

Summary of Oral History Interview with Ursula Falk July 1990

Ursula Adler Falk was born in the small spa Bad Mergentheim in Wurttemberg, Germany. She has pleasant memories of her early childhood in a happy home. Her parents had a shoe store, mostly for farmers. Because of the boycott of Jewish businesses, they moved to Karlsheim, another small town. Her father started another shoe store but lost everything he had to give that up too. People broke into the store to steal and there was no police protection. Her father tried to manage by traveling around and selling shoes to farmers or exchanging them for food. She shows a photograph of her mother, older sister, herself and a cousin. Later, she also had a younger brother.

She talks about her experiences in the town. Once, she broke a leg while riding a bicycle, but no doctor wanted to treat her and the Jewish doctors had already been taken away. She had to walk with the broken leg but without a cast and the leg still shows the effect. In school, she often was beaten by a Nazi teacher. She was the only Jewish child in her class and had to sit separately with a boy who had a bad case of tuberculosis. Later, the Jewish children were sent to a school in Niederstetten, another small town nearby, but she ran away and went back home. At that time, the Jews had to give up everything that easily could be carried away. They did not receive any food stamps. In spite these events, many Jews did not want to leave. Her father had a relative in the United States who was not well off but managed to send an affidavit for one person. He escaped to Belgium and came to the United States in 1938. The uncle almost forgot to meet him in Ellis Island and he was in danger of being sent back. He was sent to West Virginia and there he managed to obtain affidavits for the rest of the family through the Jewish community. She remembers the events of Kristallnacht (Crystal Night) in November 1938 and recalls the destruction and that people stole their furniture. While waiting for the affidavits, the family moved to Breslau to live with a relative of her mother. The landlady of the building threatened to denounce them unless they gave her everything they possessed. Ursula hid and was afraid to go to school but her sister did go. A close friend of hers was killed by the Nazis. Once, the Nazis came and cut up all the furniture looking for valuables.

One Nazi held her out of the window and threatened to drop her from the upper floor to the street where Nazis were marching and singing anti-Jewish songs. One stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth and raped her. When they reported it, the police just laughed at them.

After her father obtained his affidavit, they moved to Cologne to stay with another aunt. During air raids, they were not allowed to go to an air raid shelter. On Yom Kippur 1939, they took a train to Aachen near the Belgium border. At the station, a man was killed in front of her because he could not find his wallet with his ticket. Foolishly, she had hidden 2 Marks in her shoes and thought she would be next. In Belgium, they were treated well by soldiers and the Jewish Community. Soon, they went on to Southampton, where they had to wait six weeks for a boat. A gentile lady allowed them to stay in her home and also sent them food. They left on the S.S. Washington. This was the last boat, it was full but, after a great deal of pleading, the captain allowed them to go on. Her father met them at Ellis Island, and they went on to West Virginia, where her father worked 14 hours per day in a dairy. He earned \$40.00 per month and had to pay \$35.00 rent. They all had to help earning some money. However, they were rejected

by the community as foreigners who could not speak the language and they also encountered anti-Semitism. Even the small Jewish community did not treat them too well. They were singing offensive songs about gypsies who only want to take and not give.

Ursula entered 5th grade and won the spelling bee in 6th grade. In 8th grade, she was Valedictorian but did not have enough money to go to her graduation. Her parents were too numb to be proud of her. She wanted to go to college but her father felt that children of refugees should not go to college but rather earn money. Her parents never accumulated anything and her father never really learned English properly. They moved to Cleveland when the war started and she was able to work her way through college. They all felt lost and rejected. She always expected to be fired and still feels rejected. After she got married and had a family, she gradually told her story to the children. Once, her father received an envelope with the ashes of his sister. No other relatives survived. They all died in some unknown camp.

After the war, they secretly visited Germany and pretended to be American. Later, she and a group of 39 others were offered a free trip and 6-day visit to Crailsheim. She had mixed emotions and felt guilty about accepting this money from the people who had persecuted her, but she and her family did go and met some of her former class mates. On one occasion, she did let them know about her feelings. People claimed they did not know anything, and it always was "the others" who did bad things. She wrote an article about this trip for the Buffalo News.

She feels that childhood experiences like hers stay on for life and that nobody should have to go through that. People here do not appreciate the good fortune they have here.

Ursula A. Falk was born in Bad Mergentheim, Wurttemberg, Germany. She has an older sister and a younger brother. Her father had a shoe store but lost everything because of the Nazi persecution. Her father received a visa to the United States, and the rest of the family managed to get there late in 1939. No other relatives survived the war. In West Virginia and later Cleveland, they encountered anti-Semitism and rejection and had to struggle hard to survive. She also tells of two visits to Germany, one at the invitation of the local people where she had lived. She still feels lost and rejected.