

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Hanny Leitson

October 15, 2010

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Michelle Keegan, National Court Reporters Association.

HANNY LEITSON

October 15, 2010

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial interview with Hanny --

Answer: H-A-N-N-Y, Hanny.

Q: -- Leitson.

A: Leitson.

Q: Hanny Leitson, conducted by Annie Earl on the 15th of October 2010 at the Kindertransport Association Conference in Arlington, Virginia
A: Okay. Let's start from the very beginning.

Answer: Okay.

Q: Your name, if it was different at birth, when you were born.

A: It was still Hanny.

Q: Your name was?

A: Yes. But I've not used it because that's what my father would call me when he was very strict with me. I don't have a good association with it.

Q: And what's your maiden name?

A: Maiden name is Gross, G-R-O-S-S.

Q: What year were you born? When is your birthday?

A: In 1925, June 16th. It was a very good time of the year. I like it.

Q: Where were you born?

A: In Vienna, right in the middle of town we lived.

Q: So what was your childhood like? Tell me your earliest memories.

A: Well, there was my father and my mother and my older brother who was five years older. And then a stepbrother, Paul, who was much older, 17 years older, who really didn't live with us, but he was part of the family. And my father was much older than my mother. My father was 18 years older than my mother, and so he always seemed more like my grandfather to me. And my mother was 35 when I was born, so compared to how I felt at 35 or see other people being 35 now, she seemed much older, too. And we lived in an apartment right in the middle of the city. And so my father was a lawyer, an

attorney, and he had his office -- I think we were on the fourth floor or sixth floor -- I'm not sure -- of this building. And he had an office on the mezzanine of that same floor, so he would always come home for lunch at 1:00 o'clock, around the time that I came home from school. And that was our main meal at that time. And in those days, children did not go out of the apartment by themselves. There was always somebody with me, a Fräulein type. And I was taken everywhere, to the park and ice skating. My father took me ice skating. And there was no such thing as really playing in the neighborhood on the street. But we did take summer vacations, lengthy summer vacations to either a different part of Austria or to the beach in northern Italy. And so then I think we were able to play freely. But during the year, we were pretty constricted. My brother and I were not too close. The ideas in those days made a lot of difference. And he was an ardent boy scout and he thought all of my interests were silly and superficial. But whenever I was sick -- and I seemed to have been sick a good deal in those days with colds and flu and so forth -- he would play games and especially chess with me. And I just recently picked it up again. So that's been fun. And so I went to elementary school. And I don't remember much about it except for a gym teacher who was very -- who looked more like a snowman or a snowwoman. She was built that way. And I never liked gym. So I think that was four grades or five grades. And then I went to another school, a private school. I believe it was a private school called Luithlen, L-U-I-T-H-L-E-N. And somehow, even though Jewish children were not allowed to go to school after awhile when Hitler came, I think I remained in school there somehow until I could leave.

Q: So the schools that you attended, were they -- were there Jewish and non-Jewish children?

A: Yes. Definitely. Yes. Yeah. And then in this middle school we had religion classes, and they were done with release time. In other words, the Protestant children would go one place for instruction and the Catholic children to another and the Jewish children to another. And that's when I began to go to synagogue a little bit. My parents really didn't go. They would go to their parents or my father's parents in Czechoslovakia occasionally over the -- the Yom Kippur, over the holidays. But otherwise, no, there wasn't much celebration of holidays. And in fact, we had a Christmas tree for many years until I made my mother buy a menorah when I was old enough to go to synagogue. And then when I was a tween or an early teenager, we would go to children's services, the young people's services at the main synagogue in Vienna. But I must have went -- I think I went mostly for the boys who also attended and then we could all go skating afterwards. So I didn't take all that very seriously at that time. My earliest memory of there being something wrong politically or worrying about what's going to happen to Jewish people was I think in 1934 when I remember going on vacation by car with my parents to a place called Bad Gastein, a resort-type thing. And we got there the evening, at night when it was dark. And the village was in the valley, and we came down from the

mountain or hill or something. And all the windows in the town, in the village, were lit up and there were candles in the window. And apparently a chancellor from Austria, and his name was Dollfuss, had died. I don't know whether he died or was killed. But he was known to be very sympathetic to Hitler. And so it was eerie that he was so mourned or so celebrated. And I guess those lights are something I'll never forget. And also because my father was older he would always worry about whether he'd die before my mother and so forth. And he worried a great deal. My mother was a worrywart, too. And I've become a worrywart as well. And I married one. I married one, too. But my father was always worried about the times or money or clients or whatever. And he was very serious. He was quite an intellectual person. He was always reading. So there was really very little game playing in our house except occasionally my brother and I. And the only sport was ice skating. And then I went to gymnastic classes as a little girl next door. And swimming, I think. So somehow when Hitler came to Austria and was practically invited into Austria, somehow it wasn't a surprise because we had always lived with that kind of fear. So I don't know what else I can tell you. I had a few good friends, but the friends I had went to the same school, but they lived other places. So it wasn't like you could get together after school. You had to make a play date or something. A little older than a play date. And one friend, Francie, did come to New York and I did see her once or twice in New York. Oh, and another friend, Eva Schiffer. She was a real intellectual. My father adored her. And she lived around the corner. And my grades were always compared to hers. And I think she's a retired professor at Amherst or Andover now, and we are out of touch, although we were back in touch in New York. And then one friend went to South America, to Argentina, and we completely lost touch. And a boy I liked went to Uruguay. So everybody was spread out. There was no cohesiveness. And I think even now I envy some of my friends who grew up in one town and had their high school crowd and go to reunions and all these memories. So I don't have that. So I don't know what else should I tell you.

Q: So do you remember feeling -- you didn't -- did you recognize or celebrate any Jewish holidays in your home?

A: Well, we then eventually bought a menorah. I don't remember celebrating Hanukkah. No, really, I don't think we did.

Q: Were a lot of your friends Jewish?

A: Yeah, they were all Jewish.

Q: So growing up did you experience any anti-Semitism in your --

A: Not immediately. Not among my friends, I didn't, because I guess I just didn't -- wasn't open to that because there was nobody there. And we had non-Jewish help, Fräuleins and so forth, a housekeeper. But I didn't experience anything from them. And

of course, they had to leave as soon as Hitler came. Other people in my life, my gym teacher, my aunt was my piano teacher. And they were all Jewish. But we talked about it. And my father would talk about the things that Hitler did. And we would -- this is before concentration camps, but we were aware of the Nuremburg laws and of what happens, and you know, and how you have to -- how you can't work any more and you can't have any non-Jewish help. My father had to get rid of his secretary. He had one secretary who was with him for 30 years or something. But personally, I can't say I experienced it. My main experience was years later when I visited Vienna the first time, I think, in '69. Do you want to hear that story? Yeah?

Q: Uh-hmm.

A: With my husband. And since he didn't speak German, we couldn't go to the theater, but we went to a lot of operas. And so one night we went to the opera. And we also stayed at a hotel right across from the opera. We didn't have time to eat beforehand, so we went to a restaurant nearby there afterwards. And I think generally in there when a place is crowded, they don't have you necessarily wait. They seat you with somebody. And so we were seated with this man who was a bit older than I am, maybe 10, 15 years older than I was at the time. Started talking somehow. And I spoke a little broken German. And he said, "Oh, how come your German is so good?" or something. And I said, "Well, I'm glad you think it's good." I said, "I used to live here." And he said, "Oh?" And I said, "Well, I left in 1939. I had to leave when Hitler came to Austria." And so he said, "Oh," and then he fell silent. Oh, and he had been some kind of movie producer or something. Anyway, he became silent and five minutes later he got up. And it felt very chilly. The Austrians were never overly friendly, and they were more Nazis than the Germans were, I think. So again, it was not surprising, but at the same time it was extremely uncomfortable. And just such a tiny little incident that I'll never forget. So I think if I had experienced more incidents and more graphic incidents, I would have remembered. But I just did not happen to be with people.

Q: How did the Nuremburg laws or I guess the Nazi rise to power, how did it affect you and your family at home?

A: Well, my father I think not being able to have anybody working for you who is even partially Jewish. So that was the big thing. And that meant that -- you know, we had household help, a maid. And everybody was very loyal and friendly and they suddenly had to disappear. For my father, no help in the office, and the office was shrinking. He was upset about that. And so there wasn't anybody in my family, whether -- we were just Jewish, so that wasn't in question, whether we had a grandfather or whatever. So I think that was the main thing. What else was in there? I forgot.

Q: You said that your father talked about the things that Hitler was doing. Were you aware of the Naziism and what was going on?

A: Yeah, I think so. As I look back, we were very politically aware as children or teenagers. Much more so than I later found kids either in England or America being. Yeah, we were. And then, of course, when the annexation started. And my mother's half-sister lived, in Prague, her husband, and he was -- I mean, they were very well-situated. He was the president of a bank. And they refused to leave. I mean, this whole business over what's going to happen to us. In fact, I had an uncle and an aunt in Vienna. And he was a government employee. And I guess he was half Jewish. He thought it would never happen to him. And they didn't leave, and they perished in a concentration camp. My aunt and uncle in Czechoslovakia left in time. Their children made them leave just in time.

Q: Do you recall -- What are your memories of Hitler coming to power in Austria? Do you recall when the change happened?

A: Yeah. I remember that something -- he immediately took over the radio station, the one means of communication. And I remember -- of course there were a lot of Nazi soldiers around town, and they were marching in the Ringstrasse. Yeah. And then real fear settled in because we then -- well, it was after Kristallnacht. And I guess I heard about Kristallnacht later. I didn't see any of those terrible things happening on the street. But then we began to be really afraid. The person in power was the superintendent of the apartment building. And it was a question of whether he was going to be our friend or foe. And everything depended on him. And so I think we were all in fear that he would say yes, such and such, the Grosses living there, Jewish, and go take them. But fortunately that never happened. My brother actually left the year before. He left soon after Hitler came to power, and he went to Germany and then to Denmark and later on to South America, to Bolivia. So I was the only one left at home. And my stepbrother had married. And he was -- my father's first wife was not Jewish. So my stepbrother for certain didn't grow up Jewish, but he didn't grow up with anything else either, just nondenominational. And he married a Jewish woman, one whose sister and brother-in-law actually emigrated to Palestine, to Israel then. But they left. His biological mother was related to a very prominent Czech shoe manufacturer. And they were willing to help them get out, but only if he -- if they both converted and didn't ever acknowledge their Jewish family any more, which they did. But everybody had to survive in those days. That's what they had to do.

Q: Do you recall --

A: You go ahead.

Q: -- when the decision was made that you would leave on the Kindertransport?

A: Well, I think it was somehow made early in the year. Early '39, it must have been. But the understanding -- all this was, it didn't seem like such a tragic thing because the understanding always was that my parents would come to England two months later. And then after I left the British quarter was closed so they couldn't come. And they very fortunately were able to get to the United States. And my father subsequently died here two years later, so I never did see him again. But the good-byes were not that terrible because it was like, "So long. I'm going to see you in a couple of months."

Q: What kind of preparation went into it? I mean, did you pack? Did your mother do it for you? What was the feeling in your home at this time?

A: Well, ironically, it was kind of up. We bought clothes and packed clothes. You're going to need this and you're going to need that. And so it was a rather positive preparation. Kind of naive, really, when you think about it. So I did not understand.

Q: How old were you?

A: I was 13 by then. I understood, but I didn't expect a long separation. And then my relationship with my father, while it had always been good, you know, he was really overwhelmed by anxiety and worry. And I remember him being very short and angry with me a lot of the time. And so I do remember the feeling of, oh, good, I can get out of here kind of thing. And he did not come to the train station with me. My mother sent me off. In retrospect, it might just have been too hard for him to come. But it was a way also of getting distance.

Q: What are your memories of saying good-bye to your mother?

A: Well, again, it was a really warm and hugging good-bye, but it wasn't terribly sad because it was either denial or it was "I'm going to see you in a couple of months." So from what I've been reading -- and I just don't remember other kids and their parents in the train station. It was terrible for some kids. And then there's that story in that one movie about the father pulling the daughter out of the --

Q: "Into the Arms of Strangers." I just watched it yesterday. I recall that story when he pulled her out of the train.

A: Did you read the book? It's a very readable, a nice book, very good.

Q: What are your memories of the journey to England?

A: Well, foggy. Just sitting with a lot of kids on a train and wearing my name tag. Some people remember their number. I don't remember my number. And then some -- When we got to the -- what was it? The German -- the German border I don't remember so much. There wasn't a border, I guess. But then the German-Dutch border was -- there

were border guards who came on board, and it was scary. And we thought maybe we wouldn't get through or something. But we did. And somehow -- I remember most of this being at night, but I think maybe we did travel at night. People say when you get old your long-term memory is very good, but for me my short- or my long-term isn't very good. And so I remember that anxiety and those guards walking through and being very relieved afterwards. And so then we got to the Hague of Holland and got onto their boat, ship. And I was very seasick so I don't remember anything good about that. And then when I got there, some cousins of my mother's -- I don't remember whether they met me in -- what's the town that we landed in? Do you know? When we went to London. Anyway, when I got off the whole Kindertransport, they were there. And I stayed with them for a couple of days. And then I met my foster parents, who had been arranged for by my cousin, in a town called Cheltenham, which was west of London.

Q: I've heard of it before.

A: Yeah. Very nice town. Mostly for retired people, a couple of public schools. And they were very nice, very different. He was a high school -- vocational high school principal, and she was a housewife and a Christian Scientist and a viola player. And how I got to them was that her daughter had just married an American whom she met up at Cambridge and she had to have this very, very bright, perfect daughter. She was. She was very nice. And my cousin, the daughter of these -- the Prague uncle and aunt met her in-laws on the ship coming back from the wedding, and they said, "You know, do you know anybody who would take my little cousin?" And she said she would ask her daughter-in-law's parents. And at first they didn't want to take me, but then they did. And so I got to them. And I don't know whether I got to them on a Friday or not. But I just remember going to school right away, like on a Monday, and being totally immersed in the language. Of course, when I get to them -- I mean, I had some English from the Fräulein.

Q: What year was this?

A: That was still '39. That was just before the war.

Q: Do you remember what month you moved?

A: Yeah, April.

Q: And you hadn't spoken -- English was a new language for you?

A: Yeah, more or less. I mean, not totally new, but yeah. I didn't know much.

Q: What was school like?

A: And also I got there at the end of that school year. School was -- eventually, I liked it. Of course, we had to wear school uniforms, which was totally strange. I learned to ride a bike so that I could -- the school was at the other end of town. It was a couple of miles on a bike. And gradually I made friends. I think I felt very strange and different at first. Plus, I don't think they ever had seen a Jewish person before. I'm not sure that my foster parents had, except that there was -- the MP from that area was Jewish. The name was Lipson. So it took a while, but then I had a couple of good friends in time, Megan and Audrey. And I did like most of the teachers. It was an all girls school. In the summer I think I went on a farm, the farm of a friend of theirs or something. I don't know what I did there, but I quite liked that for a couple of summers. I don't remember many -- I've not thought about that before. I don't remember many after school activities or anything. I don't know what I did.

Q: Did you experience any air raids or bombings or anything?

A: Well, really not because we were -- there was I think only one time I remember the sirens really going off. We were 100 miles west of London, and we were pretty much immune.

Q: Did you have contact with your family, your parents?

A: Yeah. My mother was a writer, and she could write letters to me. I didn't keep them except the letter when she wrote to me that my father had died after -- a year or two after they had emigrated from the States.

Q: She -- they emigrated together?

A: Together on the last ship, the Rotterdam from Marseilles, I think late August.

Q: In '39?

A: '39, yes. Yeah.

Q: Where did they settle in New York?

A: They settled in Elmhurst.

Q: Is that in New Jersey.

A: No. Long Island. And her sister -- one sister, the Prague sister, lived in Jackson Heights so that was across the way right there. And my mother lived -- they lived in an apartment for years. When I came to New York, I lived with her in that apartment. She had a huge bed, bed/sitting room. And there was another woman that she shared the apartment with when there was no money to speak of. My mother worked in a hat factory. She did sewing and this and that. And my father was too old to take the law

exam. So I'm not sure. I think there was some help for refugees. I think they lived on that and my mother's earnings. Not much.

Q: What was your knowledge of the war when you were in England? Did you know what was going on?

A: Yeah, but not the concentration camps. But the bombings. And my brother and my stepbrother joined the U.S. Army from here. They had the long way around. They eventually came to the States and he joined the Army. And he was stationed in England, and I would see him on occasion. And the last time I saw him before he went over was June 6th, I think. When was Dunkirk? '41 or something. We met up in Manchester. Went to a tea dance. That's what people did then. And then he went overseas. So we knew about the bombings and the invasions and all of that. Well, we knew that terrible things happened to Jewish people, but I don't think we knew exactly what, which seems strange, doesn't it?

Q: A lot of people experienced that, actually.

A: Really?

Q: They weren't in Germany, they weren't in it, especially if you were younger.

A: Yeah. I don't know if I read any newspapers.

Q: What about your brother who was in South America?

A: He stayed there. He was with cousins. He left them. They were in La Paz, and then he went -- he had a job in a jungle for two years with a brewing company in Cochabamba, which is also Bolivia:

Q: Did he stay there?

A: He stayed there for two years. I think he came back. Had lost a terrible amount of weight. Just a very hardship kind of thing.

Q: Did he eventually move to the U.S.?

A: He came to the U.S. I think a year before I got married, which was '48. So he must have come in '47. And then he went to school here. He went to Rensselaer.

Q: Overall, what was your -- would you say your experience in England with your foster family was positive?

A: Yeah, it was definitely positive. I mean, the flip side was, you know, I felt that I always had to be a good girl because if I didn't walk the straight and narrow, then -- a lot of kids got kicked out of their foster homes, from reading all these various books. Have you read -- well, there are a whole lot of them. What's the name? Siegel wrote a book?

Q: Oh --

A: Lorrie Siegel, yes. And then there was one about a home for Jewish kids. I forget what that was called.

Q: Lorrie Siegel wrote the book in other people's homes?

A: Yes, you're right. I think she was in different foster homes. So you know, I think that -- and I probably had a tendency to be a good girl anyway. Those were my father's expectations. It was very strict. And there was that. And then they didn't really get it. I remember my foster mother saying, when I was about 16, she said -- she asked me whether I wouldn't want to convert. And I said -- she said, "Because then you wouldn't have any trouble and then all your problems were because you were Jewish. If there weren't any Jewish people, there wouldn't be any problems." It was something naive like that. It wasn't anti Semitic. It was naive, I think. And I was very hurt and angry about that. And I remember that being the first and, I think, the only time I must admit that I fasted on Yom Kippur, just to prove that I was Jewish. Not that they ever knew about it or cared, but I felt better for doing that. And I think I had to prove to myself. But basically it was that I think they had led a rather insulated life and didn't understand.

Q: There weren't any other Jewish people in the community?

A: Well, eventually, when I was 16 I graduated high school and I got a job. I found that there was a free Austria organization or something and that they were young people who eventually intended to go back to Austria: Jewish people. And they were all Jewish. It was kind of a group leader, a woman and her husband. They were also Jewish. Their name was Leichner. And so then I started associating with Jewish kids, and that became rather insular. That was a rather left-wing group. We read Karl Marx and all kinds of discussions and stuff. But it felt more like I belonged than the rest of my life.

Q: Do you recall when the war ended?

A: Well, I came over here before the war ended.

Q: Oh.

A: My mother made application for hardship reasons in New York and got me. I came here the year of 1944, November '44, on a ship that took two weeks on the convoy. And I was so seasick. But she was able to get me to here. And so then I remember -- I don't know where I was. But the war ended a year later.

Q: What was it like leaving your foster family?

A: Well, I had left earlier, actually. I had left probably a year or two before I came to the States because I got -- my second job was -- my first job was at an egg grading

station. And my second job was for the Signal Corps because the Signal Corps had come to the -- the U.S. Signal Corps, because they had come to Britain and made their headquarters in Cheltenham at the time. And since my foster mother made me take typing and shorthand, when I graduated high school, I got a job, a secretarial job there. And I made quite a few friends. And when those guys left to go to London to go to the Grosvenor House, I went with. And I more or less said good-bye to them at that time. And that was probably in the spring of '44. I think I was in London maybe six months. I got an apartment. So I said good-bye at that time. And then my husband and I went back one time many years later. And my foster father had died. And she was living in a nursing home and had pretty advanced Alzheimer's so that she didn't recognize me. But she eventually did. My husband, he was very good with her, and he was able to somehow refresh her memory. Either that or she pretended. And also when I came to this country, one of the first things I did was her daughter and husband lived in Alexandria here. And I went down to see them and meet them, and we corresponded. We sent Christmas letters to each other until she died last year. So that was what, 40, 50 years or something. So she just died recently. She was 10 years older than I was.

Q: So you were able to emigrate to America in 1944?

A: Right. Yes.

Q: And what month?

A: November, just before Thanksgiving, I think.

Q: What was it like coming to the U.S.?

A: Well, again, overwhelming. And I really didn't want to leave. As much as I wanted to see my mother, I felt I had friends there and roots there. And it was another wrench. But then also my mother and I had some difficulty at first. First of all, living in small quarters. And I think she was getting her little girl back. That's what she thought. And I was 18 and felt grown up and independent.

Q: How long had you been -- was it like four --

A: I think five years, five and a half. It was quite a while.

Q: It took some adjusting?

A: Yeah, it did take some adjusting. Yes. Yeah. And then I had a kind of mentor, a friend of my father's who was also a lawyer and who worked for a big company in New York. And they were friends of my parents. And so when he heard that I was coming he said he would get me a job. And he immediately got me a secretarial job at this company on 6th Avenue, Rockefeller Center. And he said, "Well, of course you'll go to college. "Because there had never been any talk of -- when you graduate high school 16 and there

is no money, you don't talk about going to college. I don't think I ever thought further than a day ahead of what I was going to do or what I was going to be or anything. It was all survival. So he got me this job and he said, "Of course you'll go to college." I said, "Oh, I will?" And he referred me to the Office for International Education. And I could have one of two scholarships, one to the University of Miami in Ohio and one at the University of Michigan. Somehow I picked the University of Michigan and had a room-and-board scholarship at a Jewish sorority and an academic scholarship. So a year later I - - oh, and I had to take a couple of courses to catch up in American history, which of course I needed, and intermediate algebra, of which I was very weak. And so I came to Ann Arbor. The person I admired most there is my mother, that she was able to let me go again and said she wanted to do this, that she wanted me to do this. Because I think if she had been, "Oh, poor me, you're leaving me" kind of thing, I probably wouldn't have gone. So that was good. And so that was another adjustment. It's been one after the other. And then I had this room-and-board scholarship at this Jewish sorority. So I was not a member, not that I ever wanted to be in a sorority. But nevertheless, I had a room of my own. And I made a couple of good friends there. But nevertheless, I was, again, on the outside, even though everybody was Jewish.

Q: Were there other students who had this similar experience?

A: No, I was the only student. That's a big expensive deal. So that was hard. And then the summer I left in a co-op and made co-op friends.

Q: Did you meet your husband in Michigan?

A: Yeah, I met my husband in Michigan. Yeah.

Q: What was his name?

A: Mort. Mort Leitson. He was a law student and was active in the National Lawyers Guild and I was active in some other things and we met.

Q: What did you study?

A: Well, actually, I majored in English lit. I wanted to major in sociology, which I thought I - I knew I wanted to go into social work. I don't know how I knew this, but I did know. And the adviser had said -- at that time, they didn't have an undergraduate social work school, which they do now. And so I said I wanted to major in sociology. And he said the sociology department is so bad, don't do that. Major in English. So what did I know? So I majored in English lit. And eventually much later I went back to graduate school and did what I really wanted to. So I met him. And he graduated a year before I did. And he was from Flint, Michigan. It's a good town to be from. And so we got married during my last year of school and we had an apartment in Ann Arbor. He would kind of commute back and forth. And then I moved to Flint, which I didn't want to

do. Originally he said we would live in Denver because he had such a good time there in the Army. But then when he was home for that year, his parents had a bakery and his name was well-known. He realized that it was much easier to be in your own practice when your name is known as not. And so we stayed there. And that was a very different family. It was an eastern Polish family, and they spoke Yiddish. They weren't Polish, but they were from there. They were first-generation, his parents were. And for them, I wasn't Jewish enough, for my mother-in-law. I wasn't Jewish enough. I didn't have enough money -- or any money. But we got over that hump. My father-in-law was a very nice man. My mother-in-law was a very nice woman, too, but very determined. So anyway, it was a good town to raise our kids.

Q: How many children did you have?

A: Three.

Q: What are their names?

A: Karen, who is here, is my oldest; and Mark is in the middle; and Ruth, Ruth Leah is an artist down in Asheville, North Carolina:

Q: And your mother stayed on Long Island?

A: She stayed on Long Island until four years before she died, when she came to her cousin, really. She didn't say she was unhappy in New York. I don't think she was, actually. But everybody was getting older. And even her friends -- New York is hard to get around in. And everybody was getting older and her doctors' offices were in Manhattan. Everything was a chore. She was just getting too old for New York. And so I really didn't want her to live with me, nor did she want to any more than I want to live with my children. We did find her an apartment right near my house, and that really worked out very well. In the end, I was very glad I did that or we did that. It was a very nice, tiny apartment, but she was very happy there. She could come and have meals with us and go on vacation and so forth. So that worked out well.

Q: Did you ever speak to your mother about what it was like for her to send you on the Kindertransport?

A: Not afterwards. I don't think -- She did it, and she did it as good or as well as could be expected. I don't think we talked about it afterwards. She must have been very strong if she could send me -- allow me to get away again. So that was very good.

Q: You said that your children have interviewed you like this in the past?

A: Well, we're working at it. There's never enough time when we get together.

Q: So you've spoken to them about your experiences?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Do you have grandchildren?

A: Yes. My one granddaughter is coming, the oldest, who is 32.

Q: Have you ever -- have they asked about your experiences?

A: Oh, yes. I mean, she has seen the movie and read the book and asked. We've talked. Yeah. Everybody -- I spoke at my grandson's school in Chicago one time. So I realize that a lot of people in my generation have not talked about their experiences, but I think it's people who have lived through horrendous things and just couldn't talk about them. But in our family, it was okay. Maybe later. Not when they were little, but later.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add about --

A: No, not particularly. Is there anything you feel that you want that I've left out?

Q: No. You have a lot of really great memories and insight into this.

A: I really don't -- funny that I don't feel that. It feels hazy. But I guess when you talk about it, it becomes less hazy.

Q: So you remember things once you start talking about it?

A: Right. Yes.

Q: You had two brothers -- or stepbrothers --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- who fought in World War II for --

A: Yes, the United States Army.

Q: And did he come back to America after the war?

A: Yes.

Q: And your brother had also immigrated from South America?

A: Yes, from Bolivia.

Q: How old was he when he left home?

A: Well, he was -- he had finished high school. He was 18, probably, just after high school.

Q: So did he decide that he on his own initiative would -- because he went from Austria to Denmark?

A: Yeah. Went to an agricultural school there. I don't know. He was interested in that at the time.

Q: Okay. Was it very difficult for your parents to get a visa to emigrate to the U.S.?

A: Well, it was hard, but I think my cousin pulled all kinds of things and got strings and got affidavits and all of that.

Q: That was the cousin that was in the U.S.?

A: Yeah. Very fortunate.

Q: And your maiden name was Gross?

A: Yes.

Q: I think that I've asked all the questions.

A: I didn't think I had anything to say to you.

Q: This has been wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing.

A: You're welcome. Thank you for taking the time.

Q: Absolutely. So this concludes my interview with Hanny Leitson with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum at the Kindertransport Association Conference in Arlington, Virginia.

A: Thank you. Do you suppose I could have a copy of this?

Q: Definitely.

Conclusion of Interview