

[0:00:00]

[Violin and piano music quartet]

[0:06:26]

Robert Buckley: We are now in Eschborn, Germany. Today is July 18, 1991, and we're interviewing one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Would you like to tell us about the pictures we have just seen of the musicians?

Magdalena Reuter: Oh, yes. Yesterday we made it, no? We just practiced the pictures and music with my brother Paul-Gerhard and with Annemarie and Waltraud, my two sisters.

Robert Buckley: And your name?

Magdalena Reuter: My name is Magdalena, Magdalena Reuter.

Robert Buckley: And your maiden name?

Magdalena Reuter: Kusserow, Magdalena Kusserow.

Robert Buckley: And where were you born, Magdalena?

Magdalena Reuter: I was born in Bochum in Westphalia in Germany.

Robert Buckley: And would you like to tell us the date of your birth?

Magdalena Reuter: Yes, 23 of January 1924.

Robert Buckley: OK. What were the names of your mother and your father, please?

Magdalena Reuter: My mother, the name is Hilda, Hilda Kusserow, and my father Franz, Franz Kusserow. The maiden name of my mother was **Eichhorst**.

Robert Buckley: I see. And where were they born?

Magdalena Reuter: They were born in the east part of Germany in Posen, what belongs now to Poland. And my father was born Pommern, the province of Pommern. I think now it belongs to Poland also.

Robert Buckley: I see. What was your father's background in connection with his work? What type of work did your father do?

Magdalena Reuter: My father was an officer in the post office. He worked in the post office. He was a military, and later on he went back after the first

World War. He was wounded and then he went back to this official, to the post office. He was a[n] officer, *postsekretär*.

Robert Buckley: I see. Whose army did he fight in during World War I?

Magdalena Reuter: *[Laughs]* I was not yet born at that time. He was in Germany in the army. I cannot say where.

Robert Buckley: OK, so you don't know too much about that.

Magdalena Reuter: No, I don't know. I don't know. Maybe my sisters, my elder sisters they know it. My eldest sister, Annemarie, she is 11 years – she has 11 years more than I. But we never saw Pommern where he was born and we never saw – because my father was – he got assignment to Bochum by the post office. He was translated, no, by his ...

Robert Buckley: You mean transferred.

Magdalena Reuter: Transferred, yes, transferred to Bochum where we were born, all our family.

[0:10:00]

Robert Buckley: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Magdalena Reuter: We had – we were together six brothers and five sisters.

Robert Buckley: Would you like to give me their names in the order of their birth if you can remember?

Magdalena Reuter: Yes, the first one – sure. *[Laughs]*. The first was Annemarie, and then Wilhelm, and then Siegfried, Karl or Karl-Heinz, and then Waltraud, Hildegard, Wolfgang, Magdalena—that's I—Elisabeth, Hans-Werner, and Paul-Gerhard. I think 11, no? *[Laughs]*

Robert Buckley: I see. When did your family become Jehovah's Witnesses, including yourself?

Magdalena Reuter: They became Jehovah's Witnesses in the same year when I was born. My parents – my father came out of the World War I, and he was so disappointed. He said, "How can it be that Christian fight against Christian?" And so he looked for really he said, "If there is any God in the heaven, where is the religion?" And he looked, he looked, he looked. And then he saw one public talk announcing, and he went with my mother to see that. And then they studied. They asked some

brothers there in the audience if they couldn't come to visit them. They would like to learn more about this Bible truth.

Robert Buckley: I see.

Magdalena Reuter: They were studying. At this time, my mother was pregnant with me. And after my birth, they got baptized.

Robert Buckley: So, in 1933 when Hitler came to power, how old were you at that time—about nine years of age?

Magdalena Reuter: In 1993 I was, yes, nine years.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember what it was like in your hometown in 1933 before Hitler took over? What was Germany like? Do you recall as a young person?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah. We didn't – because we had a close family life, I didn't look too much outside. It was – we didn't notice it too much. Of course, it was more difficult going from house to house. They came and once I remember, but I don't know the year. They came to take off the books off our house. They came once with a big car with horses and took many books out of our house in Bad Lippspringe.

Robert Buckley: What type of books was that?

Magdalena Reuter: Bible books from the Watchtower, from the Watchtower Society –

Robert Buckley: I see.

Magdalena Reuter: – because my father, as he lived in a big house, and he was the only Witness there because he moved over from Bochum in 1931 to Bad Lippspringe in 1931. Because the society, the Watchtower Society, said in Paderborn there is a city of archbishop, no, archbishop. And there were no Witnesses of Jehovah.

Robert Buckley: So, your society asked your father to move?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah and they announce[d] it in the congregation in Bochum. And my father was ready, and he said: "I'm ready to go with my family," as he was retired very early because he was wounded. And then he said: "I am free. I will look for a house in Paderborn or Lippspringe," then moved over. And then '31, we moved to Bad Lippspringe. And then he had - he lived in that house. The books from the society, they sent all to the address of my father. And he distributed [them] to the congregation

or to the people that lived around Bad Lippspringe, Paderborn, and all these small villages.

Robert Buckley: So your home was like a depot for your society storing the books and so on.

Magdalena Reuter: And sometimes, some years we had some brothers in our house. They stayed there as "colporteur", how they called them, like "pioneers" at that time.

[0:15:00]

Robert Buckley: Which is a what? What is it?

Magdalena Reuter: Full-time servant.

Robert Buckley: Oh, they're full-time Bible educators?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, they came to us and to stay there to preach from house to house there because our family was the one, the only one. My father, also he dedicated this as full-time preacher, he dedicated his time. He bought a car. Annemarie, my elder sister, she met – she studied. She met – how's that called? To drive the car and then he preached with my mother, with the family in the villages.

Robert Buckley: How old were you when they first came into your home? Who was it, the police or the Gestapo – when they came into your home to confiscate the books? How old were you then about?

Magdalena Reuter: Oh, maybe right after, yeah, nine years or when we lived in Bad Lippspringe. First, we stayed one year in a hotel. My father rented a flat in a hotel until he got really a house for the whole family to rent a house. And then right after that, it starts one by one to take the books out. Then the police came. Then the –

Robert Buckley: How did you feel when they knocked on your door, and they wanted to take away the books?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, I was small. I watched it. I knew that my father always said we have to **calm** with it, and I observed it. I – what should I say? As little girl, because we were so many, I watched it and noted it. But, sure, I was not so happy for that. But always my father had [hidden] some books to be continued to study, of course.

Robert Buckley: OK, just one minute. OK so you were a young person, and they were coming into your home to take away the books and so on. When did

they start to arrest your family? How – and who was the first one to be arrested in your family?

Magdalena Reuter: The first one, if I remember well, was my father and my mother. They arrested them, and they brought them to Paderborn. But I think few days later, my mother came back because she had so many children. And so the Gestapo, maybe the police—I don't know—they said, "You go back to your family, to look for your family." But my father was arrested, if I remember well, about ten months when he – they condemned him for ten months. And then he came back.

Robert Buckley: How did you feel, as a young girl, when they took away your father and your mother? Do you remember your emotions? How did you feel when these people would take away your parents, who were good parents evidently?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, yeah, we missed them very much. And my mother, she gathered us together. She said: "Now we have to live a moment without Father, but we will manage it and Jehovah will help us." And we planned; we made plans to come through. But anyway, she got – she continued to get some money by the post office. As my father was retired, the money was no problem. Later on, it came up more and more but at that time – and we visited our father as often as we could. We get allowance to visit him, although it was only ten minutes.

Robert Buckley: I see.

Magdalena Reuter: And he wrote us nice letters to [console] us.

Robert Buckley: What was the name of the prison he was in?

Magdalena Reuter: I think the first was Paderborn. Paderborn, and then he was condemned. Was it in **Diez** or? – He was in several prisons. I don't remember really.

Robert Buckley: What was the reason that they gave the family why your father was being picked up? What was the reason for it?

Magdalena Reuter: I think they acknowledged that my father was responsible for the preaching work because my father was very zealous. He preached in every part where he can, and so maybe they found some addresses.

[0:20:00] And then there were sometimes where we sent letters to Hitler that he should stop the persecut[ion of] Jehovah's Witnesses as they came from **the whole world** or through these letters. And then the Gestapo, they made again the research or they looked in all the houses and knew that they're Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: You mean your family actually sent correspondence to Adolf Hitler to have him stop persecuting? –

Magdalena Reuter: Also, yes. In all the world they sent letters against Hitler—telegram—and we participate also in this.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember the year that took place?

Magdalena Reuter: Several time[s] it was. I remember once when my father – or was it two? They were in prison. This was in Paderborn. This I remember very well. And Hildegard and me, we went to distribute some booklets. I think it was the booklet *Crisis*. It was by the Society campaign to bring the booklets to the people. But as we were going prohibited in Germany and my parents were maybe one week just they were in prison. We liked to visit them, as Bad Lippspringe and Paderborn [were] very far and we met the way. We went to a family, Jehovah's Witnesses. We took some booklets. We said, "Where should we go?" And so Hildegard and I, we went to one street to leave some booklets there, but we couldn't give them to the people. We put them under the – what is that?

Robert Buckley: Mat?

Magdalena Reuter: Mat? We put them under there or we put them under there. And this was the procedure of the Society. He recommends us to make it like this. And then my sister and I, we went together [into] the hotel. And then the woman came and said, "What do you want?"

And then we got a shock. We said, "We'd like to go to the toilet." But we put already the booklet under the mat.

And then she said: "Yes, there [it] is. You can go."

And then my sister went to the restroom. It was only excuse, and I was a little bit shocked. And then she came out. I remember I had a red cap on my head. And then we run away. I took my cap away because it was red. Maybe the people – and we ran back to the family, to the brothers. And we did all – we had nearly distributed all the booklets. And then from the family, as it was in Paderborn, we went to the prison, my sister and I. We said now we will look. We will visit our parents. And we knocked [on] the door. We said: "We'd like to visit our parents. We don't know what [to] do. We are without parents." But they didn't let us, sure, and then we went home.

Robert Buckley: So despite the ban, you were still distributing literature to people.

Magdalena Reuter: Sure, sure, yeah.

Robert Buckley: Hmm, so you were very courageous as a young person. So, after your mother and father were picked up, who were the next ones in your family picked up? And do you remember the year?

Magdalena Reuter: Then my father, later on he came back. He was picked up another time. When was it? About '37 about? I can't remember really the date. And he got, I think, two years or how many? And he came home in 1940, yes, 1940. And he thought maybe they'd give him the slip to sign but nothing else, nothing. He – they let him go home. And he always thought maybe behind the police they will take you because he didn't sign anything. They didn't ask him. They didn't leave him, and he came home. And when he was home, this was '40. This was in October '40. Because they killed my other brother, he came home for the burying,

[0:25:00] for the cemetery when they buried my brother.

Robert Buckley: Now, what happened to your other brother?

Magdalena Reuter: Wilhelm, who was shot *[sic]*.

Robert Buckley: Oh, they shot your one brother Wilhelm?

Magdalena Reuter: Yes, yes.

Robert Buckley: For what reason did they shoot him?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah because he did not go to the war. He refused to go to the war. And they imprisoned him six months, and then they condemned him to death, and they killed him. They shot him. And my mother asked them, the judge, if my father could come to the cemetery to the burying, no, burying?

Robert Buckley: For the burial.

Magdalena Reuter: Burial, yeah, and they let him go. They gave him vacation three or four days, and he came home. And they were – in this cemetery when we buried my brother, there were a lot of Jehovah's Witnesses. And then another day my father had come after everything was over to close the grave and everything. My father: "Come with me. Come with me in the house." We had a meeting in the house with about 20, 30 brothers. And another day, other brothers came to see my father and my father – OK, then my father went back. And after a couple of months, this was finished his time, and he came home. And this was in October, I think. It was in October '40 when he was – when he came home the second

time and he was in prison. And then he encouraged the brothers. He visited all the interest[ed] persons. He baptized them. He baptized us. It was really a nice feast when my sister Hildegard and Wolfgang and I, we got baptized by my father. And right after then, short time after then, they took us all: my mother, my father, Hildegard, and me. But, first of all, the three because they said I am too young because I was 17 years old. They said: "We have to see. You have to stay home and we have to take – we will take away just parents and your sister."

Robert Buckley: So, they took those who were over 18 years of age.

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, but they said, "We have to think about [it]," and so they let me alone. And, sure, I was alone. I cried and then I called **Emgard**. Emgard came and was – I think she was one night with me. And then after it was Sunday and we had always a book study in our house and then – or was it Saturday? I went to Paderborn to look if my parents are there, and they didn't lead me to them and I came home. I cried. I said, "I'm alone." And then Emgard and some brothers and sisters were there. We studied. And the other day after this all, the police came and took me away also to the prison.

She said, "Now we close the door, and I will take the key from your house as nobody is there." They left everything. They left the dog there and every—we had a little small dog—and they took me to the prison. I was really happy. I said, "What should I do alone here?" The police on my back always. You think the police is there tomorrow or today. Though I was relaxed because now I saw the **prison**.

Robert Buckley: So, did you end up then in the same prison with your mother?

Magdalena Reuter: Yes.

Robert Buckley: And how did you feel when you saw your mother in jail?

Magdalena Reuter: But we couldn't see them yet because they didn't show me. And they put me in. I was two days there. And then the Gestapo came with a big car. They said: "Magdalena, come. You have to come with us." They took me in the car, a big car, and then they looked [at] me. I sat behind, and they said: "Such a nice girl, and she lies so much! She can lie," because they said, "You have literature?"

[0:30:00] Because in that time they took me away, the house was – there [was] nobody. They searched the whole house. They searched. Maybe they found some. Then they said: "Your father, he had the literature there, isn't it?"

I said: "I don't know. I never saw it." And then he told me...and the way from Paderborn to Bad Lippspringe I said: "I don't know."

"Such a nice girl and can lie so much! How can you lie?" And then as we were close to our house from Paderborn and on opposite side there came about five or six policemen, big policemen on bicycle[s] from Bad Lippspringe because I'm sure they phoned them to come. And then they looked the whole house over. They said, "Where is the literature?"

I said, "I don't know."

At least 15 times they looked. They searched in this house and *blum!* They beat me. "How can you say this? You should say me!" and my hair and all the _____. And again: "Where's the literature? Where's the literature?" This is Gestapo – the police, no. The police were very quiet because they knew us, and they were very polite to us from Bad Lippspringe. But this Gestapo again, "Where's the literature?" And then again they beat me.

I said: "This is easy thing. I'm a young girl and such seven or ten big men, they beat a young girl!" What I said was a little bit maybe ...
[Laughs] I was young, everything. It doesn't matter to me. And then they was a little shocked. Then they didn't beat me again. They looked over and then they brought me back to the prison.

And then I saw once we had – then they called all of us. We stand – we stood here, my sister Hildegard, but we couldn't speak. We couldn't even see her. And Hildegard stand here up, and I stand here. And then they called my father and my mother. And I saw coming down my father from the stairs, and I laughed. I was so happy to see my father. And then the Gestapo said: "Don't look to the father! Go at the corner and look to the wall!" So, I had to go to the corner and to look to the wall. [Laughs].

And then later on, they asked us question[s], and they put us again in the prison and then brought us into Bielefeld, if I say – no, to Bielefeld later on until – I don't know, really. But we were in prison, and we didn't see each other, one another unless we got permission, the regular permission for prisoners to get visitors or to visit. And so, I visit my father as prisoner in the time of visitors. I had allowance to, I think, ten minutes I could speak with my father. And my father said, "[You] are strong! Maybe because you are very young, they will give you maybe half a year the prison because you are very young." And so it was. They gave me six months prison later on, the judge. And they brought me to the prison for youth, for young people because I was young.

Robert Buckley: Young people. And what happened then to your mother?

Magdalena Reuter: And my mother, they condemned them – her to two and a half years. They brought her to another prison and my sister again to another, so they brought us after the judgement was finished. But then, after then, the wife from the officer, from the boss from prison, she was very polite to us. She said: "Now the judgement is over. Everything is over. Now I can put you together." And I was with my mother and with my sister together in one cell. And we spent about three or four weeks, so we had so really a nice time. We spoke of experience[s]. My mother recounted us many experience[s]. This was really a nice time.

[0:35:00]

Robert Buckley: So, you were happy to see your mother in prison.

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah. Also, before – because the – what is it? The guardian, no, the guardian of women? They look for the prisoners. They were polite to us in the prison before. One woman, she put us together, Hildegard and me. On one Sunday, she said: "OK, today is Sunday afternoon. Nobody will be there. I put you together." So, we spent a half day together with my sister. This was always a nice time—very, very happy.

Robert Buckley: So, you were able to encourage one another.

Magdalena Reuter: Yes, yes. Sometimes – one time it was, I guess, in Bielefeld, I wrote something, some lines on a small paper with my sister. She was downstairs, and the stairs were there, and I was upstairs. And I threw her a paper, and she got it with some notes on it. I don't remember what notes. But the women who watched us, they were really polite. They helped us.

Robert Buckley: OK now, so what is the year that we're talking about right now? Do you remember?

Magdalena Reuter: This was in – this was before the judgment. This was in 1940, 1940.

Robert Buckley: OK, 1940. Now, where were the other members of your family? Your one brother was shot.

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, he was already shot. And Waltraud, she was free still. She was – or was she in prison? No, she was free. Karl-Heinz, he was in prison also, Karl-Heinz. And the three youngest one[s], they were in a children['s] home. They took them away of the father, so there [was] nobody at home. Everybody was in another – and Annemarie, she was

still in Berlin. The time – now I remember. Waltraud and Annemarie, they were together in Berlin.

Robert Buckley: Because they were the oldest?

Magdalena Reuter: Yes or was she – yeah, Annemarie, she was the oldest, and they worked in Berlin. And then Waltraud came home and looked for the house a little bit and then managed it. But everybody was in another place.

Robert Buckley: I see. OK, so that's 1940. What now happens to you afterwards and your mother evidently?

Magdalena Reuter: My mother was in prison, in high prison. *Sucthaus* they call it in German. This is high prison. It's a prison, a stronger prison. Two and a half years in *Krefeld*. And my sister Hildegard, she was in another prison. We were together in a prison for young people in Vechta. But after six months but we didn't see us, one another. I think we saw us once or twice because we had to – it was funny. Sometimes we had to stand downstairs to count, and my sister came down. And this was so funny because we had to put our hair different. And she was laughing because I had my hair all here [*gestures toward the back of her head*] and she also. But then they said also, "Go, go away!" They didn't know why we laughed. They didn't know we are sisters. But sometimes we had a little bit [of] fun.

But after half a year, my prison was over. And then the leader of the prison of these young people, she called me in her office and said: "Magdalena, you know next week you are free. You can be free. But, you see, I have from the Gestapo, I have paper you should sign. And if you sign this, tomorrow I bring you to the train and you go home."

Robert Buckley: What was that paper that you should sign?

Magdalena Reuter: The paper was I should sign that I will leave my faith. I will not be anymore Jehovah's Witness. And I told her: "This I cannot do. I'm very sorry, but this – I stay for my faith. I believe in Jehovah God. I never will sign. This means that I wouldn't believe in Jehovah, and so I will not sign.

[0:40:00] I'm sorry. I prefer to go in another prison than to say that Jehovah – that God is not there." "OK," she said. And I spoke with her half an hour about [it]. I gave her a good witness about the Bible and she nearly – she was crying. She said, "I'm very, very sorry, but I have the order to bring you back to Bielefeld to the Gestapo." And then she sent me to Bielefeld or the Gestapo came and took us along. I don't know.

But they brought me to Bielefeld to the Gestapo, and they asked me again to sign and so on and so on. And the other Gestapo said: "Let her. You know she will not do that. She comes from this family. They're – she is happy to go in the concentration camp to see her sisters and brothers there – or her sisters, Jehovah's Witnesses. She will not sign." And then he wrote some words, and then I had to wait there. They kept me there in that prison four months more because –

Robert Buckley: In that same prison.

Magdalena Reuter: In that same because I had not reached to 18 years because to the concentration camp I had needed to be – to have 18 years. And then they sent me to the concentration camp.

Robert Buckley: So, the Germans then always tried to stick to their laws.

Magdalena Reuter: Yes, yes. The concentration camp they – later on I heard they put some young ones in. But at that time I had to wait, so they kept me in a small cell with 10 or 13 person[s]. The whole day we sat on the bunk. We couldn't speak. It was not allowed to speak.

Robert Buckley: You couldn't speak to anybody.

Magdalena Reuter: No, we should not. Sometimes we spoke a little bit and sometimes – and then came – a friend came in the same prison, a young girl. She was studying the Bible. She was not a Witness, but she said, "I know the Witnesses." And in the night she was very – because in the night we lay down on the ...

Robert Buckley: Floor?

Magdalena Reuter: ... floor because we were 10 or sometimes 14. And everything was we lay down on the floor because there [was] no space. And then I asked this girl, "Let me" – another sister came. I knew her; was **Honey Waltman** and she came. I asked this girl, Elsa. I said, "Elsa, why don't you allow me this night when all the girls are sleeping to change with another, with Honey, because she is my – she is from my town. She is Witness. I like to know more about my family."

"Yes," she said. And in the night when everything was quiet, we changed the bed. Honey came beneath to me, and she went to Honey's bed. And so Honey under the cover, she told me everything. She told me. She told me.

And the other day the girl said, "What did you do all the night? You spoke, you spoke." But then they didn't really know what happened.

Robert Buckley: Yes, that's good, so now you weren't in the same prison at this time as you were with your mother.

Magdalena Reuter: No, my mother was in the prison in Krefeld. And Hildegard was still in that prison for young people. I couldn't even say goodbye to Hildegard because we didn't see each other, and then I was alone.

Robert Buckley: I see. How did you feel when you were by yourself? Your mother's in one prison. Your father's in another prison. Your sister's in another jail.

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, if you are alone, we couldn't sleep. Somebody would say, "OK, if you are alone, you can sleep the whole day." No, no. We had to get up in the morning six o'clock. We had to sit down on the chair, and so I was thinking. Sometimes they gave us a little bit [of] work to do, but sometimes not. I was, I think, two months alone, only the white walls.

[0:45:00] And so I thought, 'Now I will repeat what I learned by the Bible, texts of the Bible and texts of our songbook of our songs.' And I got it sometimes. For instance, one song about the faith, that the faith should be strong from our songbook from Jehovah's Witnesses, I get it in my mind again. I learned it by heart. I was thinking, thinking about, thinking about 'til I get *[clears throat]* 'til I get, I think, five verses this song had and I get it. And then I remembered what the Bible says. I remember. I thought, 'If anybody comes, what will you tell him? Then you will tell this, this, this.' And then, when I had a really good sermon in my mind to tell to the people if they asked me, then the door opens, and the policewoman came.

She said: "Let me see. You have something hidden? What number you are?" She lift[ed] up my paper off the table because everybody had a table. Sometimes they make research. They search something. From cell to cell they went. And then [she] I said: "OK, put the bedsheets off. I will see if you have anything there." I don't know what she look[ed] for. And then she looked up on the table. She said: "Ay, next week you are going home. Your time is over. Are you happy?"

I said: "Yes, I would be happy. But probably I will not go home."

She said, "Why?"

I said, "I am a Jehovah's Witness." She didn't know it. I said, "I am Jehovah's Witnesses, and they will not leave us because they like that we leave our faith, that we sign a paper that we are not Jehovah's Witnesses and so on." And so I could tell her all what I have stored in my heart and in my mind I told her. And she was so surprised. She

forget to look the bed and to look for things. She forget everything, and then she was so sad.

She said: "I'm sorry, very sorry. I wish you the best time," and she went so I had the – *[Recording glitch]*

Robert Buckley: So, the woman then felt very bad.

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, she felt very bad. But I was happy to tell her about my faith because sometimes you wished to speak about your faith, to speak about your feelings, and that is ... the same was when the overseer, the woman from the prison, called me. I told her what I thought about that, why I couldn't renounce my faith, and she understood. And as my sister Hildegard later on told me, she was the one who called my sister to tell her that my brother Wilhelm was killed, was shot. And she was so polite, so kindly, and Hildegard started to cry. She had no handkerchief. She said, "Take mine," and she was so nice, so polite. The people that were around us, they were always nice to us. Only such they don't know us. They said they're only against Jehovah's Witnesses, and they don't see the person.

Robert Buckley: You know, there are some people that say that these things didn't take place in Germany. It's just an exaggeration by the Jewish people and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Magdalena Reuter: But they should have seen it. What should you do? In Madrid was a man. We were in the Bethel in the branch office. And the wife, his wife is Jehovah's Witness. And her husband, he's a German. He was one of the SS, and he came once.

[0:50:00] And the sister said: "Tell my husband you have been in the concentration camp. He will not believe it."

And he said: "Yes, I was SS. Have you ever seen killings of person[s]?"

I said, "Yes, I did."

"Have you ever seen when they took off the Jewish people they killed?"

I said: "I didn't see when they killed them because in Ravensbrück there were not these gas room[s]. But I saw – we saw every day comings of big cars with five lights in the night. In the morning when we went to our work, we knew they took the Jewish people off in another camp to kill them. This I saw. But, "OK," they say. I said: "This is not our work, our labor to

speak about that. We speak about the Kingdom. And if the people don't believe it, what should we do?"

Robert Buckley: When was it you went to Ravensbrück because you had been in prison?

Magdalena Reuter: Yes.

Robert Buckley: So, what year was it you went to Ravensbrück?

Magdalena Reuter: I went when I was ten months. I reached 18 years, and then they put me on the transport because they had a special transport for prisoners. And as the train goes through Munster, through another town, through another town. And I'd been in about ten different prisons the night over, sleeping in the night, until I reached Ravensbrück. And in this ten days on the way on the transport, this was really terrible. I was together with six women, with this criminal and these prostitutes. And they spoke such a bad language in the train, and they tried to speak with the SS, with the policemen in the prison. And they laughed, and they spoke about sex. They spoke things I never heard about, and this was terrible for me.

But then when we reached there, I only thought I would like to be with my sisters there in prison. Then we reached there. And then all these women and the SS came, "No, don't laugh! And don't take one another!" because they went arm-in-arm. And then these women, they start to cry. They feared. And I was happy because I was free from these women.

Robert Buckley: When you were being transported—if we can just regress for a minute—were you standing up? Were you sitting with all these people? Was it overcrowded?

Magdalena Reuter: Sitting, sitting. No, depends. One day it was more overcrowded because these were special train, *Wagen* or wagon, for prisoners.

Robert Buckley: I see.

Magdalena Reuter: They had no windows. You couldn't look out because the window was painted. Came only light in, and these were special train[s].

Robert Buckley: So, each night you stopped someplace. They let you –

Magdalena Reuter: Yes, in another prison just for one night to sleep, to eat a little bit. In the morning the next.

Robert Buckley: There's a lot of young people today that aren't even familiar with this part of history, which only happened really a few years ago, 50 years ago or less. How would you explain to a group of high school students or maybe young college students what happened when you first arrived at Ravensbrück? How would you describe it to them so that they could understand what happened to a young person of your age, 18 years of age, because you could relate that to them? What was the first thing that happened?

Magdalena Reuter: In Ravensbrück? Yeah, if they don't believe that there is ...

Robert Buckley: Well, they had never heard about it before. You see, many young people today have never heard about it. What was the first thing that happened as you got off the train? How did they treat you?

Magdalena Reuter: They brought us in the reception first to register us. And the first thing was for me, where can I find my sisters to get rid of all these bad women, to get together with my sister? And then they registered us, and later on, we had to go in a bathroom. They looked if we didn't have lice because you catch them in every place in the prison.

[0:55:00] And then one woman, she looked [at] me and then she said to me, "Why are you here?"

And I said, "I am Jehovah's Witnesses," Bibelforscher, at that time, Bible Student.

And then she said, "Ay! You're welcome!" She was a sister also.

And I said, "Do you know where is Luisa **Jahndorf**?" as she was from my town. And only five minutes later, I went back to register. I was still sitting there. She looked [at] me because she had – she was – she worked there also. She could go there, and she looked [at] me, and I was so happy to see her. And then later on, she brought me to our block.

And there was another sister, Gertrude Poetzinger. She took me along. She said: "You are young. I show you. Here's your bed. You are beneath my bed." And she showed me the procedure in the camp, and so I was happy. She said: "Then the next will be the commandant soon. He will call you that you – he will – that you – he likes that you renounce your faith, and he will call you." And so it was.

He called me after two days. He called me, and he had a big Bible on his table with a sign. He opens the Bible and said, "Read that Romans 13:1." Everybody should be in subjection to the government

like this. He said, "Why don't you do what the Bible says, what your Bible says?"

I said: "But before I answer this question, we should read first the context, the whole chapter. Then I could explain it."

And then he closed the Bible and he gave me half an hour talk. He spoke I should renounce and everything, and then he dismissed me. He didn't say anymore.

Robert Buckley: When you first went into Ravensbrück, I understand that many concentration camps, they would shave all your hair off and things like that.

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, the women, first of all, if they find something on your head, lice or something, then they shave the head – was one reason. But the sister, if she finds something, she asks first, "Why are you here?" That may not happen with our sisters, although one or two they did it. But the other reason was the women who had friends with boyfriends, they were Polish, they shave their head. And so you know if you saw in the prison this shaven head, they came into the prison because of having bridegroom or friendship with a Polish man. This was a sign mostly.

Robert Buckley: Oh, in other words, they shaved their heads – the women's heads were shaved because they were ...

Magdalena Reuter: Because Hitler was so against the Polish people. He was against.

Robert Buckley: Ah, so they would shave their head.

Magdalena Reuter: He didn't allow that a Polish man or woman will marry with a German because you know Hitler was very strong. He would like to build a super race, and he didn't like the Polish, and less, Jewish people.

Robert Buckley: How would you explain to a young person going to school, again, about your day's activity? I mean, here you are in a concentration camp. You're with people of your own belief, and you call them your spiritual "sisters." What was your day like? What was the first assignments that you got?

Magdalena Reuter: In the prison? Generally, I don't speak too much about the prison or my sisters. And if young girls –

Robert Buckley: No, if you were explaining this to high school students or to college students. How would you explain to them about your day's activity, what they made you do?

Magdalena Reuter: In the prison?

Robert Buckley: In the concentration camp, in Ravensbrück.

Magdalena Reuter: I don't really speak too much with young people about it. If they don't believe it, what should I do?

[1:00:00] Because our work is to preach the good news. If they don't believe in the concentration camp I was in, OK, if they don't believe it. And if they like to know it, I explain. I said we worked there from morning until the evening. And they gave us to renounce our faith is only to Jehovah's Witnesses they gave us this slip. Everybody, some Jewish people or some other people, they said: "Oh, if they gave it to us, we would like to sign this. We would do it and we would do it." But they did it only with Jehovah's Witnesses that they renounce their faith.

Robert Buckley: So, what time did your day begin in the morning?

Magdalena Reuter: At four o'clock we get up, four o'clock in the morning. And we went there for the roll call. Or how do you call it, roll call? Depends one, two, three hours, depends how they came through. We stand at ten behind, ten, ten, every block. One block a barrack. There were one block, ten people, one behind the other, ten lines, ten by ten, a hundred, and they count. Sometimes they didn't come, they had different counts, different numbers. Then they had to count again, the SS, the people, the women or the men.

Robert Buckley: And this was always outside?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, outside, sure.

Robert Buckley: Regardless of the weather?

Magdalena Reuter: Yeah, regardless of the weather. I had once big hands, frozen hands, and they open. All the things are open here because we couldn't put – they didn't allow to put the hands in the pocket, and so sometimes we stand up about four to five hours.

Robert Buckley: Outside?

Magdalena Reuter: Outside. And then right after this, they lead us to our work. I worked in the garden with a group of Jehovah's Witnesses, of sisters, and they brought us one –

[End of Part 1 Recording]