

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Bertl Esenstad

September 16th, 2010

RG-50.030*0588

PREFACE

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Transcribed by Sarah Maksim, National Court Reporters Association.

BERTL ESENSTAD

September 16th, 2010

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Bertl EsenstatEsenstad on September 16th, 2010, in Silver Spring Maryland, and we'd like to thank you very much for agreeing to see us, to talk with us, and I'll start our interview like we always do at the beginning with--

Answer: That's a good place to start.

Q: With asking you when you were born, where were you born, how many siblings you had, and who were you parents? (clock chiming) And by the clock chiming, we know it's 10:00 A.M.

A: So what would you like to know? I was born October 28th, 1925.

Q: Where?

A: In a very small shtetl in Germany called Korb, KORB. In fact, I was born in the same bed my father was born in, in the same house.

Q: Wow.

A: And my grandparents had lived there. It was a small place in a small--there might have beenI don't know how many Jews, not too many. And my father was Adolf Rosenfeld and he married my mother Katherine Limburger I think in the year before. I don't know. I don't know the date of their marriage, and we lived there are for a year. And after my grandmother died--I really didn't know myone grandfather, I knew. He was my mother's father, but the others I never knew. They moved to--not too far away to another little bigger place called Adelsheim.

Q: Adelsheim

A: Adelsheim inand there were enough Jews to make a Minyan.

Q: What part of Germany was this in?

A: That was in Baden.

Q: In Baden?

A: Which is near Württemberg. It's near Heilbronn, near Mannheim.

Q: So it would be like westernmiddle part of Germany. Not quite to the south?

A: That's right. That's right. My father had lost a leg in the first world war; so he had a wooden leg, and he was what they call a--I don't know what you say in English.

Q: Say it in German and we'll translate.

A: (?Efeihen Lurhur?)

Q: He sold cattle?

A: He sold cattle, and he sold feed to the farmers in the area.

Q: He sold feed?

A: FEED.

Q: Oh feed.

A: Feed.

Q: Feed. Okay he sold--

A: Whatever.

Q: Okay.

A: Whatever. What else? What else?

Q: Well, I sounds like in what--you're saying is that he was born in a place where at least his family had been for an generation?

A: Or two, yeah.

Q: Do you know how your family--

A: I have no idea.

Q: Okay.

A: I have no idea how they got there. But there were like 13 children.

Q: Yeah.

A: In those--I think my mother's family also had about 11 or 12.

Q: Now, her name is unusual in my--when I hear it--

A: Limburger?

Q: No, Katherine, because Katherine is a Catholic name.

A: You know, I never--she never was called that. She was called Katty or Kater, and I assume--that's how I knew it, and I knew her as Mutter.

Q: Yeah, of course.

A: So it was Kater or Katty.

Q: Okay.

A: And she came from a place called Rexingen. My husband and I have been back to both places. Rexingen had the largest percentage of Jews of any place, and 40 percent of the population of Rexingen was Jewish.

Q: Wow.

A: And a lot of them were called Limburger, and I always thought they were all related. They were not all related. They came from a place in Poland called Limburg.

Q: And Limburg I believe is the German name for (? Livoff?)

A: I don't know.

Q: Yeah. I'm not sure, but I believe that they called (?Livoff?) Limburg, or could be many places or some other small--

A: But they were not all related.

Q: How interesting. How interesting. So your mother's family actually eventually way back, could have come from Poland? To Rexingen?

A: You know, I was--I was 12 when I left; and you know, bringing up children in Germany was quite different from these days. You didn't tell them your history. You were just there, and you just did things.

Q: Were you the oldest? The youngest?

A: Yeah. I was the oldest of five.

Q: You were the oldest of five. Who was born after you?

A: My sister, Edith.

Q: Remember there's a mike. Okay. There's a mike on you. There's a mike on you.

A: She was--that's my sister, Edith.

Q: Okay. And in a second she's going to put--put the machine on you again. (Unrelated conversation) So this is a picture of Edith taken in what year?

A: I don't know when that was taken. Edith died in '98, and after her, Ruth was born. And then Herman was born in--she was born in '30; Herman was born in '33, but I don't have a picture of him right away. And then Esther. Where's Easter? She should be on here. See

this man? Somehow or other I think it devastated the German economy when all these Jews left. And they're now doing a history. I'm sure you're aware of that. There used to be a man--I had to write to Germany for birth certificate or something to this little place called Korb.

Q: So the place your were born in?

A: Where I was born. And there was a man there who knew my father by the name of (?Weterhour?) who's doing a history of the Jews that lived in that area. The problem was (?Weterhour?)--my German is gone. It's gone. And he couldn't talk English; so all the letters were in German which I had to have translated, and I think in '90, my son--where's my son--here. Had to go the France, and he says, "You know, Mom, I'd like to go to Adelsheim because that's where we lived," and I wrote to (?Weterhour?) And low and behold, I got a letter back in English. (?Weterhour?) was getting too old to take care of ____.

Q: So that's the last name of the man?

A: That's the last name of the man. This man was taken and his English is wonderful. So Allen went to Germany and met him, and he persuaded us go to.

Q: To visit?

A: There's another little village called Sennfeld, which is near Adelsheim where the synagogue was still standing. And he--they opened it as a museum. I think upstairs are oldfashioned farm utensils, and down stairs is all Jewish. So we've been there.

(Background noise)

Q: But mostly we don't--

A: Well, out of five, this waswe really very close. These are my nieces. I got eight nieces, one nephew, and one son. So there are ten cousins.

Q: So you were four girls and one boy?

A: Right.

Q: And you were the oldest?

A: I was the oldest. I'm still is oldest.

Q: What was you language growing up in--in home. Was it Yiddish, or was it German?

A: It was German. I didn't--I don't--I can't speak Yiddish.

Q: Were there any other languages they were spoken at home? Did you feel yourself German, more German than Jewish, or equally German as Jewish?

A: I never gave it a thought. I knew I was German, and I knew I was Jewish.

Q: And it was normal?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Can you let me a little bit about what life was like. It wasn't Adelsheim that you have the most memories. What are your earliest memories?

A: Because I was a year old when they moved from Korb to Adelsheim.

Q: Do you have some earliest memories you could share?

A: My father was very strict. I think he was boss, and there were--because of his one leg--we lived on a hill. We were never allowed to go bicycle riding. We were never allowed to go to snow--sledding because he was afraid that if we needed help, he couldn't--

Q: He couldn't be there to do it?

A: He couldn't be there to do it. But we did. We did.

Q: How can you keep kids from doing stuff like that?

A: I know. And when we were out playing, and he wanted us to come home, he would stand in the front of the steps of our house and whistle. Everybody in that little Adelsheim knew that whistle so.

Q: That was Mr. Rosenfeld's whistle?

A: I don't know what else. I think we had very normal childhood.

Q: What was your mother like? Was she somebody who stayed at home and took care of the house, or did she work?

A: Well, not really because when the weather was bad, she had to go with him to do whatever earned him a living because of his--he couldn't walk on ice. He couldn't walk on snow. So...

Q: So she was part of his business?

A: I guess so, yeah. I guess so.

Q: And how did he lose his leg?

A: In the war.

Q: But as a soldier?

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: He was in the front?

A: Yeah. And, you know, when you're growing up, you accept things and you don't look at ages and somebody who's maybe fourfoot tall if you're that big, their tall. But he was only a teenager. When I think back of when he lost his leg, he was only a teenager when he lost his leg.

Q: And so he was also very young when he became a father because that was

A: Yeah.

Q: In the 20s. Did he talk about World War I with the kids? Did he tell stories?

A: No. I just remember him saying, when he came home from the war, he went on a motorcycle, and he had a bad experience. I don't know what happened, but I remember he said, "Don't ever go on a motorcycle."

Q: So he was fearful for his kids?

A: Yeah, yeah. Friday nights he would inspect our hair for lice, our nails, our toenails. I think German men--I don't know about only Jewish men. I don't know anything about any other men--were very bossy. Very, you know, weren't they? So that I remember, and I remember when he came homebefore he went to the war, he had apprentice as a baker. Well, when he came home and didn't have a leg, he couldn't continue baking, but he used to make (?Holis?) And he used to make tortes. He used to cook. He used to bake.

Q: Well, that's also unusual for a man in--in a place where there was very distinct roles that were assigned to who does what.

A: I guess, yeah. I suppose. You know, when you

Q: You don't think of things like that when you're a kid?

A: Not really. Not really.

Q: What was your mom like?

A: She was a doll. You know, but it's over 70 years. It's hard. At this point you don't know what you imagine or what was real. It's very hard.

Q: Does that mean you don't have memories of her?

A: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Q: And so do you--can you say that there are some memories you know are real or distinct?

A: Oh yeah. I remember. I remember cleaning for (?pay self?) on the ceiling to the attic to the basement. And, you know, when you have five kids, you're very busy.

Q: Were you kind of in charge of some of the other kids, being the oldest?

A: I remember diapering Esther, and I remember after three girls when Herman was born, when he woke us up when he was born, that was a big thing. That was a big thing.

Q: What kind of education level did your parents have?

A: I don't remember. I don't really know. I don't really know.

Q: Did your father attend Gimnázium or--

A: I don't think so. He was in the army as a teenager, and then he apprenticed--honestly I don't know.

Q: So--

A: Neither one of them was a professional.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know how many professionals there were in those days in little rural--

Q: Communities?

A: Right.

Q: Did you have any--in Adelsheim, you say there was enough Jews to make a Minyan?

A: Yeah, we had a Shul.

Q: You had a Shul. Is that where you went to school as well?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Grade school.

Q: And--

A: And we were expected to get A's, and I do remember later on when our grades got bad, he was very upset, and the grades got bad because of Hitler. You know.

Q: Tell me in what way? In what way did this affect you? In what way, you know, you were children. You were--in 1933, when he came to power, how old were you, eight?

A: Yeah. And how many 8yearolds remember what happened, especially if it was a bad thing that happened, you know?

Q: But it was a Jewish school that you went to?

A: No. No. No.

Q: No. It was an overall. I see. I see.

A: It was a--nowe had to be sent away. We went to--and I don't remember the year, but there was a Jewish school in Heilbronn. And we had an aunt--excuse me. My--my mother's family, the sisters, there were only two _____. They were very close, and there was a Jewish school in Heilbronn. I don't know whatwhen we weren't allowed to go to the school anymore in Adelsheim.

Q: So it was an overall public school for everybody.

A: Oh yeah. It was a grade school for everybody. There was a Jewish school in Heilbronn, which--where we had an aunt. So me Esther--me, Edith, and Esther, and Ruth were sent to Heilbronn to go to the Jewish school. And we were there for a while. I don't know how long we were there, but I remember one day we went on a field trip to somewhere where we had another aunt. And when we came back, we were told we couldn't go to school anymore. That same day. So we wenthad to go home, but we had to go the school and we had--my mother had two sisters in Aachen. Have you ever heard of Aachen?

Q: Been there.

A: On the Belgium

Q: I've been there.

A: Oh, you've been there.

Q: I've been there.

A: So the three of us were sent to Aachen where there was a Jewish school. And we had to walk to school. They had an apartment. We had to walk so school, and one day we walked to schoolthe school was near the synagogue in Aachen, that was Kristallnacht. We were walking to school, and we had to pass the synagogue, and were all--we couldn't believe it, and somebody told us go home. So we went home. We didn't go to school.

Q: What did you see at the synagogue?

A: It was burning. There were all these people standing, and it was burning. So we went to--we went back home. And I don'tKristallnacht was November.

Q: I think?

A: 1939.

Q: Yeah. I think was November 9th I believe.

A: To 10th.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we went back to my aunt's. I don't know anything about their lives really, but I do remember that sometimes in the evening there were people there, and they were not there in the morning. So I think my aunts must have smuggled them across the border because it was right there.

Q: Of course.

A: Belgium.

Q: Of course.

A: And we didn't know anything about this, but their Kindertransport had been formed, and my aunts--I don't know who made arrangements for us to come to England on the Kindertransport.

Q: We'll come to that, but first I still have a few questions. They may sound almost like side questions, but they're curious for me. When you would go from Adelsheim to first Heilbronn. I think it was the first one?

A: Heilbronn.

Q: And then after that to Aachen, do you remember how you got there? Were you--

A: A train.

Q: You went by train. And was there any kind of experience did you have on the trains, or it doesn't stay in your memory at all?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't remember.

Q: And when you were still in the school where you were together with other non Jewish children, did you feel anything different in the air?

A: I might have, but I don't remember. I do remember when I when we were in Adelsheim, we had to say, "Hail Hitler" to the to the teachers, and I don't know why that stands in my mind, but I met a teacher, and I was carrying books, and I dropped the books and said, "Hail Hitter." And he came over and he said, "You don't have to do that." I don't know why that stands, but I also don't know whether that's real or not real.

Q: Why? Why would you say that?

A: Because it happened I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: You know. I was--I was a youngster. I just remember that.

Q: Did--was there talk at home about Hitler?

A: I only remember at the elections my mother saying, "He won." I remember that. She said, "He won." And I guess that was Hitler who won. You know, the irony is we had a lot of relatives in America, and the whole family had affidavits to come to this country, but there was this stupid quota, and that's why I remember my father was the second youngest. There was an uncle--younger. They were in business together in Adelsheim, and it was a question of whether my father should come, whether we should come, or his younger brother, and I remember he said his younger brother because if he can't work anymore he always has his pension.

Q: Your father does?

A: Yeah. So my uncle came over, and we never made it I mean my parents never made it.

Q: So I assume from what you mentioned already you ended up on Kindertransport?

A: Right.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about what happened?

A: You know what?

Q: What?

A: I don't remember a thing about it. I do not remember. I mean that's how we came--the three of us came.

Q: You were together?

A: Me, Edith, and Ruth. My mother--my mother had a sister who went to England--to London in '33. And at that time she went to work for a Jewish family. They could only do domestic work, but anyhow, by the time the Kindertransport, she'd been there six years and her--many friends; so she found us homes. We were Ruth was in a hostile, but Edith and I were always with private people. She had found homes for us.

Q: So you don't remember saying goodbye to your parents?

A: I never saw them.

Q: So you were in after Kristallnacht, you were still in Aachen and did you ever go back--

A: Kristallnacht was in November, and we came in--in March.

Q: So for four months later, you stayed in Aachen?

A: Right. With my aunts.

Q: With your aunts. You never went back to Adelsheim?

A: Huhuh. Now, my brother--Esther came out too. She was still in Adelsheim, and how she got on Kindertransport--she did, I have no idea. I can't imagine that in that small Adelsheim there I think my aunts in Aachen made all those arrangements I think, but I don't know.

Q: So from the time--do you from the time of Kristallnacht--

A: November.

Q: November to Kindertransport, do you have any memories? Did you continue going to a school next to a burnt down synagogue, or was that done as well?

A: You know, I really don't remember. I do remember Nazis coming to investigate, to look for arms in the house, and they turned the furniture upside down. Some things I remember, but that I really don't remember.

Q: Do you remember any other kinds of exposure or confrontation to one of the questions I was getting to ask, but didn't get to before, is did you have any non Jewish German friends? Did you have any contact

A: I guess in Adelsheim, I don't know, but in Aachen--

Q: Okay. But if it was in Adelsheim, do you have any memories of it? Other children that you went to school with? Kids you played with?

A: No, but when we went back and I met somebody I went to school with. But--she remembered me; I didn't remember her. But, you know, talking about what you remember, my brother why my parents didn't have him go on the Kindertransport I have no idea, but he stayed with my parents. And in 1940 when Hitler rounded up all the and sent them to Gurs, and Rivesaltes.

Q: Is that where your parents ended up?

A: That where my parents with my brother.

Q: I see.

A: So he was in camp.

Q: This was in France?

A: And he came over here. I don't know when he came over here. With a thousand children--you've heard of a thousand children? Came to my uncle and he spoke only French. He couldn't remember anything about the camp at all. If you wanted to, you know, would remember a thing about it. And I guess people just drop unpleasant memories. I don't know.

Q: But you were then how old? You were 14 or 15 when--

A: When we came to England it was in March '39. In October, that year, I would have been 14.

Q: 14?

A: 14.

Q: So you were a 13 and a halfyearold girl?

A: Something like that.

Q: And what were you first memories of England? Of London? Do you have anything in there that you can--

A: My aunt found me a home with a family named Pool. They were not Jewish, not Jewish. They had a grown son. I mean they could've been my grandparents. They were an older couple. Mr. Pool was the chauffeur for the people that my aunt worked for. They were Jewish, and I went there, and they were very typically English. I remember some things. In fact, I remember the address where we lived.

Q: Where were this?

A: Number 10 Elm street in England--in London--an outskirt of London, and they had a maid, and I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with the maid, and I think when she asked me something and didn't understand, she would show me. I think I had to credit her with learning English. Of course, I was going to school, and I didn't do too well in school, I think. They were never too happy with my grades.

Q: So your aunt worked for a welltodo Jewish family?

A: Yeah.

Q: And in that family there was also a chauffeur, and their names were Pool?

A: Noyeah. Right.

Q: The chauffeurs names were Pool?

A: Yeah.

Q: And they, themselves, had a maid at home and--who taught you English; is that correct?

A: Well, because--when I didn't understand, she went and showed me.

Q: I see.

A: If she said, "Get the sugar," I didn't know what she was talking about. She would go and get it and--

Q: And show you, and so you connected the word?

A: And they always ate in the dining room. This is the British. So one day he's sitting, and he's going like this (tapping sounds on the table) and I said, "Shut up." Well, you would imagine that was the call for the maid. And since then, I have never used shut up on anything.

Q: Did he understand that you didn't know?

A: Oh yeah. He understood. He understood. Mrs. Pool was originally from Scotland; so when there was talk of war, there was talk of her evacuating to Scotland, and we were in the train on September 3rd on our way--hadn't left London left to Scotland when war was declared.

Q: That meant when Hitler invaded Poland?

A: Right. And I did know she suddenly got homesick; so I don't know how long we were there, but it from a small--up north in Scotland. Up north of Aberdeen Scotland, a small village. And that, you know, they--first of all, I don't think they even seen a Jew foreigner. So--but I went to school there, and it was a pretty good school.

Q: By that point, that's half a year. You know, when you went to Scotland, you've been in Britain for half a year.

A: Right.

Q: Do you in that time, had you picked up English enough that you could converse, or--

A: I think so.

Q: I remember we had English lessons in Germany, and they probably helped me, but not enough to do a conversation. Not but it probably helped me, you know.

Q: But you came from a large family, and there you were suddenly just you. No sisters. No brother. No parents.

A: Well, just me living with the Pools.

Q: Correct.

A: Now, Edith lived with a Jewish family in London.

Q: The Pools weren't Jewish?

A: No, no. But she lived in London, and Edith was the only one well, Ruth did too with a Jewish family. There were a mother in that household, there was a mother and a daughter and her husband, and the daughter and her--his really sponsored or whatever, but they both worked. So the old lady was the only one at home taking care of Edith, and she was a bitch. She thought she had a cheap maid. The Pools were very good to me. We went to I remember we went to the seaside once on vacation they always went to the seaside, and we took Edith. We took Edith. Ruth Ruth lived with a--went to a doctor, Jewish doctor. They used to be doing the work do you have a Bloomsbury House in England--in London?

Q: I did, but not in connection to the war. Bloomsbury House--

A: Bloomsbury House arranged to take care of children. They were very involved with the Kindertransport.

Q: And were they a government agency?

A: No, it was a volunteer--no it was a Jewish--I don't know who it was because I don't think it exists anymore. However, somewhere in the last few years, you could send to Bloomsbury House for your record. They checked on kinders and things like that. (?Anhel?) and my aunt in England knew them. I don't know how she knew Doctor (?Lobby Nickels?) but they had a maid who was German, and my aunt was to tell you the truth, I really don't know, but anyhow Ruth went to live with Doctor Lobby Nickles. But then Bloomsbury House evacuated when the bombs started falling in London, evacuated some of these kinder to hotels, and Ruth was evacuated to a hostel. So but Lobby Nickels and Nick was Jewish. They were Jewish. And how Esther got to England with the Kindertransport, we don't really know. It was in June.

Q: Of '39. Before the war.

A: Yeah, before the war. I think they must have advertised it for people who wanted to take--because they got 10,000 kids out. And a couple in Wales had wanted a child, but then I think the husband got sick or something was sick. Now this couple, Harrison, lived in Norwich, England, and Norwich, England, there were a lot of shoe factories and Harry Harrison worked in a factory that was owned by a Jew, and on the bulletin board that they needed homes for--

Q: Children.

A: Children. So they had one son. And I guess he went home and discussed it with his wife, and they decided to take a girl, and that's how Esther got to the Harrison's in Norwich, England. How she got on the Kindertransport, we don't really--

Q: And she had been born when? '36 did you say?

A: Esther was born in yeah '30 let's see '37.

Q: She was a baby. She was a toddler.

A: Two. She was two. Well, Kindertransport went to London, and from London she was going to Norwich, but my mother had written to my aunt that--what was happening. So she went my aunt went to the station to see Esther, and Esther naturally walked towards her. I guess because she looked like my mother. I don't really know. But she went to the Harrison's, and the Harrison's were not Jewish. And they had one son, and you would think--Allen was seven, I think, at the time. You would think he would be jealous of her. He adores--to this day, he adores the ground she walks on. He's been over here comes over here quite often. And he's like the parents have since died, but that's how Esther got to the Harrison's.

Q: So all five children--

A: Well, yeah. That's right. All five children.

Q: In Britain. And these are all--

A: That photo shows all of them. We were really very close. This is my this is we're all related except him.

Q: What's his name? This man--is he from Adelsheim?

A: That's his name is (?Lockman?) (?Rinehart Lockman?) This is he, and this is his wife, and they are the two nicest people I have but these were all relatives. These were husbands and children and whatever. And we all were very close.

Q: How--a couple of questions. Do you remember during the time when you were with the Pools, did you think of what was going on with your parents? Do you remember being worried about what might be going on with them, or was that out of mind?

A: You know, I never--no because we were always told that my parents would pick us up in England and we were coming to America. One day I got a telegram that said that is our new address. I didn't really--you know, you really don't think of what could happen. When it happens, you're surprised, but then they were sent to Gurs, and I remember--oh at 16, I had to I had to go to work, and I did. And then I remember we got letters. In fact, I gave the letters after all these years--after all these years, I gave the letters to--my mother's letters to the

Q: Museum?

A: Museum.

Q: To the Holocaust to our museum.

A: Yeah, yeah. Took me a long time, and I don't think they have all of them because they were always written to my aunt and me, and she must have kept some. I don't know.

Q: Was it over a period of years that she wrote those letters?

A: What?

Q: Your mother was it over a period of years that she wrote these letters?

A: Well, it must have been just a year or two. I don't know how long they were in Gurs, but I used to save my money and send them money, and the last lot of--and that was through the Quakers--through the Quakers.

Q: And so you--

A: The last lot of money they were not there, and the Quakers sent me the money back because I mean--it was my--I remember my mother's my father's leg needed mending or something needed money. I don't know. I don't know. I don't really want to talk about that. I don't really want to talk about that. So ask me a question. I don't what to talk about.

Q: Well, my next question was going to be when did you find out that they were no longer there? Was that when you got the money back?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: All right.

A: There's a book out that lists each transport from--I don't know if you're familiar with--can you take this off so I can get that.

Q: So you're showing me a book that lists those--Rosenfeld--Katty and Adolf 1999 1899 1898?

A: Oh that's his birthday.

Q: Okay. Adelsheim is where they're from?

A: This is a book ____ that lists all the transports. It lists all thesee?

Q: Oh my.

A: You've never seen that before?

Q: No. I've never seen this book before. It's--it's 600 and how many pages 6645 pages--no 664 pages. It lists lists of deportees by convoy number.

A: By transport.

Q: By transport. It has some photographs in the very beginning. It has a description in the beginning, and I'm going to keep on talking, and on page 161, it has the transport for Bertl's parents. Katty, KATTY Rosenfeld, ROSENFELD and Adolf Rosenfeld also ROSENFELD. She's born on 18.6.99. He's born on 16.8.98; so that means they were born in June 1898 and 1899?

A: Right. One was born on the 16th, and one was born on the 18th.

Q: Okay. And this is a book called The Jewish Community in Baden (Interviewer speaking German) and her father is mentioned in this book on page 34, Adolph Rosenfeld (speaking German). It's fine. In the book, it's mentioned that on page 35--I'll say it first in German (speaking German). In translation, it says on the 22nd of October, 1940, the last eight Jewish Jews from Adelsheim were deported to Gurs, the couple Max and Berta Alexander, Heimlich and Earnestine Goldschmidt, Adolf and Katalina Rosenfeld--who were Bertl's parents--as well as Adolph and Bona Schorsh, and Schorsh is spelled SCHORSH. Only Adolf Schorsh of the these eight couples was able to get to the United States in 1941 after his wife died in the camp. And then (speaking German) that says that Berta Alexander--the heavily injured Adolf Rosenfeld and his wife Katalina were deported in August '92 through Drancy to Auschwitz where they werewhere they died. "Where they met death" is actually the way it's explained. Okay. Now, you're showing me a photograph.

A: This is my brother.

Q: Okay.

A: This is his wife.

Q: Your brother is Herman is that his name?

A: Herman. And that's his wife. He died in '90. She died in November, and he died just later.

Q: So November?

A: That's my sister Ruth.

Q: So she died in November of--

A: Last year.

Q: Of 2009?

A: This is my sister Esther and her husband, and that's me and Morris. And my sister Edith isn't there because--I think it was a wedding. Her significant other was--had Parkinson's, and she couldn't make it. So that's...

Q: So this looks like it was taken--

A: I don't remember.

Q: Late 90's late 80's or something.

A: So many pictures.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's Herman.

Q: When did you find out details of what happened to your parents? Was it long after they got that money?

A: I think they were deported in--

Q: '42. It says in that book.

A: '42.

Q: October '42. So they must have been writing letters to you, to your aunt, for a couple of years?

A: From France.

Q: Yeah?

A: In '82, I don't know their 40th there was as I told you in Sennfeld, they have this museum, and I think in '82, and I don't remember the year, they had a memorial service for all the I think 40 years later. And, you know, Esther and I went Rinehart wrote us that he had arranged this. He's very active in this. Esther and I went for the weekend to Adelsheim we stayed with them for this memorial service, and somewhere I have pictures of it, but I don't know. It really doesn't matter. They had a very touching--and I made a speech I wrote a speech in English, and Rinehart translated it for me into German, and I really tried to give it, but I couldn't. I was just standing up there crying. So Rinehart gave the speech. But there were a lot of people there, and they had to have security. They it was held in the synagogue in this other little town, and they had to have security.

Q: In 1982?

A: I think it was '82. I think it was that's when they rounded up all the leftovers. All the people who were we also met they couldn't go shopping. I remember my mother never wrote this to us, but they couldn't--they could only go shopping grocery shopping certain

times, and then there was nothing left in the stores. And we met someone when we went over there who used to leave food at my parents doorstep at night. Because, you know, I think the people who lived in Adelsheim, there were no Nazis. There were no Nazis. We also met someone with a son who said--who was there when they rounded up all the Jews. We met someone who watched--this man with his father watched all that, and the father said to the son, "We have now lost the war." I remember that. This is a great book my sister Edith she worked for a bookstore have you lived in Washington long?

Q: I've worked there. I've lived in Washington almost ten years. I'm not from here, but I remember

A: Do you remember bookstore Olsson's?

Q: Olsson's?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: She worked for Olsson when she got me that. She worked for Olsson for 25 years or so.

Q: Amazing book. An amazing book. It's called Memorial for the Jews Deported from France 1942 to '44, written by Serge Klarsfeld.

A: Klarsfeld.

Q: Or at least compiled by him.

A: I'm not too sure France had some program where they paid money to people who were deported because this was in France.

Q: I see.

A: Gurs was in France.

Q: That's right.

A: Right? So anybody deported from France got--I don't know how much money, but we got some money because they allowed them to do this.

Q: How did your other siblings find out that your parents were no longer in the camp?

A: I don't remember.

Q: It wasn't you who told them?

A: Oh, I don't remember. Probably. Where else would they find out? Where else would they find out? What else?

Q: Oh gosh. You're a very close family.

A: We all are. We all are.

Q: And yet there are very few actual memories. Maybe because, as you say, it's blotted out because it was so painful. And for being so close, yet as you were growing up in formative years, for you, you were the oldest. And you were going into adolescence, but they spent their childhoods--and you were all scattered all over the place. So there are ironies as to how it is that you became close, you know, and many other--

A: Because in England we saw each other. We were in touch. I couldI used toI knew someonea boy, who lived in England with his aunt who came fromI forget where he came fromhad a brother here in--in New York. He wanted to stay, and I couldn't understand why the brother didn't come to England or why he wouldn't want to be with his brotherbut he never did come over here. And I know people here who have sisters in Canada. I just never could up understand that. Now, four of usno three of us, myself, Edith, and Ruth, we came over to this country in '47. Edith didn't come until '48 because she was in the British Army. She had joined the British Army and was not what they called "demobbed" until '48.

Q: That's still ashe was a

A: Discharged.

Q: She was a teenager. However it wasI mean if you were born in 1925...

A: She was born in '27.

Q: So she was 1920 years old?

A: Well, she jointed the British Army.

Q: Yeah.

A: So she didn't comeand she came over here election night, when Truman was elected. And she couldn'twe were so excited about Truman that we really neglected her, and she got very upset. But we came over here to live with an uncle and aunt and--and--and life was horrible. My aunt was unbelievable. She was very neurotic. So when Edith came over here, I--Iwewe had to leave. No other choice. But when Edith came, she lived there too, and then we decided we just couldn't do it anymore. I had a job.

Q: What town what this? What city was this?

A: Huh?

Q: Where did you come over to? Where did your aunt live? The American.

A: In Washington.

Q: In Washington. I see.

A: In Washington. We decided we were going--we took an apartment to live by ourselves. And so Edith and I took an apartment, which at that time were hard to come by. I had a job, and she got a job. I remember--and she was I had been a year, and she was getting five dollars more a week than I was; so I got furious with her. I got furious with her, but anyhow, we looked for an apartment.

Q: So the two of you then lived together, and did the others move in with you as well?

A: Yes.

Q: Was this the first time then you could say first in the

A: I think that's how we got close. I don't know. I really don't know, but there was a teenager there we were in our early 20's, picking up a tea I don't think we could do it today.

Q: This is why I say it's so--in some ways, it could have gone so much the other way.

A: It could have.

Q: It could have gone such that the children are all scattered in England. They grow up their formative years, have different impressions, they don't have memories of really where they came from, and they're strangers to one another.

A: That's right.

Q: Did your aunts play a role, the ones in Britain?

A: I think so. She came over here twice to this country to visit, but I think so.

Q: Yeah, but I don't remember in Britain

A: She was also neurotic. I lived with her after I had to leave school at 16, she found me a room in London and a job, but anyhow I lived with her. She was also neurotic. She was a chef in--in a restaurant, and she was neurotic. When she was angry, she would bake. To this day, I do very little baking because of--but I think she did. I think she did. She kept in touch with all of us. In fact, I have a cousin in London that I didn't know was there 'till my aunt found her many, many years ago, but--

Q: What were your mother's letters about when she would write to you while she was in--

A: We should be good. We must do this and do that. She'd give us orders and, you know, be good children.

Q: But not much about what was going on with her?

A: Not too much. Not too much.

Q: Did your father write?

A: He couldn't write (unintelligible German phrase) she wrote. She wrote.

Q: And you say you kept those letters for many, many years.

A: Oh, yeah. I have--you know, they made me copies. My brotherinlaw had them translated into English by someone, which wasbecause I can't read that German scribble anymore.

Q: But you did at the time?

A: Oh yeah, but you forget. You know, you forget. I don't know. Peoplepeople who haven't had this experience and forget things, I don't know if they can understand that you forget unpleasant--

Q: You have to go on.

A: Huh?

Q: You have to go on.

A: I guess so.

Q: You know, when I hear this, to me, it sounds likeIt sounds like you had a lot on your shoulders being the oldest one.

A: To bring up Esther was hard.

Q: So you pretty much brought her up?

A: Well, she was a teenager. She was like 10, 11.

Q: When you--

A: When we took this apartment in southeast Washington. She went to school. I got a job. I had trouble getting a job because who would send to EnglandI never thought of getting references, and who would send to England for referenceswhat? Then I also found a little antiSemitism. Some of the places I applied to for a jobsomebody later said they don't employ Jews.

Q: In Washington?

A: But, and, you know what? They really don't tell, you know, we're not going to hire. They kind of will let you know, and you never hear from them again. Then I applied for a job, and I went there. Went to this address, and when I got to the address, an old man came out, and he said to me, "Are you looking for the job?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said,

"Go in there and ask for Ms. Stopkin." So--which I did and she interviewed me, and she said, "We'll let you know."

Q: What was the job you were going for?

A: That was a wholesale tobacconist and candy and paper goods, and they were all working a fiveandahalf day week, and they werehe was thinking that--but the old man I saw was one of the owners, which I didn't know at that time. And they were thinking of going on a fiveday week. So they needed extra help. You know, I really don't remember, but everybodyif I sat at this desk, I didn't know what this person was doing. You had your job, and that's what you did. Well, they hired somebody. They were thinking of hiring someone to cut down on the working hours, and that person learned the whole thing. I learned the whole thing. She called me. I don't know if either one of you is Jewish.

Q: No. I'm not.

A: There ishave you ever heard of the Hebrew Home?

Q: Yes.

A: The Hebrew Home is now celebrating its 100th anniversary, and it was the brainchild of somebody called Hyman Goldman, who at 22 saw this man sitting therethat old man I saw coming out was Hyman Goldman. I worked for them. And they were very good too. I learned the whole thing. I ended up being the office manager, and it was a very good job.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the one before, what job you were going for that you didn't get?

A: Oh. I think it was an insurance company.

Q: Okay.

A: And then they used to be a Garfinkel's that didn't hire. I don't know if Garfinkel's was still around when--

Q: No, but I heard of it. It was a department store.

A: It was. Yeah, it was. I met Morriswe've now been married 56 years in December. I met MorrisI was introduced to him. But Hyman Goldman had a son Erin who was friends with Morris's brother, and one day Hyman Goldman said to him, "You know, you met Morris Esenstad? His brother's checking into you." I couldn't believe it. Morris's brother was friends with Hyman Goldman's son. And Leon checked with Erin on me. Did youI mean I couldn't get over that. But, you know, that's how it goes.

Q: You got married then 56 years ago which would have been 1954?

A: Right.

Q: And did you continued working at the--

A: I continued there 'till I got pregnant, and then I left.

Q: Okay, but then during that time you and Edith were responsible, before you got married, for all of the family. Bringing them up.

A: That's true. That's true.

Q: So--

A: There used to and it's still--Camp Ari, and I forgot were the womens'--girls' camp is called. Louise. Have you ever heard of Camp Louise?

Q: No, I haven't.

A: That was started many years ago. The problem was what to do with Esther over the summer, and Hyman Goldman was on the board of Camp Louise, which is a Jewish camp. So for five dollars a week, we would send her to camp. He was on the board, you know.

Q: And so he made it happen.

A: Yeah, yeah. You know, some good things have happened. Some good thing have happened. But it's--we're all together.

Q: It's I think--

A: We're all over the place. These are my grandchildren.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Two.

Q: Two.

A: Allen--I don't know if I have a picture of Allen. Oh. That's Allen's foster brother.

Q: Ah, yeah. The one who adores her?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: That's my grandson.

Q: Uhhuh.

A: This is Allen. This is my son and his wife and their two children, and this is my daughter's family. I don't think I have a picture of Julie. That's her, but--you know, at different and this is my uncle's granddaughter.

Q: Well, to me it sounds like an amazing achievement to keep a family together when so much was working against that happening.

A: Yeah.

Q: Germany. How did you--do you and your siblings have different attitudes towards Germany and going back and returning?

A: Well, I don't know about Edith. She was in Germany during when she was in the army, she was stationed in Germany, and she would tell me and she and somebody else went to Adelsheim.

Q: At that time right after the war?

A: When she was in the army.

Q: Right. British Army.

A: And someone on the street stopped her and said, "Are you Adolf Rosenfeld's daughter?" So that's what happened. Let's see--but their attitude--I remember Esther said to me--who can't remember Germany. She was too she was thinking of going back, and she said to me, "Did you ever consider going back?" As if they could get lost in the sea--I said, "No. I wouldn't." Well, she persuaded me to change my mind, but that was in, I think '89 or something. I don't remember the date, but Morris got sick. So they went we made agreements to go, but Morris got sick, and she and her husband went. So I guess that was my attitude at that time. I don't ever care to go back, but when Allen went and met Rinehart, I changed my mind. I went to the house where I was born, you know. Have you ever lived in a small place?

Q: No--

A: When in a little town, you see a bunch of people, and you wonder why they're there. We were standing in Korb. Rinehart had taken us there. In front of this, he says, "This is the house," and I have pictures of the house. That's where your father lived. So we were standing there, and somebody from the house looked out, and they wondered while all these people were standing there, and they said something. And it was the daughter who had her parents had bought the house from my father, and she didn't live in it, but she came there once a year to go to the cemetery of her parents, and that's when she stayed in the house. So they just happened to be in the house and they asked us into the house. We went into the house. Then we went back to Adelsheim. The German government had sold

my parent's house to somebody who we went were invited into that house, which had changed greatly from when we lived in it.

Q: So you had memories of how it had looked before?

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Do you have any did you have any photographs that--let's say relatives had gotten in the United States that would have had your family before you went on the Kindertransport that would have had pictures of the place of where you lived, of how your parents looked, and things like that? We'll put it on tap this photo that you're showing me of your family before the Kindertransport, it must have been very recent before the Kindertransport.

A: It was. I think so.

Q: Because Esther's already--

A: She looked a little--yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And so when was the first time you went did you only go back the Germany once? Twice?

A: Twice.

Q: Twice?

A: In '90, and in '95.

Q: In '90 and in '95. But you mentioned earlier that there had been 1982?

A: Yeah. That must have been wrong.

Q: Okay. So it would have been one of those

A: I have to ask Esther. I don't remember, but they had a memorial.

Q: Right.

A: For for I think it was in 202.

Q: In 202.

A: 60 years 60 years.

Q: 60 years.

A: In 202.

Q: Okay. So that would have meant three times that you've been back.

A: Yeah. That was over the weekend.

Q: Okay. So

A: But it was a funny thing, you know, Rinehart had wrote us what they were doing, and he wrote to me, and I said to Esther, "You know, Esther, I think we ought to go." And she just went like that. About 2025 years ago, I got a letter from someone in Ireland. And said, "Dear Mrs. Esenstad, I think we are related." Well, he's the the man who wrote it is a geologist, and he had been in a department in Ireland, and he went to Germany for a dig, and, you know, they keep all kinds of records. His mother was Jewish. His father wasn't, but when the war started--or before his Jewish grandmother and his Jewish aunt came to live with them in England, and they got to England because they were anti-Nazi and they escaped. I think they met at the university somewhere in Germany and went to work for the pope. And they both converted to Catholicism, but he said he was greatly influenced by his Jewish grandmother and aunt. So when he went back to Germany on a dig, he thought he would find out about his mother. I had written to Germany because I needed copies of birth certificates, and that led him to Korb, and when he got to Korb later I said to him, you know, so and so is in England is in America. And he wrote. They gave him my address, and he wrote to me, and he told me how we were related. He sent us family trees.

Q: How were you related?

A: His great grandhe's Peter is now 60 something, I would think. He's much younger than we are. His great somehow or another, his great, great grandfather and my great, great, great whatever, very far. But, you know, we are--and we've met and he's been here a couple of times. They came for Amelia's Bot Mitzvah, he and his wife. We've stayed at his house in Ireland and spent some time with him. But there we are. You never know who you

Q: You never know. You never know. And you're I think we're coming close to the end.

A: Oh I--

Q: I think we are, but I want to make sure there aren't any questions that I should have asked that I haven't asked.

A: Well, I don't know. I wouldn't know.

Q: I'm ___ myself at the moment. Is there something that you would want your children have you talked about these things with your children? Did they ask? Were they curious about it?

A: You know, this person that I worked with in England, he came on my Kindertransport too. We never talked about it. The Kindertransport children didn't ask too many questions,

but they do know. They do know. We all have the most wonderful children so, right? But it's Kindertransport has only been talked about since '89, and that is because the 50th anniversary of the Kindertransport and the Leventhal--whatever her name is--half this reunion. Do you know about that?

Q: No, I don't. I don't.

A: She and her sister organized this reunion--50year reunion in London. We didn't go. They came from all over. They came I didn't think I don't think we thought they would have such a turn out. But it's only been since that time that people have really talked about the Kindertransport. We have an organization here a branch. There's a national in New York. That's it. What else.

Q: You lost your parents, let's say at age 13 when you were sent to the Kindertransport. You never saw them again after that?

A: Never saw them again.

Q: What do you think they bequeathed you, each of them as a personality? What do you think that how did they influence your life?

A: I think family.

Q: Yeah?

A: I think so. They all were very close with their siblings, I think. And I remember all the letters from my mother--we should do this, and we should do that, and we should you know. She gave us orders because I don't think--I mean it's unimaginable, Auschwitz. They would not have--

Q: She didn't think that what's what would be--

A: No. I'm sure they didn't. You could drive yourself if you knew what was going to happen to you, you could

Q: Yeah.

A: Go mad. So you have all the things you want to know?

Q: Oh probably a lot more, but right now, unless there's something that you would want to add to what we've talked about.

A: What's going to happen with this?

Q: I'll tell you in a minute, but then at this point then I'll say thank you. Thank you for the interview.

A: I'm sorry we got so mixed up.

Q: No, we didn't. No, we didn't. This was this was all the questions--

A: Because I thought ____+

Q: That's okay. That's okay. That concludes our interview with Bertl Esenstad on September 16th, 2010. Thank you very much.

A: You're very welcome.

Q: We appreciate it.

A: You're going to send me a disk?

Q: Yes we are. Okay.

Conclusion of Interview