

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ruth Bahar, on September 19, 2019 in Scarsdale, New York. Thank you very, very much, Ruth, for agreeing to speak with us today. And this is following the interview that we had with your mother, Inge Berger, last month in New York and today with your daughter, Elise Garibaldi, who we just spoke with a few minutes ago. So some of it's going to have the same process and some of it's going to be a little different. I'm going to start with the same questions, and we'll go from there.

Can you tell me the date of your birth?

July 16, 1951.

And what was your name at birth?

Ruth Berger.

And where were you born?

In Bremen, Germany.

And who are your parents?

Inge Berger and Sam Berger-- at that time Samuel, but they changed it to Sam Berger.

And you were born in Bremen, Germany in 1951. Do you have brothers and sisters?

I have an older sister, Hannah, also born in Bremen, 1948.

In 1948. Does Hannah live in the United States now?

In Pennsylvania.

OK. So your father and your mother, tell me a little bit about who they were and how they met.

Who they were? My mother was born in Germany. And as a young girl-- she was born in 1924-- in 1942, she was sent to Theresienstadt at that time in Czechoslovakia, where she met my father, who was Czech. And he was transported-- he was studying in Brno, but he was transported from Prague in April 1942, and they met in Theresienstadt. And after the war, they reunited in Bremen in January 1, 1946. And they've been together ever-- until his passing in 2006.

OK. Do you have any memories of Bremen?

I have many memories of Bremen. Not only when I was young, and I remember leaving on this ship and all that, but we would return every summer, because we were very, very close to my grandparents. So we have a very good feel of the Jewish life there, the synagogue, the people there. I knew a lot of the people. So as I am doing research, I also know the places and the people intimately. So there's a very close connection with Bremen.

It's unusual, because most Jewish survivors left Germany, did not go back to live there after the war. Some have gone back since. Sometimes family members have come back since to visit. And it sounds that yours was unusual, in that from Theresienstadt, your mother and your father met again in Bremen and married there. What was the reason for that?

Well, I think it was unusual that they survived. My grandparents, at their age, no one survived that. They were unique. And my grandfather also felt, because he survived, he had a responsibility for those that didn't or the parents that didn't. So he felt--

What was his name?

Carl Katz. And so he took everyone under his wing. So there were so many-- mainly who survived were a lot the Eastern European, also some German, but mainly Eastern European, and usually the ones in their early 20s-- late teenagers, early 20s, later 20s-- and they all basically lost their parents. So my grandfather became the surrogate father my grandmother also. And when many people got married in Bremen after the war because they wanted to start families again, my grandfather would walk them under the chuppah. He would be the surrogate father for the brides.

So they felt a tremendous responsibility. And my grandfather always said sometimes my mother would complain, because they had so many guests, and all these people from all over the world that had no one would stay with them, and they would be cooking and for all these people, and the American soldiers would be killing chickens and bringing them-- so they'd want a meal there, and they'd have to clean the chickens. And one time my grandfather overheard them complaining a bit, and my grandfather said, we can't complain. We survived as a family, and we have an obligation to those that lost their family. My mother never complained again.

Is this something your mother told you or is this something you saw and heard yourself him saying?

Oh, no, no, no. This was right after the war. I wasn't born yet. This was in 1945, 1946.

But this was his philosophy forever. When I used to be there in the summer, we'd never know Friday night if he'd bring home somebody for dinner after the services. Because if they were alone and they didn't have a family or a Shabbat meal, my grandfather would bring them to the house. So we always had a little bit more room on the table to squeeze in some more people.

And every summer, the relatives would come over from all over the world. He would help those cousins of my mother that lost their parents in Berlin. He would act as not only their uncle but almost like a father, and give them financial help, and emotional help. So this is who he was.

And you knew him in other words--

Very well. I knew him very well. We were together every summer for basically two months. And then during Christmas vacation he would come to New York. And we would write letters twice a week. Every Tuesday and every Friday we'd write. And for special occasions-- it was a big deal those times to use the telephone-- it was very, very big, and we would call and get very excited. But yeah, we were extremely close.

And what kind of a person was he, your grandfather from--

Bigger than life.

Really?

He was a very warm person, very caring. But he was the patriarch, and he was aptly dominant figure. No one could dispute him, you know? What he said was law. Which was fine, because he was also so capable. But so generous to everybody and loving. He had these sparkly blue eyes, and when you look at you, it was with so much love.

He would be the type of person that would buy a bag of candy, and when you come to visit, he'd sit and just give candy to everyone. Or he'd go to Israel to the kibbutzim, where he had other nieces, and he would just come with bags and bags of candy to give out to everyone. He just-- he had a generous spirit, a generous nature. And caring, not only for his family but his extended family and for his community.

Why did he end up going back to Bremen?

Well--

Because he had a choice also not to go back.

They didn't really know what to do after. They stayed-- they were liberated May 8, in Theresienstadt. But there were so many sick people and old people from Bremen, and people that needed help, that my grandfather said at that point, well, there's no reason to rush back. Nobody's waiting for us in Bremen. So let's stay and help everybody get back on their feet. And they did and. They left end of July 1942. They went back to Bremen--

Were' in 194? or '46.

Sorry. Sorry, '45. After the war ended, 1945. So they went back to Bremen, and there was no Jewish community life, so my grandfather started the Jewish community again. And from Theresienstadt, he brought with him suitcases filled with prayer books that the Nazis had no need for-- they confiscated from the suitcases.

When they arrived in Theresienstadt, they had no need for it. So he came back with also a cover for the coffin, like a velvet cover with fringes, that my mother said she thinks they used when he passed away also that was originally from Theresienstadt. They came back with covers for challah, for the two loaves of bread that they use for the Sabbath or holidays. My mother still has that, one for my grandmother--

Because they had nothing. The prayer shawls, the tallisim, they came back with that. And they have prayer books that my mother still has. And it says in one of them Julius Horowitz. He was from Bremen, and he passed away in Theresienstadt. And she even has his book there.

So they came back with all this, and they started the Jewish community again. Then my grandfather took care of the cemetery. He took care of all these people. So he was-- and there was nobody else there that could do the job that he did. There were no more original Jews, full Jews from Bremen that returned. They were from mixed marriages, but not people that were really involved in the life of the Jewish community, except for him.

So he was very vital. That was a role that only he could really do. And then he was thinking of going to perhaps Palestine. He was thinking of going perhaps to New York. He was putting out feelers, but somehow he got back into life in Bremen, and I guess he realized that there was an important place for him there. And he stayed.

And how did you learn of all these things that you just told me right now? Because you would have been too little, except for your experience with him as a grandfather visiting him. Were these things that your mother told you?

Well, since my daughter originally opened up this, I also wanted nothing to do with the Holocaust. Because I grew up with it, and I grew up with the feelings of it. I grew up with my father's feelings, which were very, very deep, different than my mother's, because his experiences were so much worse. My father suffered tremendously. And he had nightmares till the end of his life, and he had a lot of hate in him that he couldn't overcome. There was a lot of ugliness that he had experienced that, thank God, my mother didn't experience. But--

Did he ever talk about those things?

He wrote a book about it.

Oh, that's right. Your daughter had mentioned it. And the book was called Faces of--

Well, there was a German version-- first was German-- and then in English it was The Face of Hell. And also, we had been in Germany when they had war crimes, and then the people came over to the house in the summer, and they would tell their stories. And they were horrible stories. So I think I just ran away from war. Even to this day, it's very difficult for me to go to Holocaust museums. It's very, very difficult. So--

Excuse me. I'm sorry interrupting, but when you say when there were war crimes, you're talking war crimes trials after the war.

Trials, yeah. Yeah.

And so you were old enough to hear, and witness, and know what those conversations were about.

Well, they would come, because I guess they felt comfortable talking to my grandparents and my parents at that time. Because who could you talk to? So they were-- they had to unburden themselves. So I remember, at night, we would be there, and my parents and my grandparents were always very welcoming, everybody could come for dinner, and afterwards for tea and all this. And so they would unburden themselves. So we would hear these stories.

But you asked initially how I know all this. So a lot of this is really in depth more, I would say, happened a lot when my daughter started questioning my mother. And then we would go through things, and then we would go through boxes. Because when she had to close the house in Bremen, she put everything, all the memorabilia, and photographs, and letters, in boxes, and she'd never open them.

So she closed the house in Bremen when?

I think maybe late 1990s or something.

When did your grandfather pass?

He passed in 1972.

And they kept the house there.

I see.

My grandmother died after my father. So that was in 2006.

So she lived a long, long time.

Almost 105. Yeah.

She was the weak one.

Oh, my gosh.

She was the weak one.

Go figure.

Exactly. So what happened is then we were opening boxes, and reading letters, and all these things. So there are so many layers to this that my daughter started to uncover and that my mother didn't even realize was in all these boxes. And every time my daughter would research something, we would only look for that, and we wouldn't look for the other things.

Then later she'd be looking for something else. We'd look at that. So there was so many layers. We could basically do an hour and a half, and afterwards we couldn't do anymore. So that was the limit to the stories that she could do.

So I want to just, again, anchor this to a date. When we were speaking with your daughter, she said it was around 2012 that she got the idea she has to tell her grandmother's story.

Right.

So it's after 2012 that you are getting a lot of this context of what's going on.

Yes.

One date--

A tremendous amount. Because I didn't know any of this. I didn't know the dates, what happened-- I didn't know when. I knew she was in Theresienstadt. My father, they met. I knew the broad strokes. But that was it. I didn't know the details.

When did your family-- that is your mother and your father-- come to the States? What year?

In 1955.

So you are four years old when that happens.

OK. So you leave-- the memories that you have of Bremen, living there, are for the first four years of your life. And then afterwards, when you have visits two months every single summer and you visit your grandparents--

Which was basically the next summer already. It was going on and on. I mean, they were so tied. My mother was an only child, and they were all tied, like, as my daughter said, through the Holocaust. They lived in survived-- they shared a room, they shared their bread, they shared everything. It was a very unique relationship, and we were very tied to each other, but more than most families. Because most families don't live and die by giving each other bread.

And also, during the war, my grandmother, as I said, was the weak, made it to 105. My grandfather was 73, right? So when there were jobs to be done after the work day, and they had to do things like shoveling potatoes-- that was an extra task -- my grandfather or my mother would volunteer to do it, instead of my grandmother. So it was things like that-- they would keep each other.

And when they were all supposed to be sent out further East from the camps, they all volunteered to do this together. They were in one. So it was a very unusually tight relationship.

And did you know about that aspect of it before 2012 when--

Yes. Bits and-- certain stories they always told, but not in such depth. But yes. Oh no, It shaped our lives, all this. I think-- yeah. Every aspect of our lives, I would say, was shaped by their experiences during the Holocaust.

Even though you ran from it.

I ran from it because it was just-- it was everyone. All my relatives were all Holocaust survivors. All our friends where we moved to was because of other Holocaust survivors that said, come, move to our area. So this was all we grew up with.

Yeah. Yeah. And at some point, one has to find out that there's more or there's something else.

Yeah. I guess. Or this was our norm, I guess. But we didn't need more of it.

Yeah.

All right. Let's go now to 2012. You're learning-- you take about an hour and a half at a time. That's about all you can take going through these things. And this is where you said--

Well, there were two different things. There's one, the interview process that was with my daughter, and then sometimes I would go to my mother's home, and we would look through more pictures and do things in German. So my daughter got the English version, and then I would get the German version. So there was so much material to cover, and things my mother had to discover before she could tell my daughter about it.

There was a lot. There's boxes and boxes of things that And we went through.

And if you were to say, what did you learn-- I don't know if one can encapsulate it, but the major things that you learn that you didn't know before after this process of going through some of these boxes, looking for some material, talking to your mother about it. Is there anything that really struck you as, wow, I didn't realize that?

Oh there were so many moments. There were so many. And so many times that I had tears in my eyes, and so many times I learned more about my mother's cousin that she loved so much and that I was named after.

What was the cousin's full name?

Ruth Cohen. Cohen.

Ruth Cohen.

And those things were really hardest for me. Even my daughter, she did a song with my mother saying farewell to Ruth-- called Ruthie-- at the train station. And that always gets me every time. That's--

What happened to Ruthie?

She was in the first major transport, which was the Minsk transport, which was in the fall of 1941 from Bremen to Minsk-- White Russian.

Belarus.

Belarus. And she perished there. Which my mother never saw a body. She never saw a death certificate. So that was always for her kind of up in the air. And even when we were in this country, and it was more than 10 years after the war, and she had an advertisement for a real estate agent that was in the neighborhood with the name Ruth Cohen, my mother said to my father, let's go and see. Maybe it's really her or something.

So she kind of never gave up hope . And I think when my daughter did the interview with her, I think she maybe relived these times, maybe she had time to mourn her grandmother for the first time, which she never had. She had a time to perhaps mourn her cousin and relive those times with her cousin. So these were all very emotional interviews, very emotional times. It was a year and a half, but it was an emotional roller coaster of a year and a half.

Yeah. Yeah.

And my daughter would always ask these persistent questions and details. And That my mother said, I don't know, and I don't remember. But then she would remember every single detail. Then it would come to life, and sometimes she'd laugh like a 14-year-old girl, because she would be telling a naughty story or something. And then sometimes she'd cry, tears because of the sadness of it that she didn't have a chance to mourn.

You have to realize, you don't have a chance to mourn. When you're in the middle of a war situation, any war situation, there's ugliness, there's horror, but you don't have time to mourn. Because if you do, you're finished. You have to pick up and go. And she never had this opportunity until she really spoke to my daughter about this. So that was her time to mourn. So we can only do it in increments.

Of course, of course. But what a gift both ways actually. That's what strikes me. A gift from an older to a younger generation, but also from the younger to the older.

Absolutely.

And you're in the middle. You're the middle generation.

I was sitting there. I was making the tea and I was making the lunch. And I was listening, and yeah, I was a part of it. But theoretically a quiet part.

OK. Then let's jump ahead a little bit to, we'll just kind of summarize, your daughter did the interviews, a book was written, and it was published, and it had an effect. It took off.

I'll just jump ahead backwards one step. She's done the manuscript, and it was early, before it was even published. My mother was invited to go for the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz to Bremen. But my mother wouldn't be able to handle that emotionally or anything. So I said to my mother, test it. I said that I'm willing to go, but it was really more to test how serious they were. And low and behold, they said yeah, you're invited. And then I said, oh, my goodness now.

So in place of your mom.

In place of my mom. But because my daughter had done the research and all that, I had something to say. And otherwise, what would I have had to say there? So that was when we went there in 2015 when we started to have connections more in Bremen.

And that's when we had the first connection with the person that his father was apprenticed to my grandfather. And he just wanted to know more about Carl Katz, and he wanted to know more about the situation. Because he had lost his father, and he felt like he wanted to know more about his role model in life, which was Carl Katz.

So that started. And he's not Jewish, but his role model was Carl Katz in everything.

Can we know his father's name and his name?

His name is Thomas Hesslow. And I can't remember what his father's name was. But of course his last name was Hesslow. But it's just not coming to me now.

OK. And the business that your father had where--

My grandfather's business?

Your grandfather's business.

Carl Katz and Company.

And let's just say what kind of a business was it.

It was like recyclable goods in fabrics-- schmattas, cloths. And it was in metals at first. More metal, and later it was more recycling cloth. It was a big business there.

And that's where Mr. Hesslow's father had been apprenticed.

Right, right. And he has been a loyal supporter since.

OK. So you've met him there in 2015.

In 2015, he contacted me through email. And we were emailing each other, and he would send me information. And he would keep me up to date on what's going on, and he wanted to be helpful. He was, at that time, I would say, one of our staunchest supporters.

OK. All right. And so your daughter's book is published, and it has an effect. And you go to Bremen and you meet Mr. Hesslow?

Yes. But before that really happened-- yes, I do meet Hesslow and all that. Yes. OK.

OK. But before that, what?

But before that, before our meeting him, that was in 2018, I get an email from him-- it was shortly after April 5, 2016, and it was in the newspaper, which is the Weser-Kurier, which is the newspaper of Bremen, and there was this article about this book that had come out. And the author was the grandson of the Gestapo agent in Bremen. The author's name was Bernhard Nette, and the Gestapo agent was his grandfather Bruno Nette. He wrote this book.

And so they had a summary of what this book was about, and they mentioned Carl Katz. And they mentioned all these horrible things about Carl Katz. And--

Such as?

That he was a collaborator, and that he was against the Jews, and he was, you know-- but at that time, I had known a lot of people in Bremen already, and I had known people that were involved with committees-- Holocaust remembrance-- that were writing books about the Jews, were actively involved with the Jews that perished in the Holocaust, and no one had notified me about this article except for this Thomas Hesslow. And he was very upset about it. But he was the only one that told me.

Which I find very surprising, because they knew I would be interested, and they knew I should be notified. But yet, no one did, except Thomas Hesslow. And he was very upset by it. And then he would send me this chapter, chapter 13, which was horrible about my grandfather, just horrible. And then he said, well, no, it's not only chapter 13, it's like all over the book. And it's about 30% of the book is written about your grandfather.

So he was sending me this and that, and that hit me like a ton of bricks. That was so difficult for me. It was such a shock. I had never known of this existence. I couldn't imagine something like this. And that's when I realized that there's this much more than meets the eye going on there.

And what was it that wasn't meeting the eye? That you discovered later--

That there are a lot of people involved in the Holocaust industry, I would say, that are running memorials, that are running Neuengamme, which is a concentration camp out of Hamburg. And they invited this Bernhard Nette to speak, knowing that what he was writing was outrageous. And it's not only that I would think it's outrageous, I ran it by Frank Mecklenburg from the Leo Baeck Institute, who's the chief researcher and chief archivist there, because to me it was outrageous, and he said absolutely.

He said this is anti-Semitic. This reminds him of the literature that was printed during the Nazi era. He said calling a Jew a fanatical Jew this is directly from the Nazi literature.

So this way I had confirmation, not only my gut, which was hurting. I mean, physically-- it took a physical toll on me.

Did your mother know any of this sort of stuff?

Absolutely not. She was shocked. So you let her know-- But it was also professors. Who were part of this were professors that were historians of the Holocaust. So I would assume that if you're a historian of the Holocaust-- I was naive-- I thought you wouldn't be anti-Semitic. I couldn't imagine that you would be a historian of the Holocaust and yet anti-Semitic.

Well. But I have to play devil's advocate a little bit here, and that is, if there is information-- the way you knew your grandfather was in one way, but a lot of times people have one face with their loved ones, with their families, with their friends, and another face that is totally different with the public or with others who are not close to them. And did it ever occur to you that there could be truth to any of these accusations?



Well, there were such widespread, such in-depth and citing pages in the archives, and citing all these Jewish witnesses against my grandfather, that I thought, oh my God, is there truth to this? I mean, is it possible that this could all be lies and fabricated?

And when I first got the files from the archives, I spoke to my daughter about it, and she said, we have to brace ourselves if there's any truth to this. And I said, yeah, but I love my grandfather. Could I have been this mistaken. And I lived with him you know. But yeah, I had to prepare myself for just in case there was some truth. And I had to face this truth, and it was very difficult.

So what did you find when you looked in those archives?

It was absolutely lunacy. I saw this that the witnesses, basically, against my grandfather were the Gestapo agent. And the main-- I would think the brightest, because I--

So was your grandfather brought to trial?

He wasn't. They were preparing--

Tell us about-- walk us back a little bit. What happened that your grandfather got involved-- he comes back to Bremen after the war. You you're born in 1951. And in between those years of '46 and '51, a lot of people come by, there are war crimes trials you mentioned earlier. And your mother, I remember when we interviewed her, did not mention any involvement of your grandfather in any of those war crimes trials. And you right now just talked about people who came perhaps to give testimony coming to your home.

No, that was something else. That was much later on. That was much later on.

OK. So--

My mother knew nothing of this.

So what happened in the late '40s?

Well, what happened also-- so he comes back in 1945, and there are no Jews basically.

Carl Katz is the only-- yeah.

Carl Katz is basically the only show in town. And so then they were trying to find people that would help with the Wiedergutmachung. The--

Restitution.

--restitution. So who would they choose but my grandfather? Because he knew what happened during that time, who was who during that time. But nobody else did.

During the Hitler time.

During the Hitler time until he was transported out in 1942. But he knew what was going on there at that time. Also, he was bright, he was capable, he spoke German well.

So they would put him on also another committee. Through the political party at that time there was a committee-- they tried to find six or seven righteous people of Bremen to decide who was commercially-- he was in charge of commercially-- clean or not. So he was put on that committee. He was put on a lot of committees of influence. Plus, through the Jewish community, different organizations such as the Joint would give extra rations, and extra cheese. Or

my mother always says Velveeta-- she never knew what Velveeta was until then-- but she was also helping to give out to people.

So the Jews had extra food. But my grandfather found they didn't have enough food, so sometimes we'd go to Bergen-Belsen to get more food. So he's very active in all of that.

And this is all post-war.

This is all post-war, but my grandfather-- so some people also would come to the Jewish community to ask for extra help or extra support. But my grandfather knew what they had done during this time, and he said to so-and-so, no, I will not give you anything because of your behavior. No, I will not give you anything because of your behavior.

So these would have been non-Jews. These would have been--

Not only non-Jews. No. These were people in mixed marriages.

I see. OK.

There were many different categories. Or the product of a mixed marriage that he knows-- he said to this one person, he didn't treat his father properly. And his father was the Jew, his mother was the non-Jew, and it was a distant relative as a matter of fact. And when he came, he wanted help from the Jewish community, but my grandfather said to him, I know you didn't want anything to do with us--

During the war.

--during the war. Now we want nothing to do with you now. You're not a member. So my grandfather knew these. And so there were people that maybe said, well, if we get rid of Carl Katz, we have access-- nobody else knows the story, except for Carl Katz. And there were many that did shady dealings that were in mixed marriages that did these things. But my grandfather knew. Not many people knew about this.

So in other words, he made some enemies.

Yes, he did.

He made some enemies. OK. And this is stuff that you're finding out for the first time when?

Oh, just recently by researching the archives and asking my mother. Certain things my mother knew from before how people behaved. And then I'm piecing it together by my mother's stories, and then I'm reading what my grandfather said. And then I'm saying, oh Mom, this is the connection to your story, and I'm giving her the information that she didn't have. I'm filling in the blanks. But because I knew my mother's story, I had a full picture of it.

And I research the archives. I go line by line. I go so thoroughly. And I have books that I look up what they said, and what the testimony-- who is this person, I ask my mother. And then I check who this person is. So I go over everything with a fine-tooth comb.

And so when you're doing this, going through the archives, are these the archives that the book you mentioned that Thomas Hesslow writes to you about-- I take it you have a copy of that book?

Yes, I do. I have it with me.

And so what sources does that book use?

Yeah, the book uses those same sources that I'm looking at. But they're coming up with very different quotes. So I'm looking, I'm seeing what he writes about it, then I'm going to check, and I'm getting the full picture of it And I'm saying,

whoa, this doesn't jive. He's pulling out like false testimony.

And it's obvious to anyone, if you're 12 years old or older, that this is false testimony. It just doesn't make sense. But they said-- so what happened in I think 1947, Nette went, they called it spruckhammer, which is a certain kind of trial that they gave to those suspected of Nazi crimes. So there was a special kind of a system. And my grandfather was a witness against Nette--

Bruno Nette.

Bruno Nette, the Gestapo agent. And Nette at one point says he's so surprised that my grandfather Carl Katz would speak against him. He was shocked. And he said, because he spoke like this against me-- these are Bruno Nette's words-- I will give witness against him. I wouldn't have otherwise, but I will because of the way he gave witness against me.

And he said, but I'm not doing this out of revenge. I'm doing this out of justice.

That's in the archives?

That's in the archives. All this is in the archives. I did 1,000 pages of testimony I looked at from Bruno Nette. I didn't go over that with a fine-tooth comb, I just looked at where it pertained more to my grandfather. But my grandfather was 300 pages in there.

They were putting a case together. They were trying to put a case together. And they were basically putting it together because of what Bruno Nette was saying.

So I did a chart of where this is all coming from, where it's leading, and--

So they were trying-- "they," being who, building a case together against whom.

So basically, it was some police there. [INAUDIBLE] who was the policeman. There was the district attorney. Böhlinger was interested. And so there was the police of Bremen that was interested, the district attorney was interested, and they pulled in a prosecutor named Siegfried Häffler. And Siegfried Häffler had been a member of the Nazi party since 1933, and he was part of these special court cases that were in Berlin. They were like-- terror tribunals that were called. So it was just prosecution, basically no defense.

And he was later sent to Poland, to the occupied area of Poland, and his death rate in what he was involved with in the court cases was second only to Warsaw in the amount of death--

Sentences.

--sentence that that occurred. So they decided they needed Häffler to be in charge of my grandfather's case.

So this--

This is in 1949.

All right. So there is information being gathered by certain individuals then. Because you're mentioning Nette, you're mentioning Häffler, you're mentioning [INAUDIBLE].

Well, no. Nette at that time was in the prison. He was in prison, and my grandfather had given testimony against him. That was in 1947. And because of the testimony, then Nette gave against my grandfather. And then they said, OK, let's open a case against my grandfather.

An investigation.

An investigation, yes. Investigating. So the investigation, I guess started before 1949, but approximately 1949. And the witnesses they had giving the depositions or the testimonials at that time were mainly Nette and other Gestapo agents. And then they're realizing, well, that's not really-- they're Gestapo agents.

Former Gestapo agents.

So how much weight can they carry? So they were looking for Jews also, like that would carry weight. And when I read it also, I said, OK, Gestapo agents. What else are they going to say? This is what they've done all their lives, and this is what they love to do. And Gestapo agents-- why would they even be witnesses, Gestapo agents? I don't even get that.

Yeah.

Anyway. And their mentality, when you read these archives, the mentality of the Gestapo is so interesting. It's fascinating. It makes for great reading.

So they said, well, we need some Jews also. Because that'll give it some meat, some gravitas. Let's get some Jews. How do we get Jews?

I think Nette-- everything comes back to Nette. All the connections come back to Nette.

Bruno Nette.

Bruno Nette. Because before 1949, my grandfather was in good terms with a lot of these later became hostile witnesses let's say. He was on very good terms with them. One of them being-- I'll just mention them briefly-- Carl Bruch. And Carl Bruch opened his house, when they first came back from the concentration camps in 1945, to them. And they were on very good terms in 1947. We have pictures. I have photographs of this.

He was at my parent's wedding in 1947, and he was happy, and enjoying. And all of a sudden, in 1949, he turned against my grandfather.

So he becomes part of an investigation witness-- hostile witness against your grandfather.

Yes.

And what does he say about your grandfather in those archives?

I don't think that's as important as-- I'm just going to

OK. Sure, sure.

So everything-- my point is that he changed, and other people changed. So there was another one, which is I think what are the major witnesses. This was a group called Shusterman. And it's even quoted-- why is this so important? It's because this is being used today, not only in the grandson's book, but in another historian named Rodenberg, who is an expert on this period, and knows everything. He keeps on mentioning the Shusterman, the Jew Shusterman. So also Shusterman, we don't hear anything from them also until 1949. But what happened between 1945 and 1949?

So this was a case with almost everyone that got-- even my grandfather mentions at what time. He said, we were on such good terms. What happened all of a sudden?

That you see in the archives?

I see that in the archives. And everything changed. And it's all-- if I boil down to all this, it's basically from Nette. So Nette sent his son to different people. He also sent his son to my grandfather to plead-- he said, please, help my father, so that they reduce his sentence, or speak some good words for my father. So he was actively going around doing this.

I think Nette was the brightest out of all the Gestapo agents. And then there was the Shusterman. So they brought in the Jews Shusterman. And the one they always mention is Arnold Shusterman. Arnold Shusterman was a journalist from London, and I guess that gave him more credentials. His brother was in Bremen, Benno Shusterman, and he went to Theresienstadt, and later on he perished in Auschwitz.

He had never met my grandfather. He had never been in Bremen. And I'm reading his letters, and reading his testimony, and he gets all his information from his sister-in-law, Johana Shusterman.

Benno's widow?

Yes. Kind of widow, because they were divorced, which we find out later. Which is very, very important-- which is vital. So this Johana Shusterman blames my grandfather for everything. She gets her information from Getrude Hendel. Now, Gertrude Hendler was at this spruckhammer, and she was a witness to Nette, and she heard Nette speak.

So all this chain-- everybody's chain-- leads back to Nette, to the point where a lot of witnesses said, please, consult the testimony of Nette for more information. So all these big shot witnesses are all getting their information back from Nette. They had no money at that time in Germany. Of course this was 1949-- they didn't have much money. But they spared no amount of money to get this Arnold Shusterman from London to Bremen.

So not having ever met my grandfather, not having been in Bremen, not having any connection, the major witness to this day--

The major Jewish witness.

The major Jewish witness to what? So he comes to Bremen, and he writes this letter. He comes to Bremen. And he says, well, while I'm in Bremen, he's going to do some investigative journalism. So he goes to see this Gestapo agent, interrogates this Gestapo agent, Heinrich [? Hammes. ?] And he asks him questions, and he asks him questions.

Well, did you know the relationship of Nette and Carl Katz? How was the relationship? So this [? Hammes, ?] I would think, is maybe not the-- he should probably stay to the script of Nette's script, which he kind of doesn't. And he said, oh yes, they were on very good terms. And from 1939 to 1945, he was in and out of the office with Katz and Nette all the time.

Nette only came to Bremen in this position in 1941, not 1939. And my grandfather was already in Theresienstadt in July of 1942. So already, once they go off script, it's already--

There's a discrepancy.

There's a discrepancy. But Arnold Shusterman wouldn't know the difference, because he didn't know anything that happened. He didn't know when the transports were. This is their star witness, Arnold Shusterman. He didn't know anything.

So he wrote it down. And he said yeah. He's working against Carl Katz the Jew, and he's helping the prosecution.

And why?

Why? Maybe to be a big shot? Maybe he felt guilty he didn't help his brother, and his brother per-- I don't know why. But he didn't even know what he was talking about. So he keeps on interrogating, because this is what he heard from the testimony against my grandfather.

So he would ask another question. And another one of the accusations were, oh, before he was transported out to Theresienstadt, that night, to celebrate-- this is the word, to celebrate-- his leaving of Bremen, he had cognac and beer with Nette. Carl Katz had cognac and beer with Nette to celebrate.

So the head of the--

To show that they were in such good terms and such good friends. My grandfather's version of this, yes, I had beer with him so that it would be smooth the next day when we left. Because for the Minsk transport, it wasn't smooth, and they went through all the luggage. He wanted him to be on good terms.

Do you honestly think he would celebrate by having cognac? Leaving Bremen to go out East to the settlements and to leave his home-- he would be celebrating? And the last night, he would want to spend this with a Gestapo agent instead of his close friends that he had or his family that were packing and going? So Heinrich Hammes, the Gestapo agent, said yes. And he had cognac with them. While everyone else was in the cattle cars suffering, all night He Was out drinking with Nette. And this is what Arnold Shusterman-- OK.

Now, Theresienstadt was not in the cattle cars. It was on regular passenger train, and it was that morning. It was not that night. Whenever he goes off script, he gets confused. Because the story was-- So they left 5 o'clock in the morning, and there was no all night in the cattle car.

Ruth, as we're talking now, or as I'm listening to what you're explaining, is that there's a lot of going into the weeds in the archives. And voices from the past, from this investigation that is opened up against your grandfather, and one person says something, and another person says something. I have a couple of questions. Number one, does anybody say anything that in any way sounds convincing, sounds like it could have been?

Not one of them. Every witness that I've read has gaping holes in their stories. Whether it's the dates not being right, the events not being proper. Because there were these rules-- like I told you last time-- with a married couple. And if one dies-- there's all these intricacies. So none of the rules apply. There was a hole in every single story, along with one woman divorcing the one that blamed my grandfather for transporting her husband out, but she divorced him. You divorce him, he loses the protection, he goes out.

So every single--

So she was a Gentile.

She was a Gentle. And that was the Johana Shusterman. That was the whole Shusterman-- the strongest witnesses. I don't know if Arnold Shusterman didn't know the rules. I don't know if you even knew that she divorced him. He might not even know that's why he was sent out, because--

He lost his protection.

He lost his protection. It has nothing to do with my grandfather. But if you don't know that and you don't research it, she just said it was because of Carl Katz. But these historians that are reading this are much more involved in all this than I am, no much more than I do-- much, much more. And if I could spot it with my horrible German and my belabored work, they could definitely have spotted it very easily.

But they didn't want to. They wanted to take out these lies-- absolutely lies. I mean, I have proof of everything.

OK. So after you do go into the archives then, and you look at it, and you research what you do, your conclusion is what?

Well, they dropped the case. And I also read why they dropped the case.

Why did they drop the case?

Because a lot of it just didn't hold water. It wouldn't-- they were trying to make certain cases against my grandfather. They were trying to do that he knew that they were-- they were trying to prove certain points. One of the points was that

he was the one that put the names on the list-- that he collected the names and put it on--

Of other Jews?

Of other Jews. That they wouldn't have been on the list if it hadn't been for Carl Katz. Which is absolutely ridiculous, and it could never be proven. Because it just didn't make sense. And none of the testimony that they gave was accurate to that.

But they tried. They tried really, really hard. Then they tried so hard-- if he had just put them on the list but he thought they were going to a work settlement, that wouldn't be effective. He had to know in 1941 or 1942 that they were going to their death, to a concentration camp. So then they were trying desperately to find some proof that he knew this. But he didn't know this. There was no proof of this.

Then they had to find a motive. Well, what would be the motive for him to give up these people? So they were thinking, well, he only liked full-blood Jews. And he was a fanatical Jew, and he didn't like mixed marriages. But his partner in 1938 that he had to give up was a Jew of mixed marriage. His best friends were mixed marriages.

So nothing would hold water. And a lot of the witnesses, they saw that they were witnesses that were not reliable. They hadn't been-- I saw they weren't reliable in Nette's case, and they weren't reliable sources. So they were just filled with contradictions. There was nothing to go.

But unfortunately, it never went to trial. If it would have gone to trial, it would have been blasted out of the water. So you have all these accusations, but you never have a defense, because it never went to trial. So you had just the accusations in the archives.

But when you say it was suspended-- that is, it never--

In 1950.

It was suspended. There must have been a reason why it was suspended. Was a reason given?

Well, there were several reasons given as what I told you. Because they couldn't-- nothing would work. Nothing would be provable. And there was a Johnson-- I guess he spoke German at the time, and he was an American Sergeant, some military person, and he said, this has to be disbanded. He was reading all of this. And with that, they also-- I was reading-- said they just don't have anything conclusive to throw at him. Because the motive didn't work, and this didn't work, and that didn't work.

But they tried. They were digging. They tried everything. They even tried to say that he took things of value from Theresienstadt with him-- that's how he made money, and that's how he got into his business. So they were trying things like, he was associated with somebody called Rosensaft who was accused of gunrunning to Israel at the time before the War of Independence. And he was good friends with him, and they were trying to find some connection.

So they were trying desperately to find something, anything on my grandfather. But they didn't. They didn't find anything conclusive. But these accusations stand in the archives.

And the book that Bruno Nette's grandson wrote uses that same material?

He picks and chooses what he wants. So he throws out the accusations. And one of the big guys is this Arnold Shusterman. Another Rodenberg, another historian who writes, and he's involved with all these Holocaust activities, also writes, Arnold Shusterman. But I told you who Arnold Shusterman was, and Johana Shusterman divorced her husband. That's why he was sent.

So these are the witnesses. But they don't write-- they don't mention-- that Johana Shusterman divorced him. And in the archives there's a lawyer that gave testimony, that said he warned her to not do this. Do not take the protection away.

That they didn't write about in the book. So you could pick and choose whatever you want-- all the accusations.

Have-- and that's how things stand today in other words. There are these books--

That's how things stand today. And then while I was going through it with a fine-tooth comb, I saw that my grandfather had put away a file, and there were 300 pages in there. And it's now located in the archives in Heidelberg. So I'm hoping any day now to be getting that. I had to get permission, and it was no problem-- whatever. But everything takes time, and I guess nobody wants a standard and scan 300 pages-- 310 pages. So I'm waiting for that.

But absolutely, there's not a shred of evidence against him. Everything is clear. Even if I look at the dates-- if I look at what they've done. I've looked at their arguments--

So what does it mean that today, 70 years after-- is it 70 years, 75 years-- the war? What does it mean that this comes up? That-- yeah.

Well, maybe it says to some people, well, we weren't so guilty. You know, the Jews did this too. We aren't so bad. Anti-Semitism is alive and well. And as I read with a friend of his that this happened to, they persecuted my grandfather three times. They persecuted him during the Nazi time, they prosecuted him in 1949-1950, with what I've just told you, and again today.

They don't let it rest. And he was a wonderful man, and he did so much. And so much good for Germany also. He got a medal from the German government, a first class medal of service for what he did. And he started East-West relations for the commercial ties and that brought along political connections.

This is after the war?

This is after the war. He did a tremendous amount. He has a street named after him. But yet they want to sully his name, because he's the Jew-- der Jude. And that's what it is. And it's started-- I saw writings in 2006, but I wasn't aware of it. No one had sent it to me. I didn't know about it.

But now, looking back, it was a quieter voice. There's also Beata Meyer. She wrote A Fatal Balancing Act, and she wrote about my grandfather also. And I contacted her-- and she's from Hamburg, and Nette also, the grandson is from Hamburg-- her and I said to her, do you know anything about him? She said no. He's not anti-Semitic, nothing.

So then I sent a Chapter 13. And then she said to me, I don't want to get involved with this. And she's a Holocaust historian. I would just say the opposite-- whoa, get involved. What is this? What's going on here?

So if we have all these well-known Holocaust historians-- and this isn't the only one. There are those.

So what are you saying is that they're taking the grandson's memoir, the grandson's story about his grandfather, and using it as source material themselves? They're using it further as source material.

They're using it as source material. He's he was speaking in the University in Bremen. He was giving lectures in a high school. He was giving talks at memorial services.

They had him in Memorial services in Hanover. Because the transport from Bremen went through Hanover, and there was a special memorial service. He was there. He was talking.

So this gives him legitimacy. If all these Holocaust organizations say, your book is OK, you could talk during our Holocaust-- so what happened, which the worst of it was he was supposed to speak in Bremen during a memorial for the Minsk transport where my whole family perished. And I heard about that, because now I'm looking at the internet once I was made aware of it. And I put up such a fuss.

I said, are you kidding me? How dare you. And that's when we were supposed to speak at that time. But then somehow



it happened that my book wasn't getting translated, and there was a problem, and I was all of a sudden pushed aside. They didn't have time for me in this book, and they was supposed to be supporting this book, the translation of this book. And I heard he was going to be talking there. That was outrageous-- outrageous.

And it's frightening, because I never had a clue that Holocaust historians would be anti-Semitic, would do this. And the first time I read Beate's book, the Balancing Act, I looked at it one way. And then, afterwards, I looked at it another way. I said, oh, my goodness.

And that's very frightening to me. Because where are people getting this information from? You think you go to a Holocaust museum, you think you go to a Holocaust memorial, you could trust the people saying that-- they will speak out for us Jews.

And when I found out the opposite, it was frightening. I don't find as frightening people that go around with swastikas, because we know who they are. I find it very frightening for these people that have crocodile tears-- oh, the poor Jews that died, oh the poor Jews that died. By Carl Katz, yeah, he was even worse.

Because the Nazis did it to the Jews. But a Jew doing it to a Jew, that's much worse. And that's the message.

Did you ever have contact directly with the grandson?

Not directly. I had Frank Mecklenburg write him, and I read the correspondence. And he truly believes he's not anti-Semitic. He truly believes he's a voice for Jews.

So it's the same way that Nette in one of the-- I read what he wrote. And he said, how could I be-- Bruno Nette, the Gestapo agent. Clearly, I can't be a racist. I had cognac, and I had a meal with Carl Katz. Clearly, that proves I'm not a racist. What? A Gestapo agent. This is in the archives.

Yeah. Yeah.

This is his testimony. How do you deal with this? How was even allowed to give this testimony? How would-- or there should be a major disclaimer, look how ridiculous this is.

Has this come out in Germany? Has this story come out in Germany? Has it been discussed?

Well, my daughter's in the process of writing the story, and it will come out. And I'm in the process of getting more information. And she started writing it just on this archives that I had in Bremen. And it was enough of a story. But then I found out, in Heidelberg there's this 300 pages. So I said, wait. Let me get this before you start writing this book. Let me see what my grandfather had gathered. Let me see what that is. But even without that, it's outrageous enough.

But are there people aside from Thomas Hesslow who know of this and say, wait a minute, there's something wrong here in Germany.

Oh, yes. There's starting to be. But we pointed it out. If we wouldn't have pointed it out, nobody would have taken notice.

Which also suggests to me that maybe other people-- I mean, I'm giving the benefit of the doubt, and you know much, much more than I do here, maybe some just took what the grandson wrote and went with it without checking.

Those are the regular people, yes. The historians, no. Any historian that reads it would know. There are red flags all over the place that it would be impossible.

OK. OK.

But absolutely. And we had a meeting in December when I was there. And there's this wonderful woman,

[INAUDIBLE]. She's one that she believes she understood, and she's fully on board with us. But there were other people there, and one person was arguing, well, what's the difference? They could read many books, and they could make up their own mind. I said, are you kidding me? Who's going to read many books on this situation?

When you go to a Holocaust museum, and you get a book, well, you're going to read three books and decide which one is accurate? You're going to do your research? And I sat across from this Rodenberg there, and it was very interesting. He said something, and he said he admires Nette, because, he said, Nette says-- the grandson-- I don't like who my grandfather was. He was a terrible person. And he had the courage to go out and say this, and I wish I would have had this courage.

And I said to him, it's wonderful to have the courage to say your grandfather was a horrible person. Your grandfather was a Nazi. But it's not correct to say this of Carl Katz.

Thank you, Ruth. Thank you very much. I know that you are undertaking the effort to clear your grandfather's name. And from what you have explained to us, it's not an easy process. And it's far more complicated. As you said, not everything meets the eye.

It's heartbreaking. It's really heartbreaking.

I can imagine. Thank you for sharing it with us today. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap it up?

Well, I just hope that I would get support-- my daughter and I would get support. She's going to be writing it. But I need support for this. I need people to know who these people are and that they're doing such damage in the name of Holocaust memorials, and Holocaust books, and Holocaust research. They're doing a tremendous amount of damage.

And I think we have to be aware of this. And I think they're much, much more damaging than those that are out in the open anti-Semites. Because I couldn't figure it out for a while. I was shocked.

OK. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you much. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ruth Bahar on September 19, 2019 in Scarsdale, New York. Thank you.