

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Beatrice Pappenheimer
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Beatrice Pappenheimer, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 6, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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BEATRICE PAPPENHEIMER

June 6, 1990

Q: OK. Uh Bea, we've started. Would you tell us your name please?

A: I'm uh Beatrice Pappenheimer, but I was born Beate Stern.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Lauterbach, Germany. Lauterbach uh is a small town and it was uh October 1932.

Q: Tell me about your parents and your family.

A: OK. My family consisted of my parents and I have a sister who is three years younger than I am, and at that time we had an uncle living with us. He was uh about nineteen years old. He was still going to the university, and also uh my grandmother lived with us. And this is, this was our family unit.

Q: Tell me about your childhood, before it became really bad.

A: OK. In Lauterbach it was still mostly peaceful. Uh the only thing that I remember was that my uncle used to come home from the university and he used to have uh many arguments going on with my father, because my uncle would say, I can see the handwriting on the wall. I see what's coming. Let's get out of here. My father, he was an orthodox Jew. He had a lot of faith. He had faith in God. He had faith in people, and he thought, well, Hitler then...Hitler as much as what he's doing and what we're hearing, he's not going to get away with it. And also probably he thought what am I going to do in a different country, even Israel, or Palestine at that time, where things were pretty tough. He didn't speak any language but German. He was in business. He had a textile business. We owned a little store but he was on the road most of the time and my mother was in the store. Uh as a matter of fact, I remember this because my grandmother used to take care of me. I, I think in those days I used to know my grandmother better than I knew my mother. As a matter of fact, I often think of my parents being very modern, today's parents like, because they both worked. My father had had a university education and I was taken care of by the grandmother. And uh then the other thing that I remember was that uh there was talk about a cousin dying. And I remember I had nightmares about that for some reason. I was scared. That was the first time I knew what it was like to be scared of death, of something unknown. Uh that was my earliest recollection. I also...I remember playing dead. Uh I would lay down in the living room floor and I would cross my hands over my chest and say to Grandma, I'm dead. So there was talk about people, I remember, even disappearing and dying, even that early. The next thing that I remember - one day my parents came home and they were all agitated and uh the reason for it was they had to

go and register somewhere. And I remember something about that the men were called Israel...they had a name and the women's name was Sara.¹ But my parents were terribly upset. They didn't like the idea that they had to give their names and addresses and occupation and I think also what it was they had to have permission to uh move. If they want to move out of Lauterbach, they had to get permission, and that upset them to no end, and we stayed in Lauterbach until about 1936 when my father had to give up his store and they also had to give up the house because Jews were not allowed to have any, hold any property anymore. So then we moved to Karlsruhe. One of the reasons we moved to Karlsruhe was because my uh father had a brother and his family was living there. I think so. And that...Karlsruhe was a big city, compared to Lauterbach, but we had had a nice sized house in Lauterbach. In Karlsruhe it was a different story. When we first came there we moved into with my uh aunt and uncle and their three children, and they just had a small apartment, so I remember us being five children in one bedroom. And we had a wonderful time as children but at the same time it was bedlam. And my uh...I remember my father and my uncle both trying to find us an apartment. Well, that was very very difficult already in those days because many people wouldn't, if you were a Jew they wouldn't rent you an apartment. They weren't allowed to. But finally my father found an apartment above a bank and I think...well, this is the picture that I showed you that I have a picture from. And uh it was a small apartment compared to the big house we had in Lauterbach which consisted of three rooms. The bathroom was out in the hallway and we shared it with other families but we had a kitchen and the door opened from the hallway into the kitchen, so that was the main entrance and on the left side was the living room and on the right hand side was the bedroom. And there in Karlsruhe I was old enough I had to start going to school. And uh school was very very different than what we have here in the United States. There were all man teachers. They were uh going by the uh Nazi theories and we had to learn how to say "Heil Hitler" and we had to uh we were taught Nazi theories. I don't remember much of that. I just remember mostly uh that they taught us a tremendous amount in one year, but they were extremely strict. It was perfectly alright for the teacher to hit you, and uh for the girls, I remember we had to go up to the front of the room, to the desk of the teacher, and it was always on a platform, and we would hold our hands out like so, the tips of our fingers, and he would take the ruler and hit our hands that way. For the boys, he could slap them around wherever the hand would fall. We had to sit a certain way. We had to write a certain way. We could not look out of the window and God forbid we should talk to each...to each other, or to the teacher. You were only allowed to talk if the teacher addressed you. So it was completely different, but naturally I didn't realize that until years and years later. Also we didn't like to go to school, mostly because on the way to school there were other children, not Jewish, who would go after us and yell, dirty Jews, or Christ killer...all kinds of names. They would push us, throw stones at us and we were very afraid and the same thing when we would come home. Sometimes we would duck into stores. I remember one of the stores we used to run into was uh a big department store, and it had uh escalators and that was my first experience with an escalator. Uh, yes, the city of

¹ decree August 17, 1938

Karlsruhe was quite modern, and it was a beautiful city. I still remember the parks. I still remember the Schloss, or the palace that we used to go to that was in the park and every Sabbath afternoon we would uh just walk around this since we were orthodox, so one of the things you did, in the morning you would go to synagogue, in the afternoon you would go to the park. And talking about synagogues, we didn't really have a synagogue there. We used to have one in Lauterbach. I remember my father and I going to a regular synagogue, but in uh Karlsruhe for some reason I never went to a regular synagogue. We went where there was just like an apartment and it was two rooms - one room for the women and one room for the men, and there always had to be a guard in front of the apartment building uh watching the place, so I don't know whether it was you were not allowed to hold services or not, but I just remember the guard. But as children we used to have a good time running around and uh my parents being religious we used to go every Friday and...my father used to go Friday I should say. We used to stay home, wait for him to come home, and the on Saturday mornings we used to all go to synagogue, and it was a religious thing, but I think it was also social because we had a chance to meet with other people then. Uh we went to school there for about a year, and then Hitler closed all the schools to Jewish children.² We were not allowed to attend the public schools anymore. And after that my father tried to teach us as much as possible. Uh I remember as we used to uh sometimes go for a walk with one of my parents or with both of them, we used to see signs in front of stores saying Juden verboten. Not only uh stores but also public buildings and even parks. And our lives became more and more restricted. Uh one day as children we were playing outside in the street because that was the only place where we could play, and two Nazis came along and we picked up some little pebbles out of the gutter and started throwing those pebbles at them. By then we had a hatred for the Nazis. Well, they got tired of the game, and they turned around and they started yelling at us and going after us, and it was just fortunate that we knew the streets and the alleys of Karlsruhe a little better than they did. But my mother, she had been watching from the living room window and she saw the whole episode and when we came back upstairs she was absolutely furious, and she says, I can't trust you to play outside by yourselves anymore. From now on, either you have to have your father or I along, so that restricted our movement. Uh we used to see parades. We lived uh where there was right opposite from our apartment, there was like a uh public square and there was a tall uh column, you might say, and I don't know uh what it was all about uh but they used to have parades, uh the brown shirts and some of the other Nazi movements, and I as a child, I loved uh listening to the music. I used to love to listen to the parade and the marching, never thinking anything that much of it. I knew my parents were against it, but it sounded so pretty, so I would go to the window of our living room and look out. And one day my mother came up behind me and she hit me on my behind and she said I don't want you looking out of the window. So I couldn't do that anymore. Uh like I say, our lives were very very restricted, plus scary at the same time because I remember my mother saying to my father, now be sure you're back by nig...uh night time. I don't want to have to worry

² Jewish children could only go to Jewish schools: Nov., 1938; no school for Jewish children at all: July 1, 1942.

about you. And one of the reasons was that uh there were a lot of muggings going on and people just disappearing, so my mother always used to say, be...be home before it's dark, and I remember there were times when my father wasn't home and she would pace the kitchen floor, back and forth, back and forth. So life for my parents must have been terribly tough, terribly uncertain and I, I remember the arguments between them a lot uh for one reason or another. Also because uh some of the shops were closed to us it was hard even to know where to get your bread, where to get your food. It was tough. I had one experience that I shall never forget was that one day uh I went over to see my girlfriend, and she lived right across the street from us, and I go upstairs...she lived also in an apartment...and uh I knocked on the door. The mother opens up the door and she's, and she says to me, oh it's you. I don't want you playing anymore here. And she just shut the door in my face. And that was the last I saw of this friend. And I gather that she wasn't Jewish, and by then, and I forgot exactly what year it was...could have been probably 1937, '38...they couldn't, they they could not fraternize with you any more, but that hurt. And I still carry that hurt. Uh the next thing that I can tell you about is that uh one night we woke up and there was a lot of commotion in the street and as I remembered looking out of the window, I saw fires all over the place. It was as though the whole city of Karlsruhe was burning, but I remember saying something...my father was saying uh the synagogues are burning. They're burning all the synagogues. So he quickly got dressed and went downstairs and I remember my mother and my sister and I waiting up for my father to come home again. And he didn't come home. And we waited and we waited all night. He never came home. We found out...and I don't remember when I found this out, but now I can tell you that he had been taken like a lot of other men that night, rounded up and they were taken to concentration camps and he was taken to Buchenwald. I don't remember how long he was gone, but I shall never forget the day he came back, and at first I didn't know it was him, because the kitchen door opens up and there stands this man...he was bent over. My father had...he was a short man but he had always been quite erect, but that day he was bent over and he had, he was all dirty and there was blood on him and he was shaking. We had one of those old-fashioned uh black wood-burning stoves right across from the kitchen door, and when he opened up that door he started putting his hands, both hands, on that stove, and I knew it was hot, so I screamed at him...Pa...and at that same instant, I recognized who he was, and I screamed, Papa, Papa, it's hot. And my screams brought my mother into the kitchen and she took one look at him and I still remember her raising her hands and quickly going to him and taking him into the bedroom. Well my father was sick, I guess, and uh it was lucky I think that my mother had a little bit of nursing experience. Somehow she managed to get him well, because we couldn't call a doctor by then, and uh...but he was never the same after that. I don't think my father found work when we had come to uh Karlsruhe. I don't know really what he did, except for one comment. One evening...I I used to watch him. His hands always hurt him, and one evening I remember we were sitting around the table and I said to him, how come your hands hurt you so much Father? And he said it's because I'm laying bricks and it's hard work and it hurts my hands. So he must have been maybe put into forced labor and uh he was a brick-layer. He was never the same after that. He stayed around the apartment quite a bit and maybe he was hiding. I don't know. I

don't know to this day how he managed to get out of Buchenwald. Uh I don't know...some people I know if they paid enough money they were able to get out. Others they escaped. I don't know how he did it. The next thing that I remember is uh that we had bombings. The air raids started. The air raids would start up and we'd go down...first of all we had to pull our shades because we had, there was blackout, so we had to go down...we pulled the shades, went down to the basement and there we huddled in the basement. It was a big basement, because we lived in an apartment and the apartment houses, several of them must have been connected so it was a community basement. And one of the things that I remember and probably this whole episode I remember because of that...my mother used to tell stories to everyone and one of her stories...I smile at it today, and whether I believed her or not I don't know, but she would say...see this basement. It has a rounded roof, and it did. It had a rounded roof. And we were all huddled down there. Some of the children were crying. Some of the older people wringing their hands and saying what's going to become of us, and uh you didn't know whether you would live from one minute to the next. You would hear the bombs falling and it was...it was terribly frightening. And here my mother tells the story...see this roof is rounded. If a bomb should fall, it's not going to come through. It's going to roll right off, and I must have laughed at it even at this time, because when ever I think about it, it makes me laugh for some reason. And she would tell all kinds of different stories. She would try to get everybody to sing songs, just anything just to take their minds off just a little bit of of the situation. Then the air raid sirens would blow again and we'd go upstairs. So we got used to that kind of a life uh...nights being interrupted by the sirens. Sometimes even during the day. Then one day...it was late 1939,³ there was a loud knock on the door. And there stood two Gestapo. My mother asked them, what do you want? And they said, don't ask any questions, and they yelled, just go and pack. And my mother said, well, how long are we going to be gone? How much should we pack? And they got angrier and angrier as she asked these questions, and they yelled louder and louder, and finally they said, just go pack enough for two weeks, so my mother goes into the bedroom and she starts packing and I went into the living room because I had a doll that I loved very much and I used to take that doll where ever I went, so as I went into the living room one of the Nazis followed me, and I go and pick up that doll and he says, he says to me, and he also gets ahold of my arm and starts shaking me and saying, where you're going you don't need this doll, and I look at him, and to this day I can see that face. And I and I said to him, if I can't have that doll...I thought for some reason that he wanted it...I said to him, if I can't have that doll, you can't have her either. And I take the doll and I threw her down on the floor and her doll...and that doll was made...her face was made out of porcelain and broke into hundreds of pieces, and oh, that it got me so upset. As a matter of fact I was so upset during that whole episode I don't remember my father or my sister. It seemed like the whole thing was played out between my mother and I for some reason, and yet I know they were there, but I don't remember them at all. My mother gets done packing and we're about to go out, and I look around that apartment and I thought to myself...we'll never see it again. And I look at my mother and I said to her as much. I

³ date uncertain

says I don't want to go. They're not going to let us see this place again. And I take ahold of the leg of the kitchen table and I...I wouldn't let go of it, and my mother had a terrible time trying to get me out of the door, but little by little she calmed me and she managed to get me out. They took us to the railroad station, and there there were hundreds of people, lots of people. And you could tell some of them had been waiting there for quite some time, because they were laying on blankets, sitting on the suitcases. There were babies crying. Older people again crying and uh it was just so confusing...everything. We waited, I forgot for how long, but after a while we lined up and they put us on a train. Now it was a regular train but we were squeezed in. There were so many of us. And I thought always because there was so many people on the train and I don't know whether they'd slow (ph) or not that that's why the train went very slow. And it did. It went very slow, and especially going around a bend. It would really slow down, and because there were so many people, it was very hot and the windows were open so some people thought they would escape and they jumped out of the windows, but they didn't realize at first that there were Nazis on the roof of the train, and they had guns and they shot those people as they tried to get away from the train, and that was my first experience seeing someone die. I saw some being shot. It was terrible. And people were just...everybody was very excited on the train, too. Then after a while the train stopped and it was at the border of Germany and France. And then there was a voice over the loudspeaker and it said, if you have any money, get rid of it, or at least I thought that's what it said, because my mother, she tried to hide some money on her and and I I was in a terrible state I guess because I saw her doing it and I started screaming at her, which I would never have dared to do under ordin...ordinary circumstances because you had a great great respect for your parents. But I said to her, don't do this. They're going to do something terrible to you, and sure enough, they had said over the loudspeaker that if you disobeyed orders, you would be shot, and so I was just hysterical when I saw her doing that and so she says OK, take the money and flush it down the toilet. So I go take the money and I go to the toilet and I flush it down, and I don't think...I don't know how much it was or anything...it was just a handful...and then I came back and I walked through the corridor because there they have compartments and I walked through the corridor and you can see into the compartments and there I saw the Nazis searching people and taking them out into the corridor and uh after a while I noticed that they were lining them up on the platform outside. Pretty soon I hear the shots and true to their word they were shooting all the people who had tried to hide money on their person. But I didn't see...I just heard the shots...I didn't see anything because my mother took me against her body like and she hid my face against her. Then the train went on, and like I said, there were so many people on the train, I didn't have a seat. My mother had a seat but I didn't, and after a while I made myself comfortable on the floor. I just sat down on the floor and I remember I had a wall to lean against. I remember still seeing a fat lady sitting there and there was an old man and people standing...somebody tall and thin and the train went on and on. I don't remember...there was no food, nothing to drink, and I missed more not having anything to drink. I became very very thirsty and my throat felt so dry, almost was like getting a sore throat, and I don't remember how many days we were on the train. It just seemed like it went on and on and on and on. I slept some and then suddenly the train stopped and we were able to

get out but then they put us on trucks and I remember still the roughness of those of those Nazis. Sometimes there was an old person who didn't walk fast enough for them, and they would kick him, or they would pull a man's beard or they would hit them with their sticks that they had and always I heard the word, "schnell, schnell", which means quick, quick. Then we were put on those trucks and taken to the concentration camp. My first sight of that concentration camp what...my my...I became just desolate. There was barbed wire all around it and it looked all brown, grey and black. There wasn't any green for grass. There were no leaves on the trees. It looked so desolate. It looked so sad. We were taken off the trucks and then we were separated, the men from the women and we had to say goodbye to my father and the women were taken to a big barrack and there they told us to get undressed and this time they looked for gold. We had little bracelets. They took those. My mother, she had pierced earrings. They were round...they were hoop earrings and they pulled those earrings right off her ear lobe. They didn't even give her a chance to take them off. They just pulled them, and I still hear her cry out to this day, and I remember her holding her hands like that to her ears. Then they gave us mattresses and the mattress was very light, and I was surprised but the reason why it was so light was because it just contained straw. They assigned a bed for us. Now my mother and sister and I, we had only one bed to sleep on. We were about twenty-five to thirty people in a barrack. We had just...there were just beds but they had like...they were they were frames, wooden frames, chicken wire and then we put the mattress on. There were no bunk beds. People tried to have a little privacy. Now I remember them, them hanging up maybe some kind of a rag or cloth, and in each barrack there was a scale, and I was, really at first I remember I was wondering what was the scale for. But I had a chance to find out, because everyday they would throw one loaf of bread into the barrack, and they would throw it. The women would go after that loaf of bread. At first it wasn't that bad, but then when you...but then when we became hungrier and hungrier, things became worse and worse. And the reason I'm saying this is that we used to have one person to divide...to divide up this loaf of bread, and it wasn't very big. It was regular loaf like that. But to divide it up amongst, like I say, twenty-five to thirty people wasn't very easy, and also I never saw any knives, forks or spoons. So one person was selected and she would try and weigh bread as closely as possible so everybody would have the same amount. Didn't always work out that way because it was very difficult to do. So if one person would get just a little bit more, the other women would jump on this person and they would have terrible fights. These women who had been ladies turned like into animals almost, just to have a little bit of more bread, but they were starving us, and when you are that hungry it hurts and you will do almost anything, anything to get just a little bit of bread, or anything. The other thing that they used to give us in the evenings, they used to give us a bowl of soup and the soup consisted of just...it was liquid and it had a little bit of a vegetable in it but one day in my soup I found a little piece of meat. A little piece of meat. I still see it to this day. And I ate that piece of meat and do you know that I can still taste it. I still know what it looks like and do you...nothing in my whole life is every going to taste as good as that little piece of meat. How it found it's way to me I don't know, but that's the only time that I had meat. That's about all that I can remember getting or eating there except my mother worked in the kitchen, so I had dysentery.

People got terribly sick with various diseases because the sanitary conditions were non-existent. Like I never saw any running water. The barrack that we were staying in, it leaked. So sometimes my mother, she would have a container and she would try and collect as much water as possible and I think we used that for drinking. We used it for various things that we needed, maybe washing off a little bit. I don't remember taking a shower, bath, nothing. We were dirty. We had lice. We had lice in our hair. We had lice on our clothing. And I remember my sister, she had terrible sores because these lice, they made you scratch, and she had sores all over her legs, all over her arms and body, and in the evening my mother would try and take her clothes off but the clothes would stick to the sores and she would cry terribly. The one strange thing that happened in that camp was that we used to get uh people from Switzerland. A woman would come...I mean it was a lady. She would come. She was from the uh Red Cross. She would come and as children we'd go to this one barrack where we used to be able to uh play certain games and she would be there and she would sing songs for us. I remember this because she used to yodel. That's the first time I heard any yodeling. And she would distribute those little triangles of cheese. One piece of cheese per person. Well, it would have been better if she hadn't done it at all because what happened was we were like animals and some of us were stronger than other people and because we were so hungry, terrible fights used to break out again amongst us children. We used to try and get away the cheese from each other, and I...as a matter of fact my sister to this day holds it against me...being older, being stronger than her, I used to grab the cheese away from her, and she oft...she often...that's one of the things she always used to say to me. She says, Bea, how could you have done this to me. I was starving like you. How could you take the cheese. But I did it. I took the cheese away from her and so I don't understand...I never could understand how how how come they did something like that. They knew we were terribly hungry. We were starving. And yet they came and they went back, and they didn't do anything. They they saw the way we were living. And...but that didn't happen too often. I remember maybe two, three times during that time...I was there almost a year...

Q: Which camp was this, Bea?

A: This, this was at Gurs. And uh it was, it was a terrible thing to do to us and it didn't help us any. By then I, we had been there maybe a year. I was very homesick for my father. Uh and I would, I would listen to grown-up's conversation, and I knew where the man's camp was, and maybe because I listened uh I got it into my head that I want to visit my father, no matter what. I, I...the urge was so strong. I had to see my father. So I told my sister about it. I said I want to see our father, and she says you are absolutely crazy. First of all, they're not going to let you. They'll shoot us before they'll let you do it. I said I don't care. I want to see our father. Will you come with me? Very reluctantly my sister comes with me and I take her hand and we go to the entrance of the camp. The guard comes out of his guardhouse and he must have asked where were, where we want to go and I told him. He must have given me a certain amount of resistance. I don't remember the exact conversation, but one thing I remember is that I didn't have any respect for our guards. I wasn't even that scared of them. I just had no respect for them. I felt I was

superior to them, and I don't know why, where that feeling even came from. And because of that I think I was able to do what I did, because there we were having a bit of an argument and like I say, I don't remember the exact conversation. The one thing that I remember about it is that I kicked him on his boot and I said to him, "tu sale cochon", which means you dirty pig. And I take my sister's hand and we...I said to her, what ever you do Suzie, don't look back, and we march out of that camp and we, I thought for sure he would shoot us in the back. I really expected it, but he didn't. We marched and we marched and to this day I still can see that route. That concentration camp was very close to the Pyrenees. You could see the Pyrenees, and the Pyrenees were throwing a shadow over the road, and after the shadow I still can see that sun shining and we walked down that road and I find the camp where the men are, and somebody must have...yeah, somebody did. Somebody took us to my father. I don't remember everything about that visit, but one thing I've never forgotten...just during that time they were giving everyone eggs. Just an egg. And I was so surprised to see an egg, because we had never gotten an egg at the camp. Even in Germany it was very hard to get eggs and I've always loved eggs, so if they were giving each man an egg, I thought ummm....my father surely will share that egg with us. I know he will. My father opens up the egg. So did the other people. It was a raw egg. And I look at my father, and he was shaking for some reason as he was looking at the egg, so I go look at the egg and low and behold there's blood in the egg. Well an orthodox Jew will not eat an egg with blood in it. It's unclean. It's not kosher, but I thought oh, he'll make an exception. He'll, he'll eat some of it and give us some surely. We're starving after all. But my father takes the egg and throws it against the wall of the barrack and I could hardly believe it, but I look at that yellow ooze running down the wall and I thought to myself, I'm going to go lick it before it touches the floor, and I go and run for it, but I made the mistake of turning around as I ran, because I, I knew I was...I...I...what I was doing was not right, and I looked at my father's face and I stopped. I could not do it. My father took us in his arms and we cried together. And I don't...that's something I just could never forget, that even though he was starving, we were starving, he would not eat the egg that had blood in it and therefore not kosher. Uh we got back to the women's camp and that's, that was, that's the big thing that I remember about that visit. Then uh my sister who like I say is four years younger than I, she became very weak, very sickly, so one day my mother said it's...I'm going to send Suzie out of the camp so you have to say goodbye to her, and I said goodbye to my sister and I hated it because she was really my best friend and so it was just my mother and I and shortly after that they transferred us to another concentration camp by the name of Rivesaltes...

Q: Do you know...excuse me...do you know where Suzie went?

A: At that time I did not know where she went. I just knew she...I said goodbye to her and that was it, so then, like I say, we were transferred to the, to another concentration camp by the name of Rivesaltes and there it was much the same. The only thing is I must have even gotten hungrier because I remember going into the garbage, so I was in competition with the rats and the mice. As a matter of fact there was talk about the rats being also

starving, not having enough food so they used to bite people. I became sick with cholera and uh they put me into like an infirmary. It was a little room and I remember there was a window with bars on it. One day I see my father's face and I could hardly believe it and I, I must have asked how come they let him come to see me, and he said it's because I'm being transferred to Marseilles. Well, I didn't think too much of it for some reason uh and I didn't realize that that was the last time that I saw my father, through that window. I got better and then one day my mother came for me, and as we walked back to the barracks I still remember her saying to me, you know it's time that I sent you out of the camp too. Otherwise you won't last much longer. Now my mother, I remember watching her in the evenings when she would get undressed. She was like a skeleton. And also she started coughing. She would cough at night and now I suspect she came down with TB. But I remember the coughing and I remember how skinny she was and also probably she gave us maybe some of the food that she should have eaten. I don't know. One day my mother takes me to a place where there were other children and a truck, and then we were loaded up on that truck. I said goodbye to my mother, also not really realizing this would be the last time I would ever see her. We said goodbye and the truck went out of the camp. It was broad daylight. There was this organization called the OSE, Oeuvre de Secours des Enfants and they took out as many children as they could out of the concentration camps and they had homes across the southern part of France. I was moved fourteen different times and uh these homes...they were like chateaus or big mansions and we used to be maybe a hundred, hundred and fifty, two hundred children in one of those homes. They were, they tried to teach us French and also uh give us...they gave us French uh names like I was born Beate and my name name turned into Beatrice. Uh they gave us...we didn't have much schooling. We were really busy trying to, for instance we...to grow vegetables so we would have something to eat. Sometimes we came to these places. They didn't even have enough beds or furniture so the boys would be uh building furniture. Us girls, we would till the soil so we would have something to eat. They use...they used to teach us how to survive in the, in the forest. Uh what grasses, what weeds to eat because many times we didn't have enough vegetables, so we would eat off the land. Uh we just...we were constantly moving all the time. We did our own cooking. We did our own uh washing of dishes and uh did everything ourselves. I really learned housekeeping in those homes you might say. Uh we we learned how to write a little bit more. They always made sure that we would write to our parents in the concentration camp. We had older children looking after the younger ones. Uh I received letters from my parents. As a matter of fact I tried to send a package once to the concentration camp of bread. Uh I I hadn't...I... some reason bread became very very important to me and so one day I went into the village and I tried to get...I got some bread and I made a package to send to the camp. Whether my mother ever got it or not I have no idea and those homes were raided though. And so they used to move us. I remember one night they woke us up and we were moved by uh motorcycle. It was a terrible ride yet at the same time I found it very exciting. At other times we were moved by like farmer's cart with hay on top of us, because the countryside was also occupied and all these little towns were occupied and and a lot of the uh French were Na...Nazis. So we were moved from one place to the other. One day as I came to this home, a little girl comes and she brings me a blanket and

I look at her, she looks at me, and I thought oh, she looks familiar, and I didn't recognize her right away because she didn't have any hair. Her hair was shaved and she had a bandage, and it took me maybe a couple of seconds to recognize my sister. And I could hardly believe it. It was pure coincidence. It was like a miracle that we found each other. Well we, needless to say, we were overjoyed and we hugged each other. As a matter of fact we would...we wouldn't let go of each other for the longest time. We were quite insecure. I remember being terribly insecure and I used to scratch my head all the time and uh I used to think, what's going to happen to us? What's going to happen to us when the war is over with? Will my parents be alive? Will we find them again? Will we find each other again? But I also learned something during those days, that maybe because the times were so terrible that I learned that what goes on around you is one thing and what goes on within you can be another thing. Because I found myself having perfectly happy moments. And it was a strange revelation.

Q: Tell us about some of those moments.

A: I remember once we were, we were in this uh convent and and these moments came all of a sudden, for no reason at all. I was going down the stairs and I was going to be with some other girls and on those stairs this happiness comes over me, just like that and I think it was...I was alive. I was able to go down the stairs and it it was, you know, the situation was terrible. I didn't know...at that time I didn't know where my sister was. I didn't know where my parents was, but I was joining a group of friends and for some reason that made me happy and also what was so important in those times was my Jewish identity. It helped me tremendously. I had something in common with other people. And I knew that other Jews were taking care of me and it gave me a sense of family and that was very important and and finding out all of this on my own...nobody telling me this, gave me a sense of security because I knew that within I was alright. The things that were happen...were happening outside uh could only touch me if I let them touch me, and this was the most important lesson I think that I've learned in my whole life. Uh and it's true I made also a lot of friends during that time, good friends. Uh and these friends, they helped me an awful lot to get through it and I hope that I was able to help some of these people too. I don't know. I did meet up with some later on and we stayed in those homes until 194....1943.

Q: Could you...before you move on...could you tell me...you said that you were, you were in a convent at one point. Can you tell me a little bit about the convent....

A: Yes. This is...I'm coming to it. (laughter) So we were in those homes until 1943. Well, in 1943 Hitler became even in a bigger hurry to kill all the Jews so these homes were bombed. They were not raided anymore. Now this was getting to be serious business, and this organization...what to do with all of these children that they had on their hands. Some of the children went into private Christian homes. Some of us, my sister included, went to a convent. That convent was in Milleau (ph), in the southern central part of France. A little town. And life in the convent was completely different than what we had

ever known. As a matter of fact I had hardly given it a thought that I knew some people were Christians, gentiles, but we were used to calling the others but I had never really mixed with anybody especially that was not Jewish. I had lived in a Jewish world, so this was different. I learned about baby Jesus, for instance. And the story was so appealing to me and what happened was that I became...I thought to myself, this is nice. Why shouldn't I turn Catholic? And I wanted to turn Catholic. I liked the convent. The sisters were very very kind. Uh as a matter of fact only one sister really knew that we were Jewish. The others did not know. It was a school convent so we learned catechism. I know a lot about the Catholic religion. We went to church. It's true we could not ta...partake of communion and I don't know really how they got around that, but we did not take communion but we did everything otherwise what the other Christian children did. There too the older ones took care of the younger ones. I remember I took care of a little girl, and I still remember her name. Her name was Violet. Now she was a little Catholic girl. She had a problem. She would not let anybody touch her. She had a mental problem. But I liked that little girl. I still remember how she looked. She had curly hair, dark curly hair. She had kind of a dark skin and I liked that. I always was so white that I always liked somebody that had a dark skin, so I took a liking to her but I knew that if I would touch her she would pull away. But I used to kind of flirt with her. I used to smile at her, talk to her, and eventually I was able to just play a game with her of touching and soon we became friends and I was able to touch her. And that gave me a lot of satisfaction, because I was the only one. In that convent we also uh had food. It's true we had chestnuts for breakfast, for lunch and dinner, but it was food. But to this day I don't like chestnuts. On Sundays we used to get chocolate milk, but it isn't chocolate milk like we have here. It was like a very...almost like a between a pudding and between a chocolate milk. It was very thick, but I loved it. It was delicious. And uh we had bread. We had soups. We even had some meat once in a blue moon, and...but we were not starving anymore and we slept between two sheets, which was luxury. We used to uh do work for the village. I learned how to sew, how to do embroidery. I learned how to knit. We also were farmed out to farmers and I learned how to cut grapes and also uh to pull weeds and to pull bugs off potato leaves because they didn't have insecticides in those days, so this was done by hand. And we used to do things like that.

Q: OK. Could we at this point pause? We need to change tapes and then we'll come back to the convent.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: OK. Uh tell me more about the convent. Tell me, tell me what con...what it was like being in the convent.

A: OK. It was (cough), it was very nice. I happened to like it. Uh the sisters had a lot of faith and when bombings were going on, for instance, instead of going down to the basement, they would have us go out in the in the yard and uh we would hold hands and uh we would just form a circle and dance around and the only protection that we would have would be a piece of wood that we we would put between our teeth and the bombs would fall and there we were, just dancing around. It's true though that they had a big sign on the roof, and I forgot what it was...saying that they couldn't bomb the convent because it was a convent. There was some kind of a sign saying you cannot bomb here but you know, whether that would hold true that they would honor that or not who knows, but that's what it was and nothing ever did happen.

Q: OK. We need to stop the tape...

PAUSE

Q: Tell me about the convent and bombing raids on the convent. You had started a story.

A: OK. In the convent, when uh the air raids would start, we didn't go down in the basement. What we used to do, we used to out into the court...into the courtyard, and there we would hold hands and dance around the circle. And the only protection that we used to have was a piece of wood that we would take between our teeth so we would not bite our tongue, and it's true that there was a sign on the roof of the convent letting the planes know that they should not bomb the convent, but whether they would actually uh do this or or not, we really weren't that sure, so we were scared. But the sisters, they had a lot of faith and that's the way we did it, and I'm here to tell the story. Uh the other thing that I remember is that one day we were walking...we always used to walk to church two by two, and we were in uniforms. I used to stand out because I had blond hair. The children, most of the children who were French, have dark hair. Dark hair, usually a darker skin, but my hair no one had cut for quite some time so it was very long, very blond. I looked very very German. While Milleau was occupied and there were Nazis walking all over the place and as we walked towards the church, suddenly a Nazi comes up to me, started stroking my face, started stroking my hair, and I was petrified. I could not look at him. I was trembling. And it was just fortunate that the sister who had been walking in front of the line just happens to turn around and saw what was going on. She came towards him and started talking to him and he let me alone. And thank God I had the presence of mind not to open up my mouth. It was a frightening experience. Uh the other thing that I remember is that, like I say, I liked the story of Jesus. I was really taken up by it and I want to convert. And I told the sisters, I said to that one sister, I said, _____...I still remember her name..._____, I would like to become Catholic. And she would shake

her head and she says, I don't know. I don't know. I don't think your fath...your father and mother would like that, and I would say, it would be so much easier. And it's true. I was thinking it would be so much easier to be a Christian than to be Jewish but somehow I never did do it. But they are children, and many of them who did convert and who after leaving the convent did become Christians or were adopted by Christian families. We lost an awful lot of kids that way. But my sister and I, we stayed Jewish. Also we were in two different convents. My sister, she had...by then she still was sickly and she also was starting to come down with TB. So in those years whenever you had something like that, they said you should go out in the country, so they sent my sister...at first they just wanted to send my sister out to the country to another convent, and I argued with them and I said to them, if you send my sister, I go. And I was very stubborn and so they had us both go and we went to Balmal (ph), to another convent and there it was, it was a farming convent and we used to help take care of some of the livestock. Well one day the sister told me take care of this cow, to take her to a certain pasture. Well, I've never been good at directions and I took her to the wrong pasture because when I came back with her, the poor cow was all bloated and the sister was furious with me. She says from now on I cannot trust you with the cows, so you're going to have to feed the pigs. I know you can't do anything wrong feeding the pigs, so here I was, a nice little Jewish girl who doesn't eat any pork, feeding the pigs. Uh we learned how to church butter and we ate butter for the first time in years, and oh did it taste good but the only trouble is we had a little bit of butter. We didn't have enough bread. At least it wasn't enough bread for me, and I was always hungry for bread, butter and jelly. I used to dream about food. We stayed in that convent until the war was almost over with and then this organization took us back and we went back to one of the homes. And there we stayed until it was over.

Q: Tell us, tell us about the home and tell us first...did you find out...you had met up with your sister. Did you find out where she had been?

A: Uh not really. We didn't talk about things like that that much. It was...our talk was more about the everyday things, you know...what we were going to...eating was of the utmost importance. We always talked about food. Uh we used to do a lot...I remember I used to do a lot of running. Again the older children took care of younger children. I seemed to have a certain aptitude to take care of like uh...I remember I took care of a boy who was a uh hemo...hemophilia I think...where they bleed. I had to be very careful with him. Uh I I had to make sure that he would not run, that he wouldn't cut himself and I used to take him for walks. We used to sit under the tree for hours at a time, and uh he was my responsibility at times I remember. Uh and then I used to take care of other children. And uh we were, we were busy walking, exercising, uh like I say learning about what we could eat, what we couldn't eat, and also sitting down and learning French. We used to play games. Uh we had uh we used to dance like I learned to dance the ____ there because we were all Jewish...but different...there were children from Poland. There were children from Hungary, from all different nationalities, uh not only German. And I learned how to speak a little Yiddish, so it was...uh I don't know. We didn't even...I don't think we even did that much. For the most...we were weak. We didn't weigh very much, and we

concentrated more or less on our health and what we had to eat. Uh oh we washed clothes. I was always very particular as to how I look, and I...this story I got from my sister. She used to say whenever there...because in many of those chateaus they were old. There was no running water for instance, so we had to take a bath in a lake but winter time comes. It was too cold and most of the children wouldn't do it, but here I was, taking my bath in the lake, no matter how cold it was. Or I would wash clothes out which a lot of the other children wouldn't do, and uh as a matter of fact I...there was a doctor. I remember him because he used to come to the home on horseback and uh he used to be quite fond of me and uh he used to call me Mignon (ph) which means sweet in French and uh he had another name for me which I...which escapes me now, and uh he was very nice. He was very special. The other thing that I had was a paren (ph), a god mother. And usually I don't tell this story but I think here it's OK to...you know, I should tell it. Uh she would send me money every month and there I had this money. As a matter of fact it's in my documents, her name is, and uh she would send me money and I had all this money and I didn't really know what to do with all that money but I just saved it and once in a while some...we would get, we would be able to go into town and so I would buy a fountain pen with it. I bought some uh uh shoe polish with it once, and uh I quarreled with my sister because she used too much shoe polish, as a matter of fact. I said to her, do you think that I can spend all this money on shoe polish and you use it all. She remembers that too. She remembers all the terrible things I did to her, and one day we had gone into Paris and I bought all the children ice cream and I felt like a big _____ because I had all that money, and why I had that power I don't know to this day. But she wanted to adopt me. Later on I found out, but she wouldn't take my sister and I wouldn't go without my sister and that was after the war. As a matter of fact when the war was over with this organization having all of us on their hands, one of the things they did was advertise in the _____, which is a German-Jewish newspaper and it circulates in Israel, Palestine in those days, and in New York and England and my grandmother was the first one to read the advertisement that the org...that they had put in that paper saying that they Beata and Suzie Stern were looking for any living relatives and it was from my grandmother that we heard first. She sent us a letter.

Q: From where?

A: From Israel, Palestine. And I was over-joyed. I thought oh, my grandmother is alive. Because by then I was constantly worried...would anybody be alive and what would become of us. I mean can you imagine. Here we were. Two little girls and realizing that their...the letters from our parents had stopped after a while we were in those homes. So I knew something happened to them. Also by then there were a lot of rumors going around. I mean I don't know whether...I don't know whether we knew about Auschwitz and all those terrible camps or not. I really don't remember. I just remember something terrible was happening to people, but it was not a descriptive type of a information that I received or or knew. I just knew something terrible happened. As a matter of fact, after I didn't hear from my parents, I became uh very scared and I wouldn't talk for a while. They had a hard time getting me to talk again because I was so afraid. Uh and I used to constantly

worry...think what will become of us? What's going to happen to Suzie and I? So when I heard from my grandmother it was just really something to me, and then my uncle also wrote, and soon we heard from my aunts in New York City and my uncle and aunt in London. Well, everybody wanted us. They all said, come to us. We'll see that you get out and we'll take care of you. So we had a choice but this paren, she also wanted me and she even said what a wonderful life you will have with me. I, I had...I always wrote her thank you and she communicated with me too whether I don't...I haven't found any of her letters amongst the letters that I have but there was some kind of communication and it must have been by word mou...mou...mouth and word. And I just know she also wanted to adopt me. But I said no, because she wouldn't take my sister. I want to go to Palestine because I remembered my grandmother, but my sister said no. Let's go to London, because that's the shortest route. Now we have been traveling all this time, constantly, and my sister probably was even more tired than I was. And so she thought, well, it's the shortest route. Let's go to England, London. So I said OK. So one day they took us to Paris to process all the papers I imagine and this...there was a lady in _____ who was a friend to one of my aunts and she knew that my mother was in the concentration camp, so my aunt had told her about us and that we might see her and to watch out for us and low and behold, we met up with her and to this day I call her Tanta Santa (ph). And she came with us to Paris and on the train, I remember I had all this money and I thought to myself, I don't need this money anymore. I should give it away. And I said to Santa, I said to her, you know, I'd like to give this money to a library. Why to a library? Why I want to give the money away? I don't know. But I said to her, I don't need this money. Take this money and give it to a library. So I gave her the money. Now it's interesting...at that time I really didn't know it was to her that I gave the money. I found that out years and years later when I discussed this part of my life with her, and she said to me, Beata (ph), you gave me that money. It was me you gave it to. And I saw to it that that money went to a Jewish library. And like I say, what prompted me to do this I don't know. Then uh also the other thing we did while we were in Paris was Tanta Santa and I, she had lost her husband. She didn't know where her husband was. I didn't know whether...where my parents were. I didn't know there was a cousin who I was very fond of...his name was Robert...and his mother who was, had been in the concentration camp with my mother, Aunt Clara...I want to find out where all these people had gone to, where they were, whether they were still alive, and they had lists in certain places...they must have been public places, so we went in Paris to all these different places and we would look at these lists, looking for my parents and other relatives and she looking for her moth...for her husband. We would go from one place to the other and it was terrible for us because we would never see the names, so we knew, you know, they were gone. And we did that...we were...I, I had forgotten...we were a few days there, and we never did find any of the names, but we always, every morning I remember we used to have hope and we would go out and she would take me around. Every evening we would come home dead tired and we felt so bad, so desolate and so sad. Then after a few days it was time to board the ship, so we went and it was one of the first ships to leave Calais...

Q: Excuse me. I think you need to back up to explain something for me. Your aunt, or as

you called her your aunt, had taken you from _____ to Paris.

A: Yes.

Q: Alright. How did you make arrangements to go where with her?

A: Well, she did. She made all the arrangements. I...that was out of my hands because I didn't know Paris. I was just...I was by then twelve years old, so I didn't know that much but I knew...she wanted...I wanted to go with her because I must have been...I was very close to her and when, probably when she said she was looking for her husband, I must have said well I'd like to look for my parents and for my Aunt Clara and so I used to go with her and she remembers me doing this. And uh that's how, but then she stayed in Paris. She didn't come on ship and then we were about uh I think we were about fifteen, sixteen children who boarded that ship and we went to England. It was one of the first ships to leave Calais and suddenly there were rumors on board that the waters were mined, and we thought, oh my God. We've come this far to be blown up. And uh we got scared but after a while we noticed there was uh mine sweepers going ahead of us and everything was alright, or not quite alright because there was a storm and it was such a rough voyage...most of us kids were throwing up all over and we were so sick and so miserable. Lucky for us there were some Waves aboard and that was my first experience meeting Americans. And they were wonderful. Absolutely wonderful to us. They took care of us. Washed our faces. Cleaned our clothes off and made it bearable. Well we arrived in England and then we took the train to London and there was my uncle who had come to meet us, and uh I was over-joyed at seeing them. Being with a family again. Living in a regular house. It it was wonderful. My aunt spoke French, which was good. I by then had a hatred for Germany. I hated the idea that I was born in such a country. I was ashamed. I was ashamed of being German. I was almost ashamed of myself. Where all these feelings came from I don't know exactly but I was...I was ashamed. I didn't want to speak German, so my aunt spoke French with us and uh they were good to us, but times were difficult. They lived in a house where the windows were all broken, because of the bombings there and there was cardboard on the windows. Uh food was rationed. I remember my aunt tried so hard to uh get sugar so she could bake some cakes, or even just bake. Uh we had to start going to school there. My aunt thought it would be good if we started school, but at first she uh used to tutor so we would learn English, and he was wonderful. We came out of the camps and and at that time, through those homes, in fairly good condition except we had calluses on our feet. We didn't have shoes and we used to go bare-footed so much of the time, so the calluses were about an inch thick and it was very painful after a while, these calluses, and we had to go to a foot doctor and slowly get all that layer of callus taken off. Uh the doctor was so nice. Uh my aunt still talks about him to this day because he would not accept a penny for any of it when he heard our story because he had never seen feet that callused. Oh, I forgot to tell you too and the only other shoe that I remember wearing was in the convent they gave us some _____ which are wooden shoes. But they are also very hard because we didn't have the nice little slippers to fit into the _____ so we used to just wear the wooden show and most of the

time I didn't like them. They didn't feel very comfortable and so I used to kick them off and just walk bare-footed. But we suffered, I suffered very badly from uh those calluses. Uh we were malnourished to some extent but my aunt managed to get us as much food as possible and we were under the doctor's care, the foot doctor care and this and that. Uh I started to school. It was a Jewish school. My aunt and uncle were orthodox. We lived in Stanford Hill, London, and there were a lot of Hasidim (ph) and it was a lovely area. I absolutely loved it and it was good living uh there. I felt I was again with my family, so uh I started this uh Victor (ph) High School, but it was hard for me. I could not sit still. I didn't have any patience. I always wanted to be on the go. And it was too hard for me because not only was I learning English, they were teaching us a awful lot of Hebrew, the _____. We studied _____. It was all too much. I was just overcome because I had never had any really formal Hebrew uh lessons before, and finally I told my aunt I don't want to go back to school. I just don't want to go. At first she more or less told me yes I had to go, so I got in to trouble at school and the teachers must have contacted her and that was the end of my schooling. And so she had me take uh sewing lessons because I was quite...I was good at sewing and my uncle had a...he manufactured handbags in the house, so I learned how to use the sewing machines and I would help him with that, but again it was sitting and I just could not sit. So he says OK, if you can't sit how about going to uh to some of the people I do business with and I'll give you samples of my handbag and you show it to them and see whether they want to buy any. So I went to these different uh places and uh showed the samples and I would take the orders, bring them back to my uncle. He would box them up in big boxes and I still remember shipping (ph) them on the bus and the subway and taking them to the various businesses and so that was my job. My other job was taking care of my little cousin and I made myself quite useful and I alwa...my aunt always gave me money. She says since you work for me, here's money. So I had money again, and I always used to go to the movies with my friends and I had a very good social good life. Uh we stayed in England until 1947. Then my...I had two aunts in New York and an uncle and they decided it would be best for us to come to New York City. And also one of the reasons was that my father had written them a letter saying that if anything should happen to him or his wife, that we are to go to them, because they were the sisters of my mother. So they took this letter and they said this is your father's wish so this is what you should do. Well, they had trouble with me again. I didn't want to leave England. I loved it there. I liked the religious life. Uh I liked living among the Hasidim (ph) because they were so joyful. I loved going to the...I had a girlfriend. She was Hasidish and I would enjoy going to services with her and I enjoyed...I remember attending the weddings and it seems almost every week somebody was getting married. Anyhow this was our social outlet and I just loved it, and my aunts had a hard time convincing me to come to New York. But uh then at the end of uh October in '47, by plane, we came to uh New York City and I don't know how much more of my story you want or not.

Q: Bea, you went to high school. What did you...

A: I went to high school in New York. Now on one year of schooling in Germany, the little

bit I had in England, somehow I managed to get into high school. I had to take a test, but I passed it. But I remember the principal when I told him how little schooling I had, he was very doubtful that I could even pass the test, and uh he says it really would be better if you would start elementary school. And he probably was right, but I didn't want to because I wanted to be with my own peers. And so I started high school and I graduated but my goal in life was to have a home, a husband and children. So two weeks after graduating high school, I got married and uh soon after I started my family and I have four daughters and three of them are married and I have five grandchildren.

Q: What do you think the effect of the war, of the Holocaust was on you?

A: On me? I think that I have learned to cope better with life. Uh it has shown me though what man can do to man and how inhumane they can be. I am because of it not that trustful of people in general but I am thankful that I am here. I know a lot of survivors feel guilty that they are here, but I don't have that guilt. Uh I'm more thankful and also because I feel that I have survived that uh my speaking out on what happened in those days is more or less uh saying well, you know, something terrible has happened to our people, but I'm going to tell everybody that I can about it, and make sure that something like that will never happen again.

Q: Alright. Bea, thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Conclusion of Interview