

GRABER, Anita
English
RG-50.030*0568

In this interview, Anita Graber, born October 29, 1925, describes her life in Berlin before moving to New York in 1939. She tells the story of her parents' lives in Poland, including their respective family businesses, before they married and moved to Berlin in 1924 to conduct a more successful fur business. She discusses the differences between Polish Jews and German Jews in Berlin. She details her life in Berlin as a Jew, including her time at German school and her family's experience with Kristallnacht. She mentions being kicked out of German school after Kristallnacht and how her father's business was able to survive Kristallnacht. She also remembers the process of leaving Germany including getting visas to the U.S. and transit visas to France.

00:00 – 09:47

The interviewee begins by telling about her early life, born in Berlin, October 29, 1925; tells her father was **Elaya Solea**, born August 1894, and mother **Sasha Emsca**, born June 1900, both from Warsaw; tells that mother was youngest of 9; father youngest of 6; explains how parents met through older siblings in Warsaw; tells how father was in the fur business and became a master furier in Berlin and she has his diploma; explains that parents spoke Polish, Yiddish and a little Russian because the Russians were there at one point and Germans were in Warsaw during WWI; explains mother's father died when she was two years old in 1902; remembers he was one of 3 brothers, the **Obremski** brothers, Henach, Mendel and Pesach; explains that Henach and Mendel were the florscheim of Poland and there was still a record of them "who's who in business" in 1939 in Europe; tells the brothers were a corporation tells details of their business called Obremski Shoes with stores in Warsaw and provinces; remembers her mother sold for them until she was married; tells she met her husband; tells that because her mother's papers weren't ready to go to Germany, so they got married in Danzig, Gdansk with just a religious ceremony; tells that in August 1924 her mother met her father in Berlin to consummate marriage and Anita was born in October 25; discusses details of her birth including asthma complications; remembers 1926 plastic surgeon Josef who her mother went to see for surgery on her nose but did not have a successful surgery; remembers that when her mother came to Berlin she did sales for her father since she had experience working for her father; tells that her father had gone to a Chada, a very orthodox education, and thought very highly of a German educated; explains this is why she was sent to a German school, **volkschule**; after being asked whether her family converted from a Polish-Jewish family to German-Jewish family, she responds not really because the German Jews did not accept the Eastern Jews, who mostly lived in East Berlin, **Glenedierstrasse**; tells she was never there but rather around the parks, Grossenpark and Lieberplatz, and every Sunday was at the zoo with girls and her brother; remembers she didn't socialize with anyone; remembers also that in German school you stay in the same classroom

and teachers come to you; tells that the teacher told her mother that her brother wasn't doing well in school, but whenever the teacher comes in the classroom he jumps up and yells "**heil Hitler**" the loudest; explains that the thing her brother wanted was to be like the other boys and wear the uniform and boots and would spend ice cream money to support **National Socialists**; tells her brother, **Peter Leo Olea**, was six years old at this time.

09:47 – 19:00

She tells that her mother pulled her brother out of public school and put him into a Jewish school, **Versanstrasse Schule**; tells that the Jewish community, **Judischgemeinde**, would meet there; tells Peter went to that school until the family left in 1939; when asked how a Jewish school was allowed to exist from 1936-1939, she answers that she was thrown out of German school after Kristallnacht and she was permitted to be there as only Jew because she was a Polish citizen; explains that she was allowed a visa to the U.S. because she was a Polish citizen on the Polish quota numbers; says that they were considered Poles more than Jews; remembers that after Kristallnacht there were rumors that they were next coming to apartments; explains that Kristallnacht effected the store; remembers wondering how they would know that it was a Jewish store because the store owner names were German names; states that in 1937 after Olympic games the Jewish shop owners had to take Jewish middle names, males taking Yisrael and females taking Sarah, and Jewish shops had specifications; remembers in 1938 around her 13th birthday, on October 28th-29th they rounded up all Polish Jewish males and shipped them to Polzen, "no man's land," because Poland didn't want them; states that they overlooked her father; explains that he went to Gestapo the next day to explain that he hadn't tried to evade it and he had been home; remembers that all of her parents friends were Polish Jews and lived in West Berlin; says that her family spoke German at home and her mother was a very bad cook; remembers her parents befriended a German Jewish woman Tanta Lily Finkelstein who was married to a Polish Jew and they had a daughter Margot who became her best friend; explains that her father did very in business in the 1920s and that Tanta Lily would cook for her family and her father put Tanta Lily and Margot up in an apartment; says that her parents were friends mostly with people they did business with and would go to balls; tells a story of her parents uncle coming to visit in Berlin and taking him out to a nightclub; remembers her mother going out dancing with her girlfriends.

19:00 – 25:57

She says she had no friends who were German gentiles and her only contact with them was learning English and French; explains her father hoped to eventually move to the U.S. so he had her learn these languages; remembers she was also a very good athlete as her father took her to swim and ice skate and she interacted with gentiles through that too; answers that she started German school in 1931 and through 1938 was the only Jewish girl until she was kicked out after Kristallnacht; explains then she went to the Jewish **Terahezelschule** in Adolf Hitlerplatz and the other schools were all east; remembers in April 1939 that they decided Jewish schools should not

be in Adolf Hitlerplatz so they closed the school; states that she then attended a **Lavitznahoschule** until June 20 1939, when they were called to the American embassy for physicals and visas; remembers that her father kept his business open until April 1, 1939 and the Christian customers would come in through the back; explains that he already arranged a passport and had to leave by August 31st while her mother's wealthy family had arranged for the rest of the family to be smuggled over the border to Poland; states that instead, their quota number opened and they were able to get on an American ship, the SS Manhattan; remembers that the manager of the office in Berlin was Herr Helfman who wanted to leave from **L'ave** in France; explains that they had valid visas there but at the French embassy her parents weren't given transit visas because too many people were staying in France instead of moving on; remembers her father went to Mr. Helfman who left and came back with visas to Paris; answers that Mr. Helfman was an American German gentile; says they left July 31st from Berlin and arrived in Paris August 1st; says they stayed in Paris through August 10th where they left for **L'ave** and boarded the ship;

25:57 – 34:57

She answers questions detailing her father's store at the time of Kristallnacht; remembers that a gentile woman customer informed him of what would happen; explains that commandeered a taxi and emptied out the stock in their apartment; states that the Nazis weren't able to break through because of the gate in front of the store; says that they never came to their apartment and his only loss was the glass of the front of the store; remembers her father's dilemma of where to take his family; explains that in 1937, the white Russians were in Berlin and Paris and had many connections among diplomats; recalls that her father sent her mother to Paris where she had family to see her aunt and cousin along with fur and money for them; remembers that the money would be put in a safe deposit box in case they made it out; recalls an elaborate story to get fur transported to Paris; explains they left July 31st and crossed through Aachen near the Maginot line and could see that war was near; remembers that her father almost stayed behind to make money; states that thus they left as a family; explains how her father transported fur over.

34:57 – 46:40

She remember that one of her neighbors from WWI told her father that he thought it was unfair that in July of 1939 the Eastern European Jews could go to the U.S. but that he could only go to Shanghai; recalls that Russians allowed German Jews to cross through to get to **Shanghai** and then the Japanese treated them well; tells a story of a family friend who received help from Gestapo to get to Shanghai; remembers that how her father bought china from a friend before Kristallnacht and brought it to the U.S.; states that they didn't try to bring any furniture with them; explains that her father just closed the door of the business; recalls a time when the family was packing and the Gestapo came amidst an air raid; remembers that every Sunday her family went to the beach at **Wansee**; remembers also they went to the zoo a lot and saw the Gorilla known as the **Gorilla Bubbi**; says that school was difficult but her father thought so highly of

German education that he didn't want to hear about it; explains that she did what she was told because she was first born; tells her first memories of school are of enjoying; recalls the hardest part was when she wouldn't write compositions against Jews and accept zero's for them; states that she had no friends in school but went to Jewish sleep-away camps; tells that her father didn't want to hear any details of the difficulty of school; gives examples of her loneliness at school.

46:40 – 58:46

She remembers a story of Simcha Torah while **Mussolini** was visiting; recalls chocolate from the Jewish chocolatiers and the food from **Herrods**; recalls the yellow Jude benches and chairs in **Oliveplatz**; states that a Jewish ice cream shop there eventually moved to Tel Aviv; explains that while living in Berlin she went several times to Warsaw, the last time being Christmas of 1937; recalls memories of her family living in Warsaw; explains feeling at home in Berlin; says that she did not speak Polish; tells what she is doing now in the U.S.; repeats questions that children asked her after telling them her story; tells that some survivors make up aspects of their stories such as testifying to being places they were not; remembers going to one of the first **Yom Ha Shoahs** in New York; expresses disappointment in schemes of some Jews today such as Orthodox Jews and Bernie Madoff; remembers when they were on the way to the Polish embassy in November and the embassy told them they were Polish Jews, not Polish citizens so they had to wait outside; [shows pictures of her family].

In this interview, Anita Graber describes her life living in Berlin from her birth in 1925 through her family's departure for the U.S. in 1939. She tells her family history in Poland and how her parents ended up in Berlin together. She details her day-to-day life in Berlin, including the business her father owned before and after Kristallnacht, and how she was treated as a Jew in a German school. Finally, she remembers her family's departure from Germany including visa complications and transportation details.