

Time-coded notes of Kayes and Helga Franks
May 13, 1990

00:02:00 Ilsa Kayes born in the city of Gruslow? In 1921.

00:03:00 Three generation's history lived in Germany, in eastern part of area. Upper Silesia. Remembers absolutely no anti-Semitism in youth. Father in clothing manufacture. Mother with two children. Father officer in WWI.

00:04:00 Father decorated with iron cross first class. Liberal, not orthodox, Jew. Considered themselves German Jews.

00:05:00 When Hitler came to power in '33, first impression was that business got better. Father went to Palestine to look into settling there, but could not stand the climate and resolved to stay, as he thought that Hitler would not last.

00:06:00 "Everybody had these illusions". Was a child so not concerned with the boycott. Thought Hitler's speeches were "crazy, he was a nut." Father was a social democrat.

00:07:00 Father was somewhat afraid of Nazi's power, so kept a low profile. Business not change b/c had a gentile partner. She felt some anti-Semitism in schools -- friends afraid to be seen with her.

00:08:00 Principle of school told her to "stick it out" but emotionally she "couldn't take it". No specific incidents -- just the general attitude was unsettling. "Teachers were very nice" even though they were often confronted by other parents about there being a Jew in the class.

00:09:00 Teacher replied to confrontations saying something that he liked having Jews in his class -- they were bright. (I couldn't hear, though.) She was very active in sports. No anti-Semitism there b/c no one knew she was Jewish, and she was good.

00:10:00 There were times in school when she was asked in assembly with rest of school to salute Heil Hitler to the swastika. She couldn't do it. She had some Jewish friends who left to South America, other strange places never heard of. People were not happy leaving, so mother wanted to stay.

00:11:00 Had to leave to a Jewish school in '37. Good school but not used to traditional Jewish classes. Very hard to get used to it.

00:12:00 Went to work with a dentist friend of the family. Also went to school at his behest to learn dental mechanics. Didn't learn much from Spanish lessons. Her sister was in a different Jewish grade school. She never experienced anti-Semitism either.

00:13:00 In '38, father was pressured into giving up his business. All his money was confiscated.

00:14:00 Gave family the money out of a trust. Father no longer worked. At that point, they tried to leave country, but so many other people were also. Connections didn't pan out. He didn't feel like moving because he was a German, that's where his roots were.

00:15:00 Remembers expulsion of Polish Jews, Greenspan? the Von Rathe? movement, and other events of time, but did not think that Crystal Night would occur. Nothing happened to her. The next day when saw temple burning, "and still we didn't know..." Then saw big trucks driving around to pick Jews up from their homes

00:16:00 She had gone to work that day, not knowing what was happening. Though temple fire was accident or something. Doorbell rang. Plain clothes men wanted to take the doctor to Gestapo HQs. She ran home. Her father was taking the dogs out for a walk. He called a half an hour later and told her to pack a suitcase for him so he can go away.

00:17:00 She was scared by way he was speaking on phone; he did not give his name, as if phone was tapped. They met in a park. He wanted to go to Berlin and get lost there in the crowds. That whole day family was very upset until Gestapo arrived. Wanted her father. She said not here. They threatened her.

00:18:00 She defied them (at 16 didn't understand the danger she was in.) They left. Next day father called and say could not get through to Berlin. Gestapo came next day and told her mother that if father did not come to them, the whole family would have to go to the concentration camps. Father went to them alone.

00:19:00 Shortly thereafter, she and her mother went to ask after him at the Gestapo. They said he was gone to the concentration camp. They protested, saying "why? My father didn't do anything." They said some other man (couldn't here name) hadn't done anything either, and he was dead, so... Weeks later, Gestapo said that if her family showed them the father's iron cross medal, that they would let him go, provided he made arrangements to leave the country. He was in Buchenwald. Reports from others she knew who came out of the camp verified that her father, because he had had the clothes she packed for him, was always clean and well groomed. But his head, like everyone else's in the camp, was shaved.

00:20:00 She could not get him out. At age 16, actually even went to a travel bureau to try to book him a ticket to China, but they were booked and so could only put his name on a list. This was a "high class German ship company... expensive" but so many people wanted to leave that could not help her. She forgot about them. Later, her father came out of the camp. "His spirit was broken. Everything was broken."

00:21:00 Did not talk about his experiences initially. "He just wasn't himself." He couldn't believe it. Every week he had to report to the Gestapo and he was "afraid to go by himself. That was horrible to see." Gestapo men would ask him, "hey, Jew, what did you do to get out." They did not know what to do with him. He sent her to Berlin to see if could get visas from consulates of different obscure countries. The people in the consulates didn't take her, a young girl very seriously, but her father "just couldn't do it" himself.

00:22:00 No success. In the middle of June, man from the travel agency called to talk to her father. (Was impressed with her behavior before.) Said there had been a cancellation on a trip to Shanghai, and wanted to check to see if they would fit in on the journey, because was a very high class transport.

00:23:00 Packed in one week. They were allowed to take an entire carload of furniture. Were on a luxury-liner. Taxed for all they took, but could afford it. Said the boat was really plush. "That was the last time we were in luxury, really." Since it was a German boat, Jews had to sit on one end of boat, had to swim at different times... Other passengers who were of all different nationalities protested the segregation.

00:24:00 The captain vowed not to take Jewish passengers again because too much trouble. "But there was no next time because a few weeks after we landed in Shanghai, the war broke out." Their belongings accidentally got sent to Australia. Lived in Shanghai for the rest of the war with whole family. Their money was in Chase bank but was tagged as German and because of the war confiscated. They had to wire to New York branch of the bank to prove that they were in fact German, but Jewish, so okay.

00:25:00 They had nothing until could do so. [Interview directed back to Crystal Night and attitude of non-Jewish laborers, friends etc, to the atrocities] Her father was popular, and so people offered help, although were afraid of consequences.

00:26:00 Neighbors had little reaction. "Everybody was afraid to voice their opinion. Everybody." Except our maid because was a devout Catholic. She was so outspoken that they even warned her about speaking out for them -- they didn't want her to get into trouble. She even begged to come with them to China, but father declined because could not afford it. Some of their neighbors expressed sympathy, "but at that time everybody was afraid for their lives." [Ilsa teared up at this point, and obviously trying hard not to cry, but quickly recovered.]

00:27:00 She did not see the SA's violence Nov. 9. The next morning saw the broken glass, and other evidence, but did not witness the actual violence. Did hear about how sometimes the SA messed up and broke windows of those who were not Jewish, and so had to replace them. [Seems about to cry]

00:28:00 Crystal Night "not only shattered the windows. It shattered our entrenched illusions of security." Up until that time, they felt that they could stay and be safe. But "that was it. That shattered our dreams." [interviewer thanks Ilsa, and sounds like is crying. Voices off camera. Camera pulls back to show both Ilsa and interviewer.]

00:29:00 Ilsa speculates on reasons behind such violence and the widespread anti-Semitism that allowed it to happen. Says that Hitler promised the German people prosperity, and then blamed all shortcomings on the Jews. "He mesmerized them" Otherwise, no explanation. She says that the people were desperate, and so they believed him -- the younger people more than the older ones.

00:30:00 People were also "very impressed" with the marches and the parades, the slogans. All the fanfare sucked them in, "and who wasn't sucked in was afraid." "We were living in fear -- but still with the hope that one day it will end and it will be the same Germany as before." But that hope was shattered by Crystal Night.

00:31:00 SOUND IS OUT. Interviewer and Ilse chatting and occasionally looking off camera. Some erratic visual difficulties as well. At one point camera angle focusses on Ilse's hands, which seem relaxed and do not tightly grasp arms of chair.

00:35:00 SOUND RETURNS to beginning of next interview: Robert Kayes (who has a heavy accent, difficult to understand). Born 1911 in Vienna. Can trace family history back to grandparents in Austria. ... SOUND OUT THEN BACK... Robert was with father? In clothing manufacture business. Recalls some anti-Semitism because was a very Catholic state, but "we didn't think about it because you get used to it."

00:36:00 President of Austria, Mr. Schuschnigg? promised that while he was around nothing would happen to the Kayes. He went to concentration camp too. When the Nazis came to Vienna with the fanfare, swastikas and flags, people received them "with open arms."

00:37:00 Took Nazis a while to harass Jews, after had consolidated their power. They had no thoughts of leaving Vienna until then. They believed the president's promise. After the Crystal Night, the SS took over the business. Although before then a commissioner was in control, was not a problem because was nice.

00:38:00 Crystal Night: the SS man who worked in the office disappeared. Hour or two later Gestapo came in but didn't get him because he was hiding in the toilet.

00:39:00 Other non-Jewish employees covered for him, said didn't know where he was. Once Gestapo left they said he could come out. He ran home. None of them knew what was happening. It wasn't until listened to the radio that they understood. Some very nice people who were Nazis by name only (because had to be) saved him.

00:40:00 The person who 'took care of the block' called him to warn him. Left home. "Many times I was saved." Even at Buchenwald. Then one day he found out that he could have a ticket to Shanghai. Always had the ticket, but kept on being put off till next ship. Finally told that would have to leave within two weeks.

00:41:00 Apparently, at the time that he was notified that could leave, a truck was waiting to take those who had no such plans to Buchenwald. He very narrowly escaped. Had to leave his mother behind. It was two years until he saw her again. Once she finally got a visa, had to take a train through Russia and Manchuria around finally to Shanghai (very roundabout). [I think he said] "It brought tears to my eyes."

00:42:00 At this time, the rest of his family was dead. Had cousins, but family was dead. When asked what Crystal Night and Buchenwald meant to his life in Austria, said that it meant the

end. People were glad to get out with their lives and a shirt on their backs. He left with four dollars in his pocket. That's what they gave everybody who left: four dollars.

00:43:00 It was the end of hope. "It was very depressing." (great example of his gift for understatement.) When asked why the people who helped him did so, said that felt sorry for the Jews. Claimed that everybody did, but were afraid of doing anything because they also could be sent to the concentration camps. The youth were more mesmerized by Hitler; sometimes would report their own parents for sympathizing with the Jews, for not being Nazi enough.

00:44:00 Those who helped him did not do so for free -- "they got plenty for it." "But who cares as long as you get out" of the country. Those who helped him were Nazi's in the neighborhood.

END OF INTERVIEW (followed by random footage lasting until 00:46:50 then clock reset, and next interview session starts 00:01:30, preceded with chat with unnamed family member about how her education suffered because of war... same aged people who did not go through same thing were much better informed.)

Interview with Helga Kayes (name not cited until 00:19:00)

00:01:00 Both parents and father's father born in Germany.

00:02:00 Rest of family trace back at least two generations -- speak only German, no Yiddish.

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES 00:02:30 until 00:03:05

00:03:00 She was the only child. Two cousins on mother's side, one on father's. Father was in clothing manufacturing business. Sold out at time of the Nazi takeover, and become an employee.

00:04:00 Was six years old when Hitler came to power in 1933. Does have some early memories of the time. Quite aware of danger associated with the "brown shirts."

00:05:00 Remembers the 1st of April, 1933 "quite vividly". The boycott. First time storm troopers chased potential customers away from Jewish stores. She always lived in Berlin, in a middle class neighborhood at the time.

00:06:00 Had to start school at the time. Remembers that mother was very concerned about how would be received. Was one of the only Jewish students there. Teacher was very nice. Did not feel uncomfortable being Jewish, although did not attend religious instruction classes that a normally matriculated student would. Next year moved near the synagogue. Enrolled in a public school.

00:07:00 Was "very fortunate" to get a teacher who was not anti-Semitic. Nearby synagogue was built around that time. Had "a hunch" that never was an official opening because only came into use when Hitler came into power.

00:08:00 Told how people went to different synagogue's depending on how good speaker was. A very popular rabbi, Manfred Swasanski (?) always filled the house and was very influential.

00:09:00 TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

00:10:00 Family considered selves liberal Jews. Went only on high holidays. When Nazi's came to power, became more religious. "Began to light candles." Went to temple occasionally. She became more oriented to Judaism.

00:11:00 Her father was very Jewish, but probably did not consider himself a Zionist. (not clear) Would have considered going to Palestine because he had a cousin who went there before World War I.

00:12:00 But because of wife's wishes, did not go. "I think he would not have minded" going to Palestine. Still in touch with this cousin, who left in 1932 with first signs of anti-Semitism.

00:13:00 Father stayed on as an employee when Hitler came to power. Mother also had a job, not for money but for interest. Started in '34-35.

00:14:00 Went to public school until 1937. When came time to go to high school, could no longer attend a public school and so enrolled in a private Jewish school. Girls and boys.

END OF FIRST TAPE (nothing missing of interview between the two tapes)

00:15:00 That was the end of her education in Germany. Sometimes children she knew would escape the country. One day they would just not be at school anymore.

00:16:00 You were not always told what happened because sometimes people left illegally, plus children often kept in the dark about such matters. Her parents were definitely trying to leave. She remembers always trying to go to foreign countries for summer vacation.

00:17:00 For instance, they visited a cousin in Sweden, and in comparison realized how dangerous remaining in Germany would be for them. At that point they tried to emigrate to Sweden without losing everything. But the Swedish government turned them down. First cousin gave the father name of another cousin who was living in France in hopes that could have better luck there.

00:18:00 Encouragingly, the French cousin tried to use extensive connections to help them out (his father was at one time a cabinet minister who died, revered, in a plane crash in '28). The cousin still knew many of the current ministers but was unable to help even though tried plying the likes of the ambassador of Brazil.

00:19:00 The Swedish cousins, who travel between the two countries often, continued their attempts at aiding the family. Some of her female cousins actually managed to make contact with Swedish Jews and arrange marriage ceremonies in her house so that they could legally emigrate. The Swedish cousin at that time offered to take Helga (first time name cited is here)

over with him to Sweden, hopefully making it easier for her parents to follow afterwards. Her parents almost acceded, but father suddenly pulled out.

00:20:00 Father had already had heart attack in 1934 and had been advised against extreme excitement and also against the climates of certain countries. This ruled Palestine out. Around the time of Crystal Night (fall 1938) the father had another heart attack.

00:21:00 She suggests that perhaps the stress of having to decide if she should go to Sweden was to blame for her father's heart attack. Helga was already quite set on leaving, as had had to say good-bye to friends and notify the school. She claims that her departure was perhaps more known than was typical.

00:22:00 Private Jewish school she was attending lost its original building and was operating out of people's houses and apartments. Accordingly, the class capacity was diminished, and by the time Helga's father had decided that she would in fact stay in Germany, she could not return to her education.

00:23:00 They opted to sent her to a less prestigious but nearer school 25 minutes walk away at the synagogue. When in transit between school and home, she occasionally did encounter anti-Semitic remarks, etc. However, emphasized that was always quite "civilized" and did not happen a great deal.

00:24:00 Attributes this to fact that neighborhood was very ethnically mixed. Remembers one serious incidence of anti-Semitism while on vacation in 1937. A group of SA's called them "stupid Jews" and told them to "get out", throwing stones at their house. Felt that the group restrained themselves because was a rented cottage and they did not want to damage what was potentially a German's property.

00:25:00 "That was ugly." She said that with death of van Rachte (?), a man linked with the Nazis whom a Jewish boy shot in Paris (story referred to in interview with Ilsa Kayes when Ilsa asked what had her father done to deserve the concentration camp, and the Gestapo agent replied that van Rachte had not done anything either), that all the Jews knew there would be some sort of repercussions. "We were scared." Only such incident knew of was arrest of all the Poles in Germany.

00:26:00 Knew one or two of those Poles. Nobody really expected what did happen though. "It came as a shock." [Some sort of action off camera, and Helga, interviewer assume not really interviewing but continue to speak] Points out that although everybody says Crystal Night took place on 9 November, that really it was the tenth of that month because the arrests occurred in the middle of the night.

00:27:00 [two back to interview] "I remember it quite vividly." Had to get up early to be vaccinated before school started.

00:28:00 "Crisp November morning." She could smell fire and wondered if people were burning leaves. Looked over to the synagogue and thought at first that they had "lights burning on the inside."

00:29:00 Next she saw a fireman on a nearby building. Realized that was a fire but that the firemen were not trying to put it out and had been arson.

00:30:00 Showed to father. He asked why firemen didn't act. She explain to him, unbelieving, that they didn't want to do anything. Her mother decided that she should go on to school.

00:31:00 On way to school, walked through residential district. Jewish doors had names written in very large letters so than one entering would know that was a Jewish household. Noticed that a door that was Jewish the day before was now not. Not particularly unusual, because Jews often left town unexpectedly at that time. But then she noticed another door gone, and then she saw glass on the ground.

00:32:00 Met with her teacher who told her than the synagogue where she went to school was also burning. They exchange information. Teacher told her to go home. On way back met with other kids, and exchanged stories, but she "did not have the strength" to tell them what she really knew was going on.

00:33:00 "I had aged, I think, at that moment, a hundred years. I felt like a very old person." Came home very tired and dejected.

00:34:00 Found out about arrests and the family's plans to pack to go live with grandmother, a widow's house. (Considered safer). Her father was not much of a wanted man -- some not as sought after as others.

00:35:00 Wonders if perhaps her father's participation in WWI had anything to do with his exception. BRIEF OFF CAMERA ACTION... In '33 or '34 her father was called in to some government office about which he was quite concerned because already many had left the country -- he was then awarded the iron cross.

00:36:00 Amused at irony of event. Lived in a new, smaller building that also housed some Nazi diplomats including (reputedly) at one point, Hitler.

00:37:00 Nazi diplomat neighbors were civil -- nodded without saying hello. Early on, in '35 even the children of the Nazi and Jewish households played together.

00:38:00 So they stayed in their house after Crystal Night, sending telegrams to friends all over (like in Sweden) looking for place to move.

00:39:00 Two weeks later, French embassy said had a visa for parents.

00:40:00 "We were living in limbo" after Crystal Night because afraid to go into streets -- didn't know what to expect. Would stick to the main thoroughfares.

00:41:00 So many families had had father's etc. taken away, so all were afraid of going in streets and having same happen to them. Everybody was trying to get visas. When they got the visa, were astounded. Was like someone giving them a million dollar gift.

00:42:00 A few days later, got word from Sweden that could go there too. Father wanted to go to France, for "subjective" reasons.

00:43:00 They took as much as they could -- no furniture -- to France with impression that were actually on their way to Brazil or something. Panned all along to have the rest of their possessions sent on to south America, or gave it away.

00:44:00 Father insistent on taking classics and Jewish books with them -- the rest of the family bringing only most favorite possessions -- the rest to be left behind. Knew to expect some trouble at the border checkpoints.

00:45:00 Customs official watching them pack so could approve of what had. Uncle got him drunk so that they could put in more. They looked for money or something to put in case.

00:46:00 At the border, SS told Jews they had to get off of train for a special search. However, when noticed her father's diplomatic visa, let them stay on the train. Got to France, hooked up with a friend.

00:47:00 Friend had rented an apartment for them. Eventually she and mother survived the Holocaust in Paris. Father died of heart attack.

00:48:00 Father confided in Helga about the pressures he was under that couldn't talk to mother about. If you had connections and cash, you could buy visas to South American countries.

00:49:00 Bolivia was where most relatives were. Father smuggled money out of Germany buy courier to buy visas. About 35 family members were smuggled out of Germany -- family and friends as well as strangers.

00:50:00 Father did this out of altruism; not paid for it. They were very poor when in France during the war -- the friend had to subsidize them.

00:51:00 Felt that Crystal Night was the beginning of the end.

00:52:00 "Total numbness" came over her as felt that they had no more hope, and had to endure. When left Germany, had no idea where they were going.

00:53:00 She felt that her childhood "was totally taken away from her". Same with adolescence -- had so many responsibilities as family interpreter as well as support. Had to be a grown up.

00:54:00 Had to smooth things over with older members of the family -- we "reversed roles." She claims that as long as aware of price she paid, that can deal with her.

00:55:00 Learned to deal with later life crises that in fact she felt were even more traumatic. PAUSE FOR TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES.

00:56:00 From the moment of her arrival in France, had to endure difficulties. For instance, spoke English, not French. Teachers from Oxford who had come to learn German, but didn't know French.

00:57:00 Consequently, she became fluent in English in year in a half. Didn't help her much though in France.

00:58:00 [Interviewer talking about how he wants to get another entire tape of her unusual experiences in France. Off camera talk about getting set up shots of her listening to his questions. Lasts through 00:59:45.]

01:00:00 In 1966 Helga return to Germany and Europe for the first time. Were still some matters of restitution that her husband had to deal with. Husband went to Berlin. She did not want to go to Berlin, but had to because impractical. Wasn't one of those people who tried to shut out Germany entirely, not buy goods.

01:01:00 When started flying in on plane over Rhineland she started to get "very angry, very emotional" at sight of how neat everything down below.

01:02:00 When landed, saw people waving good-bye in a very typically German gesture. She thought that if this had not even changed, perhaps much else had also remained the same. At that time was custom in Germany to play the anthem of the country that was deplaning. Though was extraordinarily ironic that was hearing the Israeli anthem as she got off of an El Al jet onto German soil.

01:03:00 While there, her anger -- which she had never felt before -- made her not want to speak German or be there at all.

00:04:00 Husband wanted to visit his old neighborhood. A bus driver leaned over when saw them pouring over a road map and asked them if they needed any directions. She was impressed by such consideration, what she would not expect in some other big city was certainly a surprise here.

01:05:00 Visited old neighborhood to find some buildings like old school standing, plus ruins of her synagogue. But did not seem like home. Everything seemed really small.

01:06:00 Was really impressed with the considerations of Berliners, although still wary of having any contact with people old enough to have lived through war and been complicates through acquiescence.

01:07:00 "I wanted to hate this place," but felt that people were so nice that her anger dissipated. Did not generalized this feeling to all of Germany: just Berlin.

01:08:00 Still holds many people in Berlin suspect. And emphasized that definitely was not home. Looked at Berlin as "half-dead," a "shriveled up old lady.