, that people were very sociable together, and everything was beautiful and peaceful.

I mean, my parents grew up under the kaiser. And they had gone through World War I and the Weimar Republic. Everything was fine. However, by the time I was born, Hitler already was on the rise. And in the beginning naturally, as a child, you don't feel it too much.

And from what my parents used to tell me, there used to be fights between the Nazis and the communists. My father had a store right in the center of our town. And right around that square used to be fights, terrible fights between the two parties. And at times, my parents even were afraid to take us outside, because there were really fights going on in the streets.

We were a very happy family. My grandparents lived not too far away in another town where my mother came from. It was called [? Ratibor. ?] And my grandfather, too, had a store in that particular town. And I had a very loving family of my aunts, and uncles, and cousins. As I say, we were a really happy, close-knit family.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

I have one sister who's a little younger than I. We were the two girls.

What was her name?

Her name is Vera.

And your cousins, did you see them frequently?

Some of my-- I mean, I have to mention one thing. Most of my cousins are much older than my sister and I, because my father was the youngest child in the family. It was a large family. So by the time he got married and had children, the others were older.

However, on my mother's side, yes, I had cousins who were more or less my age group. And they lived in Berlin. So we didn't see each other that often. However, they once in a while would come to visit us. Or we would go once in a while to visit with them.

You mentioned the fights between the Nazis and the communists.

Right.

And your parents were afraid to let you go into the street. Did they also, at that particular time, fight with the Jews? Were they--

No.

Did you see signs--

No, there was no-- no, no, no. There was no-- no. There was no fight between Jews and anybody else at that point. No. To illustrate, I'll tell you what happened.

I had started to go-- that was my first year of school. And I remember seeing a swastika on the wall. And I didn't know what it was. And it was in the winter time with the snow. So I took snow. And I made a swastika.

In the snow?

No, no, not in the snow-- on the wall, with the snow. And somebody hit me with a snowball, which then-- my mother was with me. She pulled me away. She said, are you crazy? Why are you doing that?

And that man was a communist who had seen me doing it. And I was a little child. I was maybe five or six years old. And he somehow resented that I did that. That's the only experience I personally have.

You mentioned that your father had a store. What type of store was it?

It was a men's clothing store and sportswear, like that.

And did your mother work?

My mother-- no, she didn't work. She did help my father in the store at times, and that was it. She didn't work at all.

Was your--

What-- oh, sorry.

Was your family religious?

No. I would say we were what you call today conservative. We had a beautiful synagogue. I brought you the picture of that synagogue. In that synagogue, the men and the women sat separated.

However, we had an organ, which made it very beautiful. As a matter of fact, if I might mention it, Leo Baeck was, once upon a time-- as a matter of fact, I think he was the first rabbi in our congregation.

Interesting.

Yeah.

What was it like going to school in your little town?

It wasn't very nice. As a matter of fact, I would say it was rather awful. In the beginning, it wasn't bad. When I started off, we were five Jewish girls in my class. But little by little, people dropped out. Either they moved away, or they emigrated.

At the end, I was the only one left in class. And I was really shunned by the rest of the students. I had to sit by myself in

the back of the class. And really, nobody was allowed to bother with me, not to speak to me, or-- you know.

And whenever something was mentioned-- and it was mentioned quite often-- about Jews, everybody would turn around and laugh at me. Ha, ha, there you see what's happening-- when, actually, they never spoke in a very positive way about Jews. It was always very negative, about the crimes Jews had committed, and whatever.

And the worst I remember is when Austria, at that time-- the time of the Anschluss, they called it. At that time, I was in school. And it was discussed back and forth about how wonderful, now they're going to get rid of the Jews there, and all that. And I'm pretty good in history.

And when the teacher asked questions, I raised my hand, and I knew the right answer. And he looked at me. And he said, gee, how come that you know so much, about Jewish?

How did that make you feel?

Terrible. Terrible, frustrated. And my mother, when I left to go to school in the morning-- I'm a very outspoken person. My mother would say to me, please keep your mouth shut, don't mention anything, you can get us into trouble.

Had you had any non-Jewish friends prior to that?

Yeah. I mean, before it really got bad, yes, I did. Yes.

And did they stop being friends with you?

Exactly. They turned their back on me. Yes. Yes. As a matter of fact, if it's of any interest to you, I can tell you one little episode that happened to me, which was terrible.

I had a Jewish girlfriend. And the two of us-- it was a small town. At that point, there may have been 50,000 people, something like that. We were walking on the main street. And we are kids. We were laughing.

And two young girls-- you see, little by little, everybody came in those uniforms, if you recall-- BDM, which means Bund Deutscher Madel, which means Organization of German Girls, something like that. They wore the brown uniforms. And while we were passing, we were laughing.

And all of a sudden, they were running after us-- and not only they, but the whole hoard of real rabble chasing us. And we didn't know what to do. We ran. We ran.

And finally, there was a Jewish pharmacy. We know the people. And we went into that pharmacy. And they hid us. And what happened is they kept on throwing rocks and everything against that pharmacy. And we waited for about an hour, something like that, till they finally had left.

And then there was an old lady happened to come as a customer, a Jewish lady whom we knew, who lived in my girlfriend's building. And she took us home. She walked us home.

But then, later on, those girls came to my girlfriend's house and told her that they wanted to have me punished, because I laughed at them, and they wore a uniform. But they really wanted to do-- they wanted to blackmail my parents. So my father said, well-- they didn't come to our house.

They went to the other people's house. So my father said, well, next time they come, take their names so that we know whom we deal with, which they did. And that was the end of it.

How many Jewish families were there living in your town?

As I say, I was really too young to exactly know. I would say roughly maybe 200, something like that, just about. And

many of the things I know because my cousins, who were older than I, were talking about it. That's how I know some of it.

You had mentioned to me earlier that your parents sent you to a boarding school--

Yes.

--later. Was it because of the situation in the school, in the town--

It was.

--in the beginning.

It was, yes, because of that. Yes. I couldn't make any headway. And really, I was-- they just gave us the lowest marks you could possibly get not to promote us.

Anyways, the myth is that the Jewish children are so smart. And they wanted to show, no, you are not that smart. Whatever, they tried. They really tried.

And not only that. I think I might not even have been that good, because I was really influenced by what happened. I mean, when you have to live with something like that, with the frustration like that as a child, it's very hard to concentrate anyhow. So my parents sent me to a school in a bigger city, which was called Breslau. And I went to that school, which was a Jewish school.

Did your sister go with you?

No. My sisters-- my sister was younger, in the lower grades. You had to be a certain age to get into that school, because it already was a high school. And my sister was too young for that. So my sister didn't go with me. No.

What were things like in Breslau?

You see, in a way, it was a little better in the bigger cities, because people didn't know you. See, in a small town, everybody knew who you were. But in the cities, people didn't really know. So it wasn't as bad. No, it wasn't.

But anyhow, the Jews lived isolated even there, because the school I went to, upstairs was our school. Down, in the same building, was a Jewish old-age home. And across the street from us was a Jewish hospital. So it was all together.

It was almost like a ghetto.

In the way, it was. Except you could walk freely. Nobody checked you out or anything like that.

Where did you live when you went to the school in Breslau?

It was a boarding school. We lived right in the school. Yes.

Were there other children from your town at that school?

No. I was the only one. But they were all from-- you see, Upper Silesia was all little towns. But they all were like one big family, more or less. And then there were students who lived in Breslau who came to that school. And I was mostly friendly with those people.

And did you get to see your parents on weekends?

Not that often, maybe once a month or something like that. Yes, I did.

And what was the atmosphere like in Breslau at that time? You said that it wasn't as bad, because it was larger city.

Yes.

But what was the condition as far as the Nazis were concerned?

Well, the Nazis were all over. There was no way of getting away from them. They were all over. But you see, one thing happened. And that will bring me really into what you want to know about the beginning of the Holocaust.

You see, there was such a thing that Germany had some kind-- as I say, it was all before my time. So I'm not too sure about it. There was some kind of treaty with Poland that, until 1937, Silesia and Upper Silesia was under protectorate-- did I say it right, protectorate-- of Poland.

So really, they were not allowed really to touch the Jews. See, in Germany proper, they could do with the Jews what they wanted to. But here we were, more or less, protected by Poles.

By the Poles.

By the Poles, yes.

Interesting.

However, what really happened-- I mean, it happened while I was at that school. It was in the fall of 1938. I don't know exactly which months. It must have been-- because I didn't go to that school until the beginning of October. That's when I started it.

It must have been sometimes by the middle of October, end of October, something like that. They took the people who were Polish Jews-- once it really was over, you see. They took the people, the Polish Jews who lived around in Germany, that part of Germany.

And as a matter of fact, I think all over Germany-- came in the middle of the night, loaded them onto vans, and drove them towards the Polish border, and try to push them over the border. And the Poles didn't want them. And the Germans didn't want them. And that created that situation.

And I think then there was the story-- I'm sure you're familiar with it. It's this young Jewish boy-- his name was Grynszpan-- who lived in Paris and who went to the German consulate. And he must have known the particular man who worked at the consulate. His name was vom Rath.

And when he got into his room, he took a gun and shot him in revenge, because his parents had been deported into Poland and were in that situation. And I think that was just the excuse the Nazis had been looking for to start to do something about the Jews. And as we always say, that was then the beginning of the end, because five years had elapsed since Hitler had become chancellor.

It was in 1933. And that was now in 1938. And they had been waiting for an opportunity to really get even with the Jews. And I think that really gave them the opportunity. And if you want me to, I'll go on telling you what--

Please. Please do.

--happened then.

Please do.

We were really very nervous about the whole thing. In that school I was in, we were talking about it. And we said, well,

they're going to do something to us. We're not going to-- they were on radio, over the radio, oh, those Jews, that Jewish boy who shot that German hero. What we are going to do about it? The Jews are going to pay for that. So we were really very, very nervous.

And we didn't have to wait very long, because-- and now I'm going to tell the story, which I have told my children, and that's how it was. I mean, that's what I really was a witness to. It must have been the morning of November 10. It was in school.

It was a very gray morning. And we had to get up very early, because our classes started at 8 o'clock. And we had to go and be ready. And everybody maybe had to have breakfast together. And everybody had a duty to do, either clean this room, or do this.

We always had to do things before we started classes. So I remember the day. It was my duty that I had to be in charge of the bathroom floor. I had to make sure that the bathroom floor was clean. And when I came into the bathroom, I heard somebody sob terribly.

And I saw a girl who lived in the town, in Breslau proper, who had come in in the morning. And she was just sobbing. And I asked her-- I said, what happened? My god, what happened to you? She said, oh, she says, the synagogues are burning.

I said, what, the synagogues? I said, how do you know? She said, well, I passed one, and I saw it burn. And now I have to add, this girl was a very religious girl, so-- you know. But I didn't know more than that.

But later on, while the other students came in, we heard all the horrors about the Jewish stores being destroyed and the men being arrested. All the Jewish men they could get a hold of were arrested and taken away, collected and taken away to concentration camp. And not only that-- at that point, Jews were not allowed to use phones anymore. They didn't want us to communicate with anybody.

And now, as I say, I was away from my parents. And I really didn't know what was going on at home, which was a terrible feeling. And I remember there were those old ladies in the old age home underneath us. And because when I was a girl and I was rather blonde and all that, they said to me, oh, please walk me to my children.

You don't look Jewish. Then they won't hurt me. And walk me to my children, because I want to know what happened. And I remember walking old people back and forth in the streets.

When they saw me walk with those old ladies-- maybe they looked Jewish or something-- they kept on throwing bottles at us. And somebody said to me, aren't you ashamed to walk this is old Jewish woman? And we passed Jewish stores, which were completely demolished. And people went inside.

That's why nobody should tell me they didn't know about it. They went inside and helped themself to the merchandise. The store windows were broken. Everything was broken up. And people just went inside and helped themself to whatever they could get their hands on.

Did you find out what happened in your own town of Oppeln?

Yes.

--during Kristallnacht?

Yes. I must say, my mother was very good that way. She sent me an express letter, which I had ON the next day-- not to worry, everything is all right, that my father is still home. He wasn't taken away.

Did they break into his store?

Oh, yes, yes. But anyhow, I said, well, I want to go home. And the next following day, I went home.

And what had happened is the house we lived in-- it was a walk-up. And somehow, our landlord, who was not the nicest person-- however, he was a fair person, and he was not a Nazi-- he got wind of what was going on. And he removed our names.

So they didn't bother to come upstairs to look for my father. However, my father had a nervous breakdown, because every time you heard the stair, somebody coming up the stairs, he thought they were coming to call for him. So he was in a really bad shape.

And when I came there, my father said that he had seen his stores, which was really his life's work. And it was completely smashed up. And he said to me that he was waiting for me, because he didn't want my mother to see it. And he wanted me to go with him and clean up the store. And that's what we did. And it was--

Just you and your father?

My father and I, yes.

Did he have people working for him in the store who were not Jewish?

Yes, he did.

And did they do anything to help him?

No. I mean, they really couldn't any more. First of all I think, at that point, there were not that many people left any more. I know he had a lady who worked for him for many years. And she was very devoted to my family, to my parents.

But she had another job, at that point, already. However, what she did is she used to come and visit us. Despite everything else, she came there and visited my parents.

It was dangerous for her to do that.

It was dangerous for her. But she did it anyhow. She came to visit my parents. And she took my sister like a protector. She would walk with my sisters. As a matter of fact, that's what I wanted to do with-- I asked her to do. I wanted to see our synagogue after it was burned down.

You went with her.

I went with her to see the synagogue. Yes.

Is that the synagogue that you brought us?

Yes. Yes, that's the--

That picture.

--synagogue. Yes, that's the synagogue.

That's a beautiful building.

It was a beautiful building. It was a little off center. I mean, it was not right in town. You had to go over a little bridge. It was more like a suburb already where the synagogue was. But it was a very beautiful, dignified--

So after Kristallnacht, was it still burning?

No. At that point, it wasn't burning anymore. But it was a terrible sight. And then I walked around. There were some very well-to-do people living in our town. And I took a walk around the-- we call them villas, where those people lived.

And everything was smashed in, and clothes hanging on the trees. And books were thrown out the windows. It was a terrible, terrible sight. Yes.

So then you saw it--

I was just going to say--

You never got to see it again, the beautiful--

No.

--interior.

No. We were not allowed.

Because I know you--

Oh, no, it was fenced off. You were not allowed to go in. You were not allowed to go close. No. Yeah, that's it. See? That was a beautiful.

We can't see the window. I know there was a picture--

Yeah, like a--

--of a beautiful--

Oh, it was a--

--window.

Yes. In the lower one, you have that window, which was beautiful.

Yeah. And it had the Star of David.

Yes. No, it was a beautiful synagogue. It really was. And we called it synagogue. We didn't call it temple. It was always called--

No, we call ours synagogue, too, sometimes.

It was all called synagogue.

And you said that Rabbi Leo Baeck had been the first rabbi there?

Yes. Yes. Well, now I'm going back to my personal, what happened. Well, I was cleaning up the store with my father. And it was a terrible mess, because-- see, my father's counters were all in glass. And they had to smash it all.

So while they did that, they must have cut themself, because there was blood all over. And then they must have taken the scissors and just cut whatever they could get their hands on. They cut into pieces. I'm sure they must have taken a lot, too. So that was the last time I saw--

It must have been so devastating for your father.

It was. It was. It really broke his spirit. It was really terrible for my father. And while we were in the store, for some reason, the telephone connections must have been restored, because the phone rang. And it was my mother who said that my uncle who lived in Berlin, my mother's brother, had just called.

And he had said that he would have an opportunity to get my sister and myself to Sweden. Would we want to go? And I have to say that I really had been begging my parents over the years to leave. I could see what was happening.

But you see, I was more exposed, because I was in school. And I could see what was going on, while my parents lived in their own little world, and they didn't see it as much. And they knew Germany the way it used to be and said, oh, the German people are good, everything is going to calm down. Well, I said, look, I have the opportunity. Yes, I want to go.

I said, yes, I do want to go. I want to leave. Because I couldn't see any future for myself and my sister anymore. And then my mother said, yes, you can leave. The only thing is you have to be responsible for your sister, which I said is fine with me.

Were your grandparents still alive during Kristallnacht?

Oh, yes.

How did it affect them?

Hmm?

How did it affect them where they were living?

My parents?

Your grandparents.

Grandparents.

Oh, my grandparents. No, wait a second. My grandmother had died. Kristallnacht night was in November. And my grandmother had died August already.

But my grandfather was an old man. He must have been in his 80s. And he was living there with his sister, with his old sister-- who, by the way, died right after Kristallnacht. She somehow had a stroke. And she died right after Kristallnacht.

And then his other daughter, my mother's sister, was taking care of him. Well, my grandfather was an old man. And I think somehow, more or less, he-- when you're old, I guess you take things more on your stride. And he was a very religious man. So I don't know.

I mean, the bottom line is my grandfather was deported at age 86. He was taken to Theresienstadt, to the concentration camp, where he died. As a matter of fact what he did is, because my aunt, my mother's sister who lives in the same town, was deported already, I think in 1941 or '42-- she was sent to Riga, she and her husband. We never heard of them again.

And then my grandfather-- who was an old man, and he wasn't well anymore-- moved in with my parents. And my parents were deported in March '43. And then my grandfather was left alone until-- I think my grandfather was deported by the month of May, something like that.

Mrs. Prager, tell us what it was like when we were getting ready to leave your home and go with Vera, your sister, to

Sweden.

What it was like? It was very sad. In one way, it was very sad. On the other hand, I was so happy to get out of Germany. And I had been away before. As a child, I had gone to summer camp and all that. And somehow, I think I didn't really see it as such a thing.

But somehow, as a child, you cannot assume what could happen in the future, how horrible things can be. And it more or less felt like I was going away for vacation. And the idea was really that we were supposed to go to the United States and that you were hoping to meet my parents in the United States.

And that was really the way it was. And I was very optimistic. And I said, oh, a few months, and then I'll meet my parents again.

Did your parents make any plans to leave Germany after they sent you and your sister to Sweden?

Oh, yes, they tried everything. And they were cheated. And they were blackmailed, and whatever. They had visas to Cuba, which were fake. And they had visas to go all kind of places-- Shanghai, and I think Chile-- because in the United States, the quota was so high. You couldn't possibly make it. They tried everything, and nothing worked. So there was no way.

How did you find out, after you left Sweden, when your parents were deported? How did you learn about it?

Oh, my parents did write to us saying that they got notification that they have to leave by that date. So we knew that they were going to leave.

But they didn't go to the same concentration camps at the time.

Well, I don't know. You see, the train really was headed for Auschwitz. However-- I'm getting thirsty.

I'm going to give you some.

However, my father-- who was, I guess, still very strong-- was sent to work at the camp, which I understand must have been horrible, Monowitz. It was run by IG Farben. They had to do slave labor.

And my mother, I assume, must have been sent right away to Auschwitz and to the gas chambers, because she had a hernia. When people had to undress, they checked them out, and all that. And she had a hernia.

And I guess, because she had the hernia, they right away must have said, well, that's it. Not only that, but she had all gold teeth. So they must have seen the gold teeth and said, aha, that's what we need.

So I don't know anything about my mother. I know about my father, that he was deported on April 20, 1943. He was deported to Auschwitz.

From Monowitz.

From Monowitz to be gassed. Yeah.

I think this is a good time to take a break. And then we'll talk some more about your life in Sweden.

Yeah, very good. Yes.

Thanks.

All right.

Do you have any cold--

Mrs. Prager, did you have some other recollections of Kristallnacht that you could share with us?

I think so. I have one, which I think really impressed me, because it was so bad. As I mentioned to you, I was in a boarding school. That was after I came back from being with-- my parents? No. No, I'm sorry. It was the night after-- it was the day after Kristallnacht.

At that time, a lot of the German Jewish young people went in something. It was called Hachsharah. That mean preparation to go to Israel. And we had a school like that somewhere in-- it wasn't Silesia. It was somewhere out in the suburbs. I don't know exactly where it was.

However, that night of the Crystal Night in that little village, the Nazis all ganged up and came with-- what do you call it, the sticks, with nightsticks, like police-- came. And those young people who lived and worked there had to get up early in the morning, because they worked for the farmers. And they had to be up early, milk cows, and all that, all the preparation.

So anyhow, they woke them by knocking on the door, woke them up and, out, out, out, out. And luckily, most of them had their clothes prepared already, because in the next morning, they had to get up so early. So they already had their clothes ready.

And there was one girl. She had been sick. And it took her a little longer to get ready. So she was the last one out. And they really hit that girl so badly. Her head was bleeding.

And then they had to march. I mean, the boys were taken-- then what they told us is put them all against the wall. And they thought they were going to be shot. But what they did is they took all the boys away to concentration camp, while the girls were told to get out, to march away.

So they came. As one group, they came to our school. And they had been marching the whole day, and that girl who was hit. And it was such a sad sight.

She was such a pretty girl. And she had black, curly hair. And everything was caked with that blood. So that was really a terrible experience.

And then the supervisor of our school, her nephew had been incarcerated in one of the concentration camps. I don't know which one it was. And when he came out, he came to her.

And he looked like a ghost. He was a young man. He looked just so terrible, all emaciated and sick. He came with a terrible ear infection.

What year was this that he got out?

1938.

And he got out of the concentration camp there?

If you had some-- you see, there was, I think, a stipulation. If you had papers that you could emigrate, yes, you could leave.

I see.

So I guess he must have had something maybe that he-- somebody, he could go somewhere. And they let him go out. And sometimes, they let the very young boys-- they let them go out. You see, some boys were only about 14 years old,

16 years old.

But they were let go again. But the older men, it took them much longer to get out. I mean older-- I mean, now, from 20 years on.

And these young boys and girls who were in that area that the Nazis came, how old were they?

They must have been, I would think, roughly between 16 and 20, something like that.

And they left the-- and they did release the females. That's--

Yes, they did. At that time, they were not out yet to hurt the women, you see. They were mostly out after the men. They let the women go.

And the concentration camps were primarily for slave labor at that time?

Yes. Yes. Naturally, as I say, at that time, they brought them all in. And there were beatings. And one of my uncle lost one eye. He was beaten, and he lost an eye, and all that.

My father was never taken. So my father, at that time, was spared. In a way, I wish he-- maybe they should have taken him. Then he would have left. It would have been easier for him maybe to leave. But--

When you left your little town, you left your parents, how did you and your sister get from Upper Silesia to Sweden?

Yeah, I'll tell you. My parents went with us to Berlin. And we spent a couple of days with my uncle and his family in Berlin.

By the time we were ready to leave-- we were supposed to go with what's called the children's transport. It was supposed to leave Christmas Eve. And everything was ready for us for Christmas Eve.

When we got to Berlin-- maybe on the 20th of December, or something like that-- all of a sudden, we heard that the transport had been postponed to January the following year. But our papers were ready. So everybody advised my parents to let us go, to send us out, 'cause they did not know what they might be doing by next year.

They might change things again. Right now, everything is clear. Let them go. So my sister and I went by ourselves.

You didn't wait for the children's transport.

We didn't wait. We were really two very young girls leaving by ourselves.

And what kind of transportation did you take from Berlin to Stockholm?

Yeah, well, that's rather simple. What we did is we took the train. I'm not sure. I think it was Bremerhaven.

And there, from Bremerhaven, we took the ferry over to Trelleborg. That's Sweden. That's the south of Sweden. And then we took the train into Stockholm.

Who met you when you got--

Yeah. Well, that's a--

--to Stockholm?

That's a very interesting story. And I don't really like to mention names. But this is really very honorable. That's why I'm

going to mention names. The Warburg family had a branch of the family living in Stockholm. And they originated really-- you know that banker?

Felix Warburg.

Well, that family, that family. They had a branch, which had been living in Hamburg. But they had moved to Sweden, as far as I know. And the two daughters of that family came to pick my sister and me up in the morning. It was Christmas Day in the morning, 7:00 in the morning. They were there to pick us up.

How did they know who you were or that you were coming?

I really don't recall that any more. Maybe we had to wear-- I think maybe we had to wear some tags or something. I don't recall any more those details. But we found each other.

And then they took us to their house for breakfast. And then, around 10:00, they took my sister and me to our respective foster parents. My sister stayed with one family, and I stayed with another family.

What was it like?

Well, my sister stayed with a lady. She was a single lady. She was not a well lady at all. She was an elderly lady.

But she was very kind to her. And she stayed with her until that lady died. And then, later on-- it was a couple of years. And after that, she stayed with that lady's sister till we left to go to the United States.

I was not as lucky. I stayed first with one family where my stay was very short lived, because-- I don't know-- the lady was not too nice. She had one-- I think some people tried to take advantage, thinking it was cheap labor. They have the people come over there, and just give them food, and shelter. And for that, you work.

But I should add that many people would have been happy to have just that. So I wouldn't criticize that. But that's what it amounted to. Then I left her. And I went to stay with another family, who was very nice.

However, that lady-- I think I mentioned it to you. She was Finnish. And when the war between Finland and Russia broke out, I had to leave again, because her whole family from Finland came over. And there wasn't a room for me.

And then I stayed with a very, very nice, very religious family, which had taken in another young Jewish German girl and me. And we stayed with them for a while. And then they--

Were they Jewish?

Hmm?

Were they Jewish--

Religious?

--this family?

Oh, yeah, religious. They were Jewish. Yes. And they were really very kind. And I stayed with them for a year. Then they left to go--

Their children were in the United States. And I think they were afraid that Sweden might get involved in the war. And they were not young people anymore. They left for the United States.

And then I was boarding through the Stockholm Jewish Congregation, I think. They more or less sponsored us. And

they paid room and board for me with-- there was another German Jewish family, m very lovely family. They both had been lawyers.

But we're not permitted to work, so they had to try anyway to keep on living. And they had to earn money. That poor woman, she had to work in a household cleaning houses just to have some money to live on. And they were very, very kind to me.

And then, later on-- at that point, I had started to work in a daycare center. And I left when I-- I went as a junior counselor for that summer. And after I came back, I felt I wanted to be independent.

And then I had two jobs on my own. I took jobs as a governess. And I was quite young at that time.

How did you manage with the language?

Oh, at that time, I had learned Swedish. I knew enough Swedish to make myself understood. I was very young when I went over there. So when you're young, you learn it very quickly. So I really had caught on to the Swedish language.

I might have had an accent. However, I could manage. But somehow-- and yes, and then in 1943, my parents were deported. And I had--

Up until 1943, did you have communications with your parents?

Oh, yes, I did have communication. Naturally, all letters were opened, because they were always mean taped over again saying, [GERMAN]. That means, in German, opened.

And once, I remember we took pictures and sent them to my parents. And somebody must have liked-- my sister and I-- must have liked our pictures. The letter came without our pictures. The letter arrived with my parents, but without our pictures.

So when you didn't hear from them any longer, then you knew?

Yeah.

No, no, they had told. As I mentioned before, they had said, we are going to leave on that and that date, that we got notice we are going to leave on that. They were very-- the Germans were very accurate the way they did things. So they said, well, on that and that date, you are going to leave. You had a little report.

As a matter of fact, there was one thing happened. There was one man in my hometown. And he was a lawyer. And he was very badly hurt in World War I. And he had some-- he was an exception. After everybody else was taken away, he was permitted to stay.

And my father sent him a letter-- a card, I'm sorry, sent him a card-- saying that he arrived, and where he was, that he was there, just to tell him that he was still alive, I assume. And it was the last we heard of my father.

How did you find out when they actually--

Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, as I say, with my mother, I never found out. I don't know anything. And with my father, there is a place in Germany. And I don't recall that name. I have been trying to think of that name-- where they look for people.

And we, my sister and I, had registered our parents' name with them. And many, many years later did we get a letter from-- my sister got a letter from them that they found that my father, as I mentioned before, was deported on April 20, 1943.

To Auschwitz.

To Auschwitz, yes. And that was-- that's how we know about that.

What were your fondest memories of the time you spent in Sweden?

My fondest memories? Well, first of all, Sweden itself is a beautiful country. I love nature. It was really-- it was very, very beautiful. And my last two years in Sweden I think, when I was independent, it was so much better.

That's all I can say. But the years were really very hard years. Some people remember them with a lot of fondness, which I cannot do, because when I look back there was a lot of sadness and loneliness.

Were there other young German--

Oh, yes.

--girls there?

Oh, I had some very good friends. Oh, yes. No, no, I had some very good friends. Yes. But you could never really be that happy, because you knew-- I mean, I wouldn't say you knew.

However-- I don't know. Maybe I'm a pessimist. I don't know. I always thought to myself, oh, god, what might be going on?

Knowing the Germans, I knew they were not going to be kind to the Jews. So somehow, back of my mind, it was always, but how can I have a good time if I know what's going on? But more or less--

And then I started to work. As I say, finally, after my parents were not there anymore, I always stayed working for families hoping that, maybe one day, my parents could come and they could stay with me. But then, when I know they were deported, I know it wasn't possible anymore. And then I really wanted to be on my own. And through my uncle, I got a job working in a big Swedish wholesale store. And--

Was your uncle living in Stockholm?

Yeah. My uncle and his family were.

This was your mother's brother?

Yes. Yes. Yeah.

Had he come over from Germany? Or had he been living in Stockholm before you?

No, no, he had come. We came over there in 1938. And he came in January 1939. I mean, he came December 1938, or he came maybe January or February 1939, something like that.

So then you were not really totally alone without family.

No. I mean, as I say, I had my uncle and his wife. However, times were so bad. And they had to come, too. They had no way of earning a living or anything like that.

They had to-- and they had two children of their own. And they had to live off their earnings-- no earnings, I'm sorry, but the money they brought from Germany. They were not permitted to work. So it was a very difficult time.

And not only that, you never knew what was going to happen. And I had another uncle who lived in Belgium, another brother of my mother's who was deported. And he died in camp Gurs, I think. So everybody, more or less-- whatever

you heard was of people being deported and dying.

Once in a while, when I used to be between jobs, the Jewish Congregation had a home in Stockholm for young girls. And that was led by a lady who used to be a principal in one of the Jewish schools in Berlin. She was a very lovely person. And I remember, when all those things were happening, I think she even lost her family. Her mother and sister were deported.

She said, in future years, when people will read about it, then they will say, we cause so many German Jews-- Berlin Jews, especially. Berlin was the last place where the Jews still were hiding. But then it was-- they gave up.

With the Jews in Germany, especially Berlin, there was such a wave of suicides. People will really wonder about it. That's what that lady used to say.

Did you have any incidents of antisemitism when you were in Stockholm?

Yes, I did. Oh, yes, plenty.

Really?

Yes. I once was applying for a job as a governess. And that lady was very pleased with me. And she said, oh, yes, I'd like you to work for me. Then she called up the other lady I had been working before-- with whom I had been working for before.

And she asked her-- said, tell me something. There's something I didn't think about. Is she Jewish? And the lady said, yes. She said, well, then tell her I have no use for her. Oh, yes, I heard plenty of antisemitic remarks. Yeah.

And yet Sweden was one of the places in Europe that you could escape to--

Yes.

[INAUDIBLE] to get away.

But people were still-- I mean, as I say, it's not a general thing. But there were a lot of antisemites. There was a lot of antisemitism. Yes, there was. Yeah.

What was the feeling when the war ended?

Oh, I don't know. I think it was good. Naturally, I was very happy it had ended in of us, that it was finally finished. But naturally, the sadness of it all, what happened to our people, to my people, to our people, that was really the vinegar and the cup of joy, so to say.

It was bittersweet.

Yes. Yes. Very much so. I mean, naturally, there's one thing talking about antisemitism in Sweden. If I ever complained about anything-- I was never allowed to complain about anything. If I ever complained about anything, people used to say to me, be glad you are here.

If you don't like it, you know where you can go. You can go back. A lot of people would be very happy to be here. That's what I used to hear.

Living in Sweden, what impressions did the Jewish people have about the concentration camps? When did they know that the concentration camps, or at least Auschwitz and others, were used as extermination camps?

Well, I don't think that anybody really knew, because I think that it's beyond human imagination to think of anything

like that. I think, for that, you have to be sick people like those people who really invented the concentration camps. I mean sick in your mind, or cruel. I don't think that any human mind can really fathom something like that.

However, I remember-- you see, what we thought was that it was going to be like a labor camp where people have to work. And my parents both said, oh, we are not afraid. We know how to work. We are not going to be afraid.

And I'm sure that others-- they were all told they were going to go to work. They would be resettled in the east. That's what they were all told.

So anyhow, but I joined-- the Jewish Congregation had a class in first help for people when they came out of the concentration camps where we saw that people might not be well or anything. But no, that's like putting a bandage on a big, gaping sore. I mean, it's not funny. But that's more or less what it was like.

However, I once read-- and I don't know where, a Jewish newspaper-- a report of a girl who had escaped. She had come to Palestine. And she was a Polish girl, Polish Jewish girl. And she brought a little rock with her. And she said, my friend gave it to me saying, please take it with you, that will be the only thing that will be left of me in my memory.

So that was the only thing which gave you somehow an inkling of how bad things might be, you see. But we didn't really know what was going on. We really didn't. I have to say that much.

How long after the end of the war did you remain in Stockholm?

The war was over in '45. Wasn't it? May '45.

Yes.

And my sister and I left Sweden January 1947. So it would have been another two years.

And in those two years, you just continued working. And--

Yeah.

--your sister, was she in school?

At that point, she started to work already, too. We both started to work. And then, naturally, we were very active to help all those people who had been released out of concentration camps, because there were-- oh.

Were they coming to Sweden?

Oh, yes. Bernadotte brought them all to-- Folke Bernadotte brought them all to Sweden. And they were first in quarantine. And then they were sent, different people-- I know that-- I think it was Romania.

They had rented Swedish mansions to have their people stationed there to recuperate. Those people had to be recuperating. So a lot of those people had to be-- I mean, they were all-- some of them-- I remember once going with a male friend, I have to say, because I couldn't have gone by myself as a woman. We went to camp where there were Poles, both Jewish and non-Jewish Poles, who had been in concentration camp. And conditions were very bad, because the non-Jewish Poles beat up the Jewish Poles, because--

Even in the concentration camps?

Afterwards.

After.

Maybe during the concentration camps, and it was afterwards already, you see, beat them up. But we went to visit. I didn't really know the conditions of the camp-- I mean, of those recuperating, rehabilitating camps. I didn't think that would be the word for it. Is our time up?

We have a few more minutes. And I think we will be taking another break and then, perhaps, talk a little bit about the end of the war and your coming here--

Gladly.

--to the United States.

Gladly. Glad to do so. Thank you.

OK.