

ESENSTAD, Bertl
English
RG-50.030*0588

In this interview, Bertl Esenstad, born October 28, 1925, tells about her life in Germany before the war in a very small town called Adelheim. She lived with her parents and as the eldest of five siblings until they were kicked out of their school in the town. They attended a Jewish school nearby temporarily before their parents sent them to live with an aunt in Aachen. After Kristallnacht, her aunt arranged for them to be taken on the Kindertransport to London. She lived in London with the Poole family until she and her sisters moved to live with family in Washington, D.C. in 1947. From then on, she supported herself and her family by working.

00:00 – 9:25

The interviewee introduces herself as born October 28, 1925 in a very small shtetl in German called **Korb**; says born in the same bed her father was born in; tells her father was **Adolf Rosenfeld** and her mother was **Katherine Lindburger**; explains her parents lived there for a year and then moved to a bigger place called **Adelsheim**, where there were enough Jews to make a minyan; answers this is in the Baden area, middle part of Germany; tells her father lost a leg in World War I and had a wooden leg and sold cattle and feed to farmers; answers she does not know how her family ended up there but each of her parents was one of 10-13 siblings; says her mother went by the name Kate or Katty and came from a place called **Rechsingen** which had the largest percentage of Jews (40%) of any place and many were named **Lindburger**; answers she was the oldest of five, then her sister Edith; [shows picture of Edith]; tells then Ruth in 1930 and Herman was born in 1933 and Ester; tells story of her trying to get her birth certificate from Korb and then going to visit it; tells that the synagogue there is now open as a museum; details her family now; tells they spoke German growing up and she doesn't know Yiddish; feels she was both German and Jewish

9:25 – 20:40

She shares her earliest memories which mostly take place in Adelsheim; remembers her father being very strict; recalls her father whistling to get them to go inside; explains her mother had to go with her father when the weather was bad because of his leg; tells her father lost his leg in the war as a soldier and a teenager; answers that father didn't talk about WWI and that he was very fearful for the children's lives; thinks German men were very bossy; explains he'd been a baker's apprentice before the war but couldn't do it without a leg after the war; says her mother was a doll; shares memories of her mother including cleaning for pesach; reports uncertainty about parents' education and doesn't think father went to gymnasium; explains she went to grade school in Adelsheim; tells when their grades got bad her father was mad but it was because of Hitler; explains she was 8 when Hitler came to power; reports going to a Jewish school in **Helbron [Heilbron]** after getting kicked out of school in Adelsheim but does not know when;

remembers a field trip at the Jewish school and when they came back they were told they couldn't go to school anymore; explains that then the three children were sent to Jewish school in **Aachen** where they had family; recalls walking three miles to school past the synagogue while it was burning in November 9-10, 1939; thinks that her aunt was involved with smuggling people across the border to Belgium; explains the **Kindertransport** was just starting; answers that she traveled by train to the different cities but doesn't remember details; remembers saying "heil **Hitler**" in Adelsheim to the teachers; recalls at the elections her mother saying "he won" and referring to Hitler; explains that her whole family had affidavits to go to America but were prevented by the **quota**.

20:40 – 30:13

She details her family relations in Adelsheim and how they decided that her uncle's family would go to America instead of them; says she doesn't remember almost anything about leaving on the Kindertransport with Edith and Ruth; explains her mother's sister went to England in 1933 and was able to find them homes; says she never saw her parents to say goodbye; tells that four months after Kristallnacht she stayed with her aunt in Aachen; thinks her aunt in Aachen made all the arrangements for the Kindertransport; remembers Nazis looking for arms in the houses after Kristallnacht; explains that in Adelsheim she doesn't have memories of kids she played with; reports her brother stayed with her parents in Adelsheim and in 1940 to the camp **Grossenrivesaltes** in France; reports his brother came to the US with the thousand children and stayed with her uncle; says she came to England in March 1939 when she was 13; remembers her aunt finding her a home with a non-Jewish family named **Poole**; says Mr. Poole was a chauffeur for the family her aunt worked for; remembers the address **10 Elm Street, London** and their maid; recalls spending a lot of time in the kitchen with the maid who helped her learn English; explains her aunt worked for a well off Jewish family; tells about the Poole family like on September 3rd when war was declared and Mrs. Poole took them to her home village in Scotland; explains that she had picked up enough English at that time and had taken it in Germany so she could attend school while in Scotland; tells that Edith and Ruth lived with Jewish families in London.

30:13 – 39:41

She reports that Pooles were very good to her; explains Edith's family wasn't so good to her and Ruth was placed by the Bloomsbury house, which placed children of the Kindertransport; tells that Bloomsbury house evacuated some of the children they had placed when the bombs started falling to hostels and Ruth was placed in a hostel; explains she didn't know how Ester got to London on the Kindertransport but was placed in Norwich, England with the **Harrisons**; explains that Harry Harrison worked for a factory owned by a Jew which posted on the bulletin board that they needed families for the children of the Kindertransport so the Harrisons adopted her; tells she doesn't know how Ester got on the Kindertransport; details Ester's relationship with the Harrisons, not Jewish, and their son Alan who adores Ester; states that all five children ended

up in Britain and were very close; [shows a picture of the family with **Reinhardt Lochman** and his wife]; tells she didn't remember worrying about her parents because she'd been told that her parents would eventually pick her up there and take her to the U.S.; explains at age 16 she had to go to work; explains she gave her mother's letters to the Holocaust Museum that she wrote from the camp in France; explains she would save money and send it to her parents through Quakers; explains she first found out her parents had died when her money was sent back; [shows a book which describes each Kindertransport, with lists of deportees by transport and photographs, page 161 has transport for Bertl's parents, Katty Rosenfeld (18.6.1899) and Adolf Rosenfeld (16.8.1898)]

39:41 – 49:02

[She shows a book called *The Jewish Community in Baden* which her parents are featured in, tells that her parents were a part of the last 8 Jews to be transported from Adelsheim in 1942 where her parents eventually died in Auschwitz]; [shows a photograph of her brother Herman and his wife]; [shows another recent picture of her with her siblings]; remembers attending a memorial service in 1982 in Adelsheim for the deportees; learned at that time the restrictions which had been put on her parents that her mother never wrote her about; thinks there were no Nazis in Adelsheim so people would help her parents; tells she met people who had lived through the war in Adelsheim; [Shows book called *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942-1944*]; says she heard of a program of France repaying money to anyone deported from France; reports she doesn't remember how her other siblings found out about her parents' deaths, but it was probably from her; explains her and her siblings were all in touch in England and stayed close;

49:02 – 1:00:05

She tells that the three of them, her, Ester and Ruth, came to the US in 1947; reports Edith came in 1948 because she had joined the British army; remembers Edith's arrival on the night of Truman's election; explains they lived with an aunt and uncle in the US in **Washington, DC** and life was horrible; tells that the three of them decided to get their own apartment and worked jobs; tells her aunt in Britain came to visit in the U.S. twice and tells details of her aunt's life; explains her mother's letters were all telling them to be good children but never much about what was going on with her; explains she kept the letters and her brother had them translated into English for her; says that she forgets the unpleasant things; recalls bringing up Ester herself as the oldest child when they took the apartment in southeast Washington; remembers having trouble getting a job because she didn't send to England for references; reports that some places in Washington told her they didn't employ Jews; tells story of finding a job in DC at the **Hebrew Home** and ended up being the office manager there; reports that there was a few places including a **Garfinkels** and an insurance company that didn't hire her; explains how she met her husband through **Heiman Goldman** and was married in 1954; says she continued working there until she got pregnant; explains the problem was always what to do with Ester over the summer so they

sent her to Camp Louise which Goldman was on the board of; [shows picture of grandchildren]; tells of her two children.

1:00:05 – 1:09:53

She reports that Edith was in Germany while she was in the army and visited Adelsheim at that time and someone on the street recognized her; remembers Ester once told her she can't remember Germany but was thinking of going back and persuaded Bertl to change her mind and go back in 1989; reports that her husband got sick so she never went back; remembers never wanting to go back but after Alan met Reinhardt she changed her mind; remembers being in Korb in front of the house her father had lived in and meeting the current owners; explains the German government sold her parents house in Adelsheim and the house had changed a lot since she lived there; [shows photograph of her family right before the Kindertransport]; tells she went back in 1990 and in 1995; decides she was actually there in 2002 for the memorial, 60 years after the deportation; tells she received a letter from someone in Ireland about 20 years ago thinking they were related; explains the story of this man from the UK whose family came from Germany; tells the relation between the man, Peter, who is in his 60s; answers that her children ask questions now but never used to; explains that Kindertransport has only been talked about since 1989 during its 50th anniversary and the **Leventhal** reunion in London; says that children from the Kindertransport went from all over to the reunion; explains that they are a part of the Kindertransport organization.

1:09:53 – 1:11:47

She tells that her parents left her with a value of family, especially from her mother's letters; says she thinks that her mother didn't know what was going to happen to her at Auschwitz.