

## **RG-50.030.0995**

### **Summary**

Natalie Kent Kempner (born Natalie Faith Pierce) was born in Philadelphia on January 18, 1924 to Gertrude and George Pierce. While this interview focuses on Natalie's activities as a Quaker after World War II, she was raised as a Methodist. She left Philadelphia when she was three and spent the rest of her childhood in Binghamton, New York. Her parents were neither particularly religious nor interested in politics. Natalie did remember, however, prejudice against the very few African-American and Jewish children in School. Natalie did not become aware of Hitler or WWII until the bombing of Pearl Harbor. When she was at Smith College she babysat for one of her professors who was a Quaker. She liked him and his wife and decided to start going to Quaker Meetings. She became a Quaker and an ardent pacifist.

Natalie finished college in 1945 just as the war ended. She wanted to travel and to change the world. Immediately, however, she married and moved to Ithaca, New York where she and her husband worked as social workers. Soon she and her husband became involved in the American Friends Service Committee. They wanted to send her to Poland, but by then (1948) the Iron Curtain had descended and they could not go. Instead, they were sent to a refugee village for children set up by UNRWA at Bad Abling, near Munich, Germany. There were several hundred children there up to the age of 18 whose parents had died or from whom the children had been separated. Most of the children were from Poland, the Ukraine, and Czechoslovakia, but they also came from other countries in Europe. She and her husband worked with older children trying to make their lives as happy as possible while other Quakers tried to get placements for the children or to find their parents. Many children ended up going to Australia and Canada as workers. There was some tension among ethnic groups. There was particular prejudice toward Jews and Hungarians. Jews were given better and kosher food because of help from international Jewish agencies. Natalie's stay there ended in 1950, and the camp ended shortly after. She acknowledged that she was not conscious of what had happened to the Jews.

In 1950 she and her husband returned to the United States. Both got a Masters degree in Social Work and for a while moved back to Ithaca, NY to run a children's home. By then she had given birth to her first child. In 1964 she and her husband were sent to Tanzania where her husband was killed in an automobile accident. She later remarried, to a Jewish man, named Mendelsohn, from Berlin. Natalie reflected that her experience at Bad Abling had given her a whole new perspective on the world, and she realized how unaware she had been of other people's suffering.