

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Anita Graber
March 2, 2010
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Anita Graber, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on March 2, 2010 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Silver Spring, Maryland 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.

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ANITA GRABER

March 2, 2010

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Anita Graber** –

Answer: **Anita Graber**.

Q: – conducted by **Ina Navazelskis**, held on March 2nd, 2010 at **Leisure World, Silver Spring, Maryland**. Thank you –

A: You're very welcome.

Q: – Mrs. **Graber**, for coming to speak with us. Could you tell me a little bit about your early life? You – when you were born, where you were born, your parents, their names, where they came from, how they made their living.

A: Well, I – I was born in **Berlin** in 1925, October 29th, and my parents were **Elias Olejer**, he was born in August of nine – 1894, and my mother **Cesia Abramska(ph)** from **Warsaw** also, born in June of 1900. Interestingly enough, my mother was the youngest of nine, my dad was the youngest of six. And one of his older brothers, I have photographs, married one of my mother's older sisters. However, on – my dad would go once af – when the f-first World War was over, he went to – he decided he was going to go to **Germany**. He didn't want to go to **New York**. He did want to go where the weather was – where they would have winter, because he was i-in the fur business. He ended up as a furrier, and he made his

[speaks German], he became a master furrier in **Berlin**. I have his diploma hanging on the wall i-in my apartment.

Q: When they were still in **Warsaw**, what was the language they spoke?

A: They spoke Polish. They spoke Polish and Yiddish, and – and also some Russian, because at that – one point, the Russians were there, and that during the first World War, the Germans were in – were in **Warsaw**. My mother's father died when she was two years old, in 1902. Her father was one of three brothers, the **Abramski**(ph) brothers, **Hainoch**(ph), **Mendel**, and **Pesach**(ph). **Hainoch**(ph) and **Mendel** were the **Florsheim**(ph) of **Poland**. And there was still a – a record of them, who's who in business in 1939 in **Europe**. And they were listed, and they were a corporation. They brought their machinery in **Manchester** and in **Germany**. They had tanneries, and they had factories. They also sol – sold out of that – one of the brothers, **Mendel Abramski's**(ph) house, my mother worked there, because when her father died, he was a contractor for them.

Q: What was their company name?

A: Of – oh, **Abramski**(ph) shoes.

Q: **Abramski**(ph) shoes

A: [indecipherable] in Polish

Q: Okay.

A: Yes, **Abramski**(ph) shoes and – and – and they were well known, and they had stores in – in **Warsaw** and in the provinces, and they also had people that went onto

the road to sell shoes. And my mother, as I said, sold for them until she got married. And – and she'd met my father on one of the trips, that he came – he went twice a year to see his mother and his siblings. And – and – and I guess they fell in love, and my mother's papers weren't ready to go to **Germany**, so they got married in **Danzig, Gdansk**. And then she – her two uncles escorted her there, and they had just a religious ceremony, they did not have the civilian one, so the uncles just whisked her back to **Warsaw**. And so their marriage wasn't consummated until she joined him about six weeks later in **Berlin**. And that was 1924, and – August 1924, and in October of '25, I was born. And I was a very difficult birth and – and I had asthma. And mom – I th – I wasn't sleeping and my mother would carry me around all night. And my father felt very badly for her. So when, in 1926, there was a well known plastic surgeon, a Dr. **Josef**(ph), who had practiced medicine during the first World War, and some of his instruments were used throughout **Europe**. And she went there to have a – to have a – a nose job, because when she was a little girl, during the summer, and she was the youngest of nine, and she ran into a tree. And she had a prominent nose, I have my mother's nose, but she broke the nose, she had a bump on her – o-on her nose, so he said she should go there and have her nose done. And my mother would tell how she – when she went in there, there were young men with big ears, and they came out with little shells. And there women and men who went in with huge noses, and they came out with little s-snub noses. And women went in with humongous breasts, and came – they went in with brassieres

and – and it was perfect. And my mother said her surgery was not a success. She remembered swallowing blood while they threw chocolate into her mouth. And professor **Jusef**(ph) wanted her to come back to do it over, and she said no, she would live with that. So, I have my mother's nose, and then in – when we were already in **New York**, I was 16 years old, and I wanted to have my nose done and my mother would say [**speaks German**], the nose isn't that important. And then when I got married and I suggested this to my husband, I said, I married you not because of your nose, and you don't have to – so, here I am. I have – my son has my nose.

Q: Absolutely beautiful.

A: So, my mother was – had been doing sales, so when she came to **Berlin**, she – she became his sales person, and he – and he was a – he was a very talented furrier. And his family had determined that that's what he should be, you know, they – they – and he'd gone to a ch – what was called a **chayder**, which was a – a d – a very Orthodox kind of education and he hated it. And he thought very highly of German education, and that's how come when I started school in 1931 – of course, I went to a German school, a **Volksschule**, and in 19 – my brother was born in 1930, and in 1936, he started the **Volksschule**. And – and by 1936, I entered the first **Bismarck Lyzeum**, which was in **Berlin**, it's right near where the tennis courts were.

Q: You know what's in – sounds interesting – I'm sorry for interrupting at this point, but it sounds like you went from being a Polish Jewish family, to a German Jewish family.

A: Not really.

Q: No.

A: Because the German Jews really di-did not –

Q: Accept?

A: – n-no, they – they – they – they – they did not accept. Th-Those eastern European Jews were different, and most of the [indecipherable] east European Jews lived in east **Berlin, Grenadierstrasse**, etcetera, etcetera. And I – and – and so I never – I was never there. I – my life w – was around the – the parks, the [indecipherable] park, **Olivaer Platz**, and every Sunday I went to the zoo with the – with the **mädchen** and my brother. And –

Q: Who did you socialize with then?

A: Really, no one. I would a – my brother was lucky, he started school in '36 and – and my mother was called to school that he wasn't doing well. And then they – and when you went to school in – in **Germany**, the teachers came to you, you didn't go – you didn't change classes, and yo – the teacher ca – you remained except for gym and – and lunch.

Q: In the same classroom?

A: In the same classroom. And when the – so the teacher said he wasn't doing his best. However, he said to my mother, I had gro – excellent do – [indecipherable] and my mother said, **was bedeutet das?** What does that mean? He says, when the teacher comes in, your son jumps up and yells **heil Hitler** the loudest. Because –

Q: Oh my.

A: – the thing he really wanted, the thing he really wanted was to be like those little boys, wear a – wear – wear a uniform, a-and wear boots. He would take a – take his ice cream money, and bought himself an [indecipherable]. This was to support – this was to support the National Socialist –

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: Yes, yes –

Q: Oh my God.

A: – he – you see, it – the –

Q: This is to – in memory of – on my school days [German] **mein kruzheit**(ph).

A: **Kreuzheit**(ph), yes.

Q: And he was how old here?

A: He was six years old.

Q: Old. And his name?

A: He was six – **Peter**.

Q: **Peter**.

A: **Peter Leo Olejer**. And – and so my mother yanked him out immediately and put him into a Jewish school, **Fasson(ph) Strasse Schule**. And that's where they ended – ended up having, even though they destroyed the synagogue, but that's where – where they met, **Jüdisch gemeinde** would meet there. And **Peter** went to that school.

Q: The Jewish community, yeah.

A: Yeah, until – until we left, '39.

Q: It's quite – I mean, th-there are lots of questions as you're talking that – that come to mind, and I will come to some of them later. But right now, one of those that – that strikes me is, that school was allowed – a Jewish school was allowed to exist, and – from '36 to '39.

A: Oh, they – they existed until I – even in '39, now they – they threw me out of the **Drusen(ph) Bismarck Lyzeum** after **Kristallnacht**. I went – I went to that – I was the only Jewish child in that school, and I was permitted to be there because I was considered a Polish citizen. You see, I was never a German ci – my brother and I, we were always Polish citizens. We're on my parents' passports. I'm on my mother's, and – and my brother is on my father's. And that's why our – the visas to come to the **United States** were in here.

Q: Oh, I see, I see.

A: Ah – but – and you can see that my parents went regularly back – each one went twice a year home to see their families. And – and so that presented no problem, but

that was fortunate we came out as a unit. We went – we were on the Polish quota numbers, we – **Peter** and I were not on the German quota.

Q: So you weren't considered Jews, as much as Poles?

A: We were considered Poles, we were considered Polish. However, interestingly enough, **Kristallnacht**, thi – that – that happened at night, a-and – and then they said in the morning, the rumor started that they were coming to the apartments. So my parents –

Q: Did it affect the store, the business?

A: Oh, the store di – of course. And how did they know? How did they know that it was a Jewish shopkeeper and not a Christian one? How would they know that?

Because **Rosenbach**(ph), **Greenbach**(ph), **Silber**(ph), **Weiss**, **Brown**, **Schwarz**, **Scharzman** –

Q: They could be German names too.

A: They – they were German names, they – those were German names.

Zimmerman.

Q: Yeah.

A: They were occupation, they were color, they were animals. And ea – I think in '37, it was after the Olympic games in '37, every Jewish shopkeeper had to take a middle name. If it was a male, his middle name was **Israel**, so my father was **Elias Israel Olejer**. If it was a woman, her middle name was **Sarah**. And so it would have been **Cesia Sarah Olejer**. That's how they knew. And it had to be so and so

many centimeters up from the floor, and so ma – in – in certain height of letters, in white. And that's – that's how they knew who was Jewish and who was not. This was plan – planned a long time ago, but they used the incident in **Paris** to do that because the mother called – called this a – it is – he was 18 years old, called him in **Paris**, she said, I'm so upset, they took Daddy away overnight, and I'm so frightened.

Q: What incident in **Paris** are you talking about, just for our listeners. Excuse me for a second.

A: That's all right.

Q: Okay, mm-hm.

A: When – when the mo – what had happened was, my 13th birthday was October 29th, 1938, the night of October 28th or the 29th, they rounded up all Polish Jewish males [**indecipherable**] because you always listed with the – with the police department.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, you do that throughout **Europe**.

Q: Of course.

A: They know exactly where you are. And they shipped them off to no man's land, the – **Pozen** [**indecipherable**]. And the – the Germans wanted them to go into **Poland** and **Poland** didn't want them, cause they were just Polish Jews. And so for awhile they remained there, in no man's land.

Q: Your father amongst them?

A: No, for some reason they overlooked my father. And all his friends were involved, everybody he knew was am – they overlooked him, because of the name? I have no idea. He went to the Gestapo the next day, to say, I have witnesses that I was home. I did not try to hide. So he remained. He was the only man among all my parents' friends that – that lived in west **Berlin**. All their friends lived in west **Berlin**. So –

Q: Can I clarify that though, for a second? Their friends lived in west **Berlin**, but you said that they didn't really have friends amongst German Jews.

A: No, they were all Polish Jews.

Q: So were they Polish Jews? Polish Jews.

A: They were all Polish Jews. They were from **Lódz** and they were from some of the smaller cities, **Kraków**, and – and they were from **Warsaw**. [indecipherable]

Q: I see.

A: And my parents had no relatives living in **Berlin**, they –

Q: When – when you were at home, what was your language that you spoke?

A: German.

Q: German.

A: We spoke German. And they had befriended – my mother was a horrendous cook. She'd be – she never learned how to cook because her mother lived with – with a ma – with a married, an older married daughter, and my – and my mother.

And – an-and so my mother never learned how to cook, and she was a very bad cook. And my mother said that the first six weeks they were in **Berlin**, every day she made chicken, boiled chicken with – with something, the oats, or what have you, and – and boiled lima beans. I remember them, I'd – I swear it's one of the reasons I got married, to get away from that Friday night dinner. But she made that every day for six weeks. So my father said, that's **schon genug**. They –

Q: It's enough already.

A: Yeah, and they befriended a German Jewish woman, **Tante Lily Finkelstein**. And she was married to a Polish Jew, and the – but a – they were only married like a **morganatic** marriage, that's [**indecipherable**]. Was only a sib – a religious ceremony, and they had a daughter **Margot**, and she became my best friend. And my father was doing quite well in business, in this – in the 20s. And they – **Tante Lily** would cook for my parents, and my father maintained her and **Margot** in an apartment nearby. And why – why did I tell you this? And so, my mother –

Q: I was asking about who your parents friends were.

A: Well, they were friends with people they met through business, and – and going to balls. They were – **Berlin** in the 20s was – was the in place. And there's a very funny story, one of my mother's cousins from **Warsaw**, a **Tadeusz Abramski**(ph). He was Uncle **Hainoch**'s(ph) son. And he came to visit them in **Berlin**, and they took him to this nightclub, and he was dancing with this woman, and he – he was wining and dining her and buying her champagne and what have you. And my

parents' friend said to my mother, when are you going to tell him that this is not a woman, that this is a man? And when **Tadeusz** heard – found out, he was livid. He didn't forgive her for many years. Your –

Q: What a story.

A: That was **Berlin** in the 20s.

Q: Of course it was.

A: But that was **Berlin** –

Q: **Christopher Isherwood**, and

A: Well, yeah, a-a-and –

Q: **Sally Bowles**.

A: That's right, and –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and cabaret. And – and my mother would go dancing to the – I forget where that was, it was near Café **Tso**(ph). Near, near **Barnhof**(ph) so –

Q: **Kansla** – **Kransla**, something –

A: No, at – at **Kansla**(ph) we used to go every night when we were in **Berlin**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We went to the **Kansla**(ph) to have dessert.

Q: Yes, they have wonderful desserts.

A: And – and – wonderful desserts. And – and – and you would sit at a table, and you had a telephone, and a gentleman would ask her to dance, and she would get

up. And she did that with her girlfriends, you know, she took a couple of hours off from – from the store that way. And – and that was the way life was i-in – in **Berlin.**

Q: Did you have any friends who were German Gentiles?

A: No, no, none, none. None at all. I – the only time I dis – they associated with me, I was very good in – in foreign language, I th – my father decided that hopefully, when we left, we would be able to get to the **United States.** And so he – he – he determined that I should take English first, and then French. I started French in 30 – in '39, April '39, the school year was always in April, and then we were off for a month during the summer. And so I – I took English. And that – and I was good in English, and I was a very good stu – a-athlete. My dad t – my dad taught me how to swim, he taught me ice skating, taught me to ice skate and so forth and so on. So, that's the only time I really associated with them. Nobody talked to me.

Q: So this is something I'd like to find out more about. You started a German school –

A: Yes, until –

Q: – in 1930?

A: 1931.

Q: – oh – '31. And – and you're the only Jewish girl in 1939 who's in there, who's at that school.

A: Thi – '38 [**indecipherable**]

Q: In '38.

A: Yeah, when – when – with **Kristallnacht** they threw me out, and there was ad – at the ca – at the – the **Adolf Hitler Platz**, not far from the [**German**] there was a Jewish school, called the **Tiera(ph) Hatzo(ph) schule**, and I went to that one, because that was closest to where we lived, and the others were all east. And then in April of '39, they decided the German – Jewish school should not be in the **Adolf Hitler Platz**. That's a desecration, so they closed that one, and I went to the **Vietsnakaho(ph) schule**, which was east. And I had to go there by subway, and I went there until summer vacation began, June of '39, and June 20th, 1939, we were called to the American – well, we – in **Berlin** it was the embassy, not the city's, it was the consulate. You no longer waited ti-ti-til you went to **Ellis Island**, that was closed, for your physical. And – and – and we were – and – and we – we got our quota, w-we got our visas. And – and my father in the meantime had wi – he – and his – he kept his business open until April 1st, 1939, that's when he closed the store. They used to come through the back, Ch-Christian, his Christian customers. And – and he was hoping. And it opened up, we went June 20th, and he had already received an **ausweis**, he had to leave **Germany** –

Q: A passport.

A: – yup, by August 31st, 1939. And my mother's wealthy family in **Warsaw**, they had arranged for us to be smuggled over the border August 31st, 1939, you know, together with the family.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: I mean, unbelievable, but who knew? And so we were very fortunate.

Q: But smuggled in which direction? If you're going to the **United States** wouldn't
[indecipherable]

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, this was be kick – you know, this was before he knew
that we were – our quota number opened and we got visas to come to the **United
States**. But he had to make arrangements to le – he had to leave **Berlin**, he had to
leave **Germany**, or end up in a concentration camp.

Q: So, in other words, he was – he went to – to **Poland**?

A: He was going to go to **Poland**, but instead our quota number opened, and we –
and we were coming to the – to **New York** on an American ship. They had made
arrangements right along, that if we were going to leave, we were going to go with
the **SS Manhattan**. It was the **United States** line. The manager of that office in
Berlin was a **Herr Hauptman**. I forget his first name. And so – but they wanted to
go via – instead of leaving from **Hamburg**, they wanted to leave from **Le Havre**.

And I'll tell you why.

Q: **Belgium**? Is that it?

A: **Le Havre** is **France**.

Q: Is **France**, mm-hm.

A: Is **France**. And it's **Hamburg, Le Havre, Southampton, Cope(ph), New York**.
And – and so he needed – they needed – here they had valid visas, **Paris – France**,

new – and then **New York**. And my father – my mother went to the French embassy and they would not give them transit visas, because what was happening, people said oh, you know, we're going on to this place, that place, and they decided to stay in – in – in – in **France**. There were too many stateless people in – in **France**, and they wouldn't give it to them, so my parents were st – my dad had a reason, and I'll explain that in awhile. And so he – he went – he went to Mr. – they went to Mr. **Hauptman**(ph) and he said, stay here, I have a friend at the embassy. And he went, in half an hour he came back, four visas to **Paris**. And so when we left **Berlin** –

Q: Now, was he a Gentile?

A: Yes, yes, yes, he was – he was a – an American – German American or American German, whatever. But he was – was Christian. And – and – and we left July 31st from **Berlin** and we arrived in **Paris**, August first. And we stayed there til August 10th, and then we came – we – we boarded the ship. I-In **Le Havre** there was a train that – that went directly to – to the port, and – and all our luggage was – was put on board, and – and that was that. And –

Q: I'd like to step back a little bit.

A: Yes?

Q: And ask about two things. They're different, but I'll ask them while they're in my mind. The first is, your experiences from 1931 til 1938, being in that **Lyzeum**, and what kind of thoughts you have, if you can remember, what kind of interaction

there was with the other kids, or the teachers, or how, after 1933 perhaps, things changed, you know, with **Hitler** coming to power. That's one question. And the other one, I'd like to concentrate a little bit more on your father's business and **Kristallnacht**. What specifically happened there? How did he rebuild it? And if he kept it open for so long, was he able to save his assets, sell the business, or did he lose it all? So those two questions.

A: Well, he – he had a – after awhile, a Christian clientele. One of them was a woman whose husband had an important position in **Goebbels** –

Q: Ministry.

A: – ministry. And she called him the afternoon of November ninth, and she said, **Herr Olejer**, my husband tells me that such and such is going to take place. He always had a window well dressed. He – and the lights stayed on til about 11:30, 12 o'clock and then they automatically went off. He commandeered a taxi, and he took out – he – he re – he redressed the window with inexpensive things, and he emptied out his stock, and with the taxi, they went back and forth, our apartment was two blocks away, and they got everything into the apartment. And – and he had a, interestingly enough, he had a gate that was behind the plate glass. And it had something that you rolled it up, it – very heavy –

Q: Oh, I remember those types of window shutters.

A: Yeah, yeah, you needed special shears. And when they – when they broke the glass, they did not have the – the – the shears to cut – to cut the wires, so they went

on. So they were never aware of what was in the back of the store or not. And – and so – and they didn't come into our apartment. Ah – you know, when we thought – the rumor had it that we were going to be – they were going to come into the apartments, they never did.

Q: So his losses were glass?

A: Were glass. And of course, he had to replace that and – and – and there was a – there was also a special tax for that, etcetera, etcet – whatever he had to do, he did, and he reopened the store. But he was hoping at some point to get out of **New York**, so he would go to – he would go to –

Q: Out of **Berlin**, you mean.

A: Out of **Berlin**. So he would go to – to travel, and my mother would go to – or he would go to travel agencies, and – and he was looking for – in **South America**, at – where they have winter and summer, because you know, he was in the fur business. And the – and you n – you know what happened with the voyage of the damned, you know, that they – they weren't permitted to land, and they would say **Herr Olejer**, now it's 2:15, what's going to be at three o'clock, I really don't know. And my dad said, costs a lot of money to take a family of four, etcetera, etcetera, and without any guarantees, I really don't know what to do. So, in 1937, remember that after the Russian revolutions, the white Russians, where were they? They were in **Berlin**, and they were in **Paris**.

Q: That's right, that's right.

A: And they had many, many connections with the – with – among the diplomats. So my m – my father sent my mother to **Paris** in 1937. She had an aunt who – and a husband and family, and they went to **Paris** from **Warsaw**, and – right after the first World War. And they opened a furniture factory. She had a first cousin from the **Warsaw** area who went to **Paris** after the first World War, and she opened a knitting factory. So my dad sent my mother to **Paris** to see both relatives, to as – because he didn't want to have to wait too long to find out if what he was going to send out, when – would the – would – would arrive in **New York**, because by then we already had a quota number from my mother's oldest sister who lived in **New York**, she couldn't support a d – a – a mouse. And this is the height of the depression here. But we had the quota number, the low quota number, that's – that was our saving grace. It was somebody else's papers that enabled us – that he said he would – he was willing to support us. So he sent my mother to **Paris** to see both the aunt and the cousin. And he decided, to the aunt he wanted to send fur. To the cousin he would send money. When the dollar was two and a – with the – the dollar was two and a half marks, my father paid 14 marks for every dollar that he sent out. And that was sent to the cousin, and she was – she opened up a safe deposit box so that when my parents, if they should get out –

Q: They have –

A: – they could go and have money to get started with. To the aunt, she – since she had a huge factory, she was to get the furs. So what he would do is, he would throw

together [**indecipherable**] or Persian lamb, or mink or whatever it was, or fox, almost without destroying it, just it looked like – it – it – it looked like a coat or a jacket. And – and she would st – and th-the – the relative was gonna come and visit, was a – was a person by the name of **Shapsa**(ph). And my mother com – communicated with them in Polish – in Yiddish, that **Shapsa**(ph) was coming to visit and he doesn't know his way around, and will you please come and – and – and help him with his luggage and pick him up at – at – and pick him up at the station. So my dad would buy a train ticket from **Berlin** to **Paris**. That gave him permission to put a suitcase aboard the train. He would do – and when no one came to pick it up, they put it into storage in **Paris**. My mother would send a letter with the receipt and the key to the aunt and say, **Shapsa's**(ph) coming, and you know, he doesn't know his way around, would you help him with the luggage? And that's how 14 suitcases were waiting for us when we came to **Paris**. And we came – we left August – July 31st, and w-we crossed the border at **Aachen**. We went via – via **Belgium** into **Paris**, and you could see the **Maginot Line** and you could see that they were massing on either side. You had them on the French si – on the – on the Belgian side, and you had them on – on –

Q: So you were – you sensed war was coming?

A: Well, that – you could see it. You could see it, and – and – and so we arrived in **Paris** August first, and we had dinner that night at my – at my mother's aunt and uncle, and they wined and dined us, and they were – made arrangements to bring –

have all the suitcases brought to the ship – train, when we left August 10th. And we were at a hotel, and the mam – Monday we saw the cousin, and – and by Tuesday morning my dad said to the cousin's husband, **Monsieur**, let's go, and he said – meantime, the news had been terrible, coming out of – the – you know, they were – they were maneuvering, they were – they were – they – they were getting ready for war, and they had a shortage, they had a cash flow problem, and they didn't think we'd ever get out. So it was invested in their business, and there was no money. And my father said to my mother, you go with the children to **New York**, I'm not doing this here, I'm – you know. And my mother said, nothing doing. We've lost so much, we'll lose some more. We have our lives. We'll learn, and we'll – and when you – and you have – you have the furs, and you'll do the best you can. And she convinced him. So we – we left – we left as a family and we arrived here. And interestingly enough, he took out – he took out all his machinery, etcetera, and it was put into a crate. And in order to fill it up, to – to secure things inside, he used old patterns. Not a nickel was charged for all those suitcases with furs. Those patterns, that my dad had to pay for. And was just funny, but he wa – he –

Q: Who knew?

A: No, who knew is right.

Q: Who knew? But what – I mean, what foresight. What foresight –

A: Well, you – you –

Q: – to try and –

A: A-And yo – there was a movie called, in “The Gardens of **Finzi-Continis.**”

Q: Yes, I remember.

A: And remember, he was – he was ve – a very assimilated Jew, and he traveled in the highest circles, with – with important people from **Italy**. And he did not, whereas there were people in much lower segments of society, and th-the – the young men, in order to protect them, they – they went to **Switzerland** to see what they could do, because they saw it coming, you know? To send their families out, to save them. He didn’t, he was – you know, he – he said, they would never touch me, because look who I am. And look, I’m traveling in the highest circle. And that’s what happened to some people. One of our neighbors in **Berlin**, he had been in the first World War, he still had hanging over his couch, his a – his sword –

Q: Iron cross.

A: – a-and – and his helmet, and – and Iron Cross. And he said to my father, July 1939, I don’t understand it. You eastern European Jews, you can go to **North America**, and we German Jews, we can only go to **Shanghai**. And he had a 20 year old son, and an 18 year old daughter, and he wouldn’t let them go, and I’m sure they were all destroyed.

Q: Oh my.

A: So they went – this is July of ’39, and they were still thinking in those terms.

Q: How tragic.

A: And – and – and with everything else that took place, to go to **Shanghai**, **Stalin** permitted Jews to cross **Russia**.

Q: **Siberia**.

A: **Siberia**, to get to **Shanghai**. And they – and the Japanese treated those German Jews, and Jews very well. My mother – my father had a – had a customer who ended up in – in **New York** aft – into – after **Shanghai**. She had a son in **England**, so when we stopped in **Southampton**, he had – he had jewelry for her, that he gave to the son, and a ta – and a – and a bicycle. And the son came to the shi – came to the ship and took that. And when Mrs. **Turash**(ph) ended up in **New York**, and she came to see my parents to thank them for whatever it is they had done. She said when she got to – she was a handsome woman, she was a divorcee and she had one son who lived in **England** already. And – and she had a – a boyfriend who was a member of the, I guess, Gestapo. And he helped her get to **Shanghai**, and she – when she get – and she was a handsome lady. And she said she was telling the story when the – when the war broke out, what – what he said to her. I could like you. Do you sleep single? That's how she worded it, that's what he said to her. I could like you, do you – do you sleep single? I'll never forget that, I thought it was so funny, I was – happened to be there when – when she – when she worded it that way.

Q: **Schule** – **schulzeit**, your school days. Because the first part, you ha – the second question, I think you clarified for me, how your father was able to at least save

something, what he did, how much damage was done from **Kristallnacht**. And it – it sounded very scary.

A: But – but life went on.

Q: Yeah.

A: It went on, and as the German Jews had to – had to reduce their overhead and move into smaller quarters, my father had a friend, a German Jewish friend who was in ant – in ana – in antiques. And he took him and convinced him to buy two sets of china. One was a **Limoges** service for 24, and one was a German **Furstenberg** tea and coffee service for 20, and he bought that, and he brought that and it came a – some of it that was not broken, and some of – course, some stuff was broken. And – and I have it here, and I had –

Q: Oh my.

A: It's from – yeah, it – it – it – th – my – my son already has half, and my daughter, she's not prepared to take that, because it's – it's with 22 karat gold, and you have to hand wash that, you can't put that into a dishwasher, and then the dryer. So, that's here. The furniture was left there, we didn't bring any furniture, he just brought his machinery.

Q: And what about the business itself?

A: The business he just closed.

Q: He just closed the door.

A: He just closed the door, and – and that was that. And then when we left, everything had to be in quadruplicate, so my mother hired a secretary to do that. Every handkerchief, every pair of stockings had to be listed in quadruplicate. And in the middle of the packing, the Gestapo, two guys came from the Gestapo, they wouldn't even take a drink, nothing. They – they watched one another. In the middle of that we had an air raid, and – and everybody had to go down into the basement. And then they finished packing. Somebody complained there was a lot of noise, and – and – and – and these two guys, with yelling, you know, [indecipherable] from **Himmler, Judens an raus**. And this is one way of getting them out.

Q: In order of hit – of **Hitler** –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – **Himmler** –

A: Yeah, to g – to get out.

Q: From the air raid shelter?

A: The – the – well, i –

Q: Oh, from –

A: – once the air raid was over, but you know, that's now brought it into the evening –

Q: Okay.

A: – because it was getting darker, even though it was – it was July. And – and every Sunday, ma – our favorite place was to go to the **Jones** beach of **Berlin**, which was **Wannsee**.

Q: That's right, that's right.

A: And when we went in '88, I took them there, on the [indecipherable] to show them **Wannsee**, and it happened to have been a beautiful day, there were people out sailing. And next day, I think there was some snow. And – and that's where, of course, they had the final solution, in one of the villas. And – and the other favorite place, of course, was the zoo, we went there every Sunday. That was my favorite place, and there was a very well known gorilla in **Berlin**, he was known as the gorilla **Bobby, Bobby**. And he died in 30-something. And when we went in '88, we went to the zoo, and we went in through the [indecipherable] tour. And then we ended up the last thing we saw were the primates, and my children started yelling, Mom, Mom, come here. And there was – and I have it – I have – I have a country house that I'm no longer going to because my husband is on a walker now. And you see me looking at the statue, and they photographed me looking at the –

Q: **Bobby?**

A: **La Bobby**, yes, yeah, beautiful, a beautiful statue to him. I think he died in '36. And – and I became furious all over again when I was in the zoo. It was so clean. The cages were clean, the animals were well taken care of. And I said, look at this.

Look what they've done for the – an-and they do nothing, nothing for human beings. So difficult. So –

Q: Tell me about school.

A: Well, school was difficult, but my father thought so highly of German education, that he didn't want to hear about it, and so I stayed, I – you know, I was – I was – I was the firstborn and I did what I was told to do. My brother was more of a rebellion.

Q: What was ti – tell me, you were – I mean, but you were a child, you were six years old when it started. So what are your first memories of school?

A: I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, I – I enjoyed the structure of it, I – and **Tante Lily**, the one who cooked for us, she – she – she – she thought I was promising student. So – and what – what would become difficult, when I was on the – the **[speaks German here]**

Q: The Jews and the communists are –

A: Is our worst enemies. Well, I decide I wouldn't write. So I got a – you know, I got a zero for that, but they understood that that's how it was.

Q: Oh, so it was like a – a **[indecipherable]** it was li – you – it was a sentence that you had to write down to practice, writing –

A: No, no, but you –

Q: – or you had to write a **[indecipherable]**

A: – y-you had to write a composition –

Q: – essay.

A: – an essay. And – and, so certain things I did, and other things, I – I did not, I – I just – I couldn't. So –

Q: Were you lonely?

A: Oh yes, yes, I was lonely. I was lo – don't forget, there was just radio, and –

Q: I mean in school.

A: – and – and records. And even at home, you know, I – you know, I would be in the street. Now **[indecipherable] schule** that – they came to your house to – to – where you – where you did your – your **[indecipherable]** the Hebrew, the little Hebrew I – that I speak, I speak with a German accent, to this day. It's hilarious, the – the – because I don't roll – I don't roll, th – it's – it's a th – I can't. I should be able to do that because I do it in English, but I – in Hebrew, that's how I pronounce Hebrew, it's very funny.

Q: At school, did you have any friends?

A: No, no, no. I – I had – I went to a – I went to Jewish sleep away camps. My mother s-sent me every year. So I started going the year my brother was born. And I was very young. And – and I went through 1936.

Q: Did you like it?

A: Oh, very much. And I learned to eat foods that I never ate at home. And I was – I was very active child, so I – I was always thin. And somewhat underweight, and

that – and I promised I would gain weight, and I ate like a horse, but I never – I never – I never gained any weight.

Q: So, what were those conversations like with your father, when you said, school is difficult, and he said, you still have to go.

A: That's right. Th-That – that was – you just didn't – you – you did not –

Q: Did you give him examples of what was going on?

A: He – he didn't want to hear that. He didn't want to hear that and I was an obedient child, and I did what my parents asked me to do, and that's – that

Q: Tell me those – some of those examples. What are those things where you would – what – what would happen that you would come home and say, I want to change?

A: He – he – he just – he wouldn't hear of it.

Q: I know, but what happened at school? What are some of the examples?

A: Oh, I was just very lonely. They didn't talk to me. Those youngsters didn't talk to me. They had their own friends, and they – they – they – don't forget, they – they belonged to those groups, and – and they told stories about their parents, that was one of the things, these children were sent – were sent to the country. They – you know, **Kraft durch Freude**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Strength through joy. They – they did things for them that they hadn't had, because in the 20s, whatever they'd had, disappeared. So, for them this was great.

And heh – we went to some **Hatorah**, my brother and I and the maid. And she sat

upstairs and **Peter** and I were downstairs, and we had, in order to cross, to get to this particular synagogue, **Mussolini** had come to visit, and there was a parade, and we had to wait so we could cross. And – and they handed us the flags, so my brother starts yelling [**speaks German**]. Well, they grabbed him, and [**indecipherable**] up on top, she wouldn't acknowledge that she had anything to do with him, and I was ashamed and embarrassed, and they finally read him the riot act, and he calmed down. And the leading chocolatiers were all Jews, so we had wonderful, wonderful candies. I remember being there in '88, and I walked into the store and I saw this – that I used to be wild about, it was a walnut **englazed** in – it – it was pro –

Q: In chocolate?

A: No, sugar.

Q: Oh, sugar.

A: [**indecipherable**] in sugar. I bought – when I saw that I went crazy, I wouldn't even share it with my family. I bought everything he had. The next day he – we went back and we bought – I bought more. I broke, I think, I think I broke a bridge that time. And – and going into [**indecipherable**] upstairs, the food, I think [**indecipherable**] can – can – can –

Q: Exactly, exactly.

A: It was fabulous, absolutely fabulous, we had such a good time.

Q: Yeah. So it – it sounds, from a child's perspective, if we take – if we take everything that's political out of it, extraordinarily bittersweet.

A: Yes, it is, it is. I remember once – once they already had the – you could rent a chair by the hour, and they were yellow with a yu – with a **J, Jude**. And you could – or – or you'd sat on a bench that was yellow, and it said, **J, Jude**. You sat – you had to sit on those benches. We just would sit down, the kids that I hung around with in **Olivaer Platz**. And I remember being in **Olivaer Platz**, and a – an-and a **[indecipherable]** went over to – to two men, they were sitting on a green bench. And now the axis had begun, you know, and **Italy** and **Germany** were like this. And they assumed that they were Jewish, but they were Italian. And they took out their passports to show that they had made a mistake. And then there was a very well known ice cream parlor around the corner from where **Olivaer Platz** was known as **Ballza(ph)**, they had delicious ice cream. They ended up in **Tel Aviv**, having – but their children were no longer interested in it, so when the parents died **Ballza(ph)** went off the air. They have an ice cream group there called Dr. **Lek, l-e-k**, that's very funny.

Q: **Lekka(ph)**.

A: Yeah.

Q: **[indecipherable]** delicious –

A: Just a Jewish –

Q: In this time, there's so many **Berlin** memories, but you say that every year, your parents would go back to **Warsaw** to visit family. Did you ever join them?

A: Oh, absolutely. I went – I went several times. I was in **Warsaw** – the last time I was in **Warsaw** was Christmas of '37.

Q: And how did you feel being in **Warsaw**?

A: Well, I – I had cousins, and that's was wonderful. And one of my mother's favorite cousins from – from the – from the **Abramski**(ph) family, they took me to a restaurant a-at – I never saw pious Jews with the – with the beards, and what have you, an-and special **kipas**. So, she wanted them to have Yiddish German – what would I like to eat, and I pointed there, and it was **der Weihnachts-Mann ist**. And that – that be – and everybody knew that this is what I'd said, I'm – I'm – I must have been, you know, maybe it was 1933 - 1934.

Q: And you asked for the Christmas man. [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, whatever the Christmas man was eating, that's what I wanted. And whether it was roast duck, or roast goose. And – and I enjoyed being – I enjoyed being, you know, that that was family.

Q: Did you feel – did you – if you compare the – did you feel at home in **Berlin**, or feel at home in **Warsaw**?

A: I felt at home in **Berlin**.

Q: Yeah.

A: That is – so that's – you know, that's – that's where I – that's where I lived, and I didn't know anything else. So that's –

Q: Did you speak Polish?

A: No. My parents spoke Polish in order for my brother and me not to understand what they were talking about. So, my mother had a stroke in '74. My dad died in '65, he was 70. And my mother turned 74 in the hospital, and the few words that came back, she – she could swallow, she could eat, but she couldn't speak. The few words she babbled were in Polish, and my brother and I stood by like two dummies, and we didn't know what she was talking about, of course.

Q: It was her – it was the first language of her childhood.

A: Yeah, absolutely, and that's what comes back. For me to count and be accurate and fast, I count in German.

Q: Yeah. So. Is there anything that I haven't asked, that you would like to add to this, or that you think is important to know?

A: Well, not really. I'd – I've – I've come here from **New York**, and I went to the **Charles E. Smith** school to talk to them what it was like to grow up in **Germany** as a Jewish child. I did that one day.

Q: What were some of the questions the kids asked you?

A: You know, how did I di-da – did ha – what it was – it – it – it's hard for them to understand that – even that such a thing even exists. And it's – for me, it's difficult that – having met survivors and – and some of them are – are not telling the truth,

either. They – they – th-they – they’re – the – they’re just not, they’re a – they’re imagining things, to a degree.

Q: What kind of things would you more –

A: They’re – they’re willing to testify that they were in particular places, when be – they – they admitted to me they were not. There are people that don’t have numbers on their arms, that I met in 1949 - ’50, and you couldn’t have been to that many camps, and not have a number. So, it’s – and th-then – then also, I we – I went to the early **Yom HaShoahs**, so the first ones that were in **New York**, and – and everybody wanted to be, you know, the first – well – well, if you come very late, you can’t sit in the first row, and they liked to be where famous people were. But that’s human nature. And among – among those that – that **[indecipherable]** and that they were part of, you know, controlling the sums of money that **Switzerland** was willing to give, and **Germany**, and they don’t want you to ask any questions. And that’s human nature, because look at some of these people, look at these Orthodox Jews from **New Jersey**, that go to – that go to **Israel** and approach poor people to sell them a kidney for 10,000 dollars and then peddle it off back home for 160,000 dollars. They’re not ashamed **[indecipherable]**. And – and this Mr. may – **Madoff**, **Woody Allen** wrote a one page story in “**The New Yorker**” called “**Tails of Manhattan,**” t-a-i-l-s, where these two guys, these two guys are – have coronaries and they come back as lobsters. And they are lobsters in this fancy restaurant in **New York**. And in comes **Madoff**, and he wants two lobst – these two

lobsters for himself and his wife, he wants to give her a nice dinner. And what happens, a – it's – he has such an imagination, it is so funny.

Q: I gotta look it up. I've gotta look it up.

A: Yes, it – it's a –

Q: So it sounds like, you know, you experienced – experienced the real thing, and got out just in time, but also have seen how, years later, decades later, sometimes it's used in not quite the right ways, whatever the experience was.

A: Absolutely. Un – now, when – when they said they'd come to the apartments, so my parents got a taxi, and the four of us went to the Polish embassy. And it's octo – it's November, and it's north. And – and boots had just come out. They were boots with a – with a combination of leather and – and suede. And in the afternoon we arrived there, and they tell my parents, you're Polish Jews, you're not Polish citizens. And they permitted us, behind the wall, to walk. And it was quite cold. Then they permitted women and children to go inside. And one woman didn't have any children, so my mother gave her my brother. And she went and – with **Peter** and I – I went with my mother and my dad and the men remained outside. At six o'clock they permitted the men to come in also. And at eight o'clock somebody came out to say that **Goebbels** ministry called, that it was safe to go back home. So there you are.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, it was [**indecipherable**] that's just how it was. And – and yet, you know, **Peter** and I, to a degree we – we witnessed certain things, but we didn't question it, and – and – and that's how it was until – until we left. And we really, it was like the last train out of **Berlin**.

Q: It sounds like –

A: One of the last ones out.

Q: It sounds like it. Well, thank you.

A: It was fa –

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Oh, so –

Q: Let's look at some pictures.

A: So that's **Peter**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Now, this is my parents, smoking.

Q: Wow, she –

A: [**indecipherable**]

Q: Yes.

A: This my father, with his older brother, **Moritz**(ph), who was married to my Aunt **Regina**, my mother's sister. This my mother and me, fur coat.

Q: Oh, how lovely. Very lovely.

A: Now, here's **Peter** in school, first year. And this is [**indecipherable**] –

Q: That's right, that's right.

A: – you know, when you go to school –

Q: – and you –

A: – and the first day of school, yo-you're taken to the photographer, with your new school bag, your lunch bag, and here I am.

Q: Oh, how darling.

A: Yeah.

Q: Absolutely darling.

A: So –

Q: Thank you.

A: It was my pleasure.

Q: This concludes the **United States** interview – the **Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Anita Graber** –

A: Thank you

Q: – on March 2nd, 2010.

A: Thank –

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Thank you very much, my pleasure. I had –

Conclusion of Interview