

Susan Warsinger

August 12, 1996

RG-50.106*0039

Abstract

Susan Warsinger was born on May 27, 1929 in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. She had two brothers, Joseph, a year younger and Ernest, nine years younger. The family was affluent but soon they kept moving to smaller houses and lost their business. Kristallnacht was frightening as bricks and rocks came into the apartment, they fled to the attic for three days and her father was temporarily jailed. Susan and Joseph escaped by train to stay with a cousin in Paris with the help of a French lady. They were placed in one home after another for homeless children and ran to Versailles when the Germans occupied Paris. Soon nuns take them to Château des Morelles, a castle for homeless children, where they are housed, fed and given schooling. Susan wrote her feelings in her diary and she and her brother wrote to their parents although they no longer received responses.

Summary

00:00 Tape 1, **Side A** Susan Warsinger was born (maiden name, Hilsinrath) on May 27, 1929 in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. She lived with her parents, Annie and Israel and two brothers, Joseph, a year younger and Ernest, nine years younger. Her father was born in Kolomyia, Poland and her mother was also born in Poland. Her mother came to live in Germany with her mother's affluent aunt who was childless as her own mother had many children. Susan's father escaped from Poland at age 15 to Bad Kreuznach as he did not want to join the Polish army. He owned a linen store but suddenly he no longer owned it and Susan did not know why. Her mother stayed home and took care of the children. The family lived in a fancy house in a fancy neighborhood of Bad Kreuznach. She did not know why they moved each year to a smaller house. Their last residence was to an apartment house on the former Adolf Hitler Platz. Her father was very orthodox. Her mother was not but kept kosher, kept all the Jewish holidays, went to synagogue and Susan went to Hebrew School. They had no relatives in Bad Kreuznach.

05:00 Her aunt and mother's grandma lived in Fierzen and another aunt lived in Gelsenkherchen and had many children. Susan started public school at age six and hated it. Her mother took her every day and Susan cried; perhaps because the children made fun of her. Suddenly, she was not permitted to attend public school and, instead, attended a one-room school for Jewish children. There were three children in first grade and the school went up to 9th grade. They had a nice Jewish teacher which she liked. He lived next door. She did not realize the prejudice against the Jews nor did her parents inform her of it. Her street was on one side of a museum and was a pedestrian thoroughfare. She

would cross around the museum to get to the nearby stores. One day the museum keeper said she could no longer walk on the museum walkway so her mother told her to walk around which took her an extra 15 minutes. She does not recall playing with non-Jewish children. She had a wonderful relationship with her parents and believes her father liked her better than her two brothers.

- 10:00 Her brother, Ernest, was born in their apartment rather than a hospital. It was terrible to hear her mother screaming as she did not get anesthesia. A midwife helped. Her father has since passed away. She did not understand why her mother had the baby at home until Kristallnacht happened. She had a happy childhood until then. Susan does not recall having any hobbies; she just did normal six-year-old activities and played with dolls. She had a beautiful porcelain doll and her brother, who was a year younger, was playing trains and wanted the doll to sit on the train. The doll shattered and she was upset as she could not have another. She spoke German at home; Yiddish was not in style. Her favorite song was, "Schlaf, kind, schlaf" (sleep, child, sleep). Her mother sang to her Marlene Dietrich's song, "Ich stay in Regan"(ph). The major change in her life was that she did not go to school with the other children and lived with a Rabbi. They lived on the first floor, the Rabbi on the second, non-Jews on the third and an attic on top. She was aware that Hitler was the leader and heard the songs but did not sing them. She knew that everyone enjoyed singing the songs and she was not a part of it.
- 15:00 Her parents told her not to raise her hand and say, "Sieg Heil." She felt bad that she was not part of Hitler's children's movement. Though she saw adults in uniform, she was not frightened until Kristallnacht in November 1938. She shared a room with her brother and they awoke when they heard the noise of a brick thrown through their bedroom window. They ran into their parents' bedroom which was shared with the baby. Bricks and rocks were thrown into the glass door and fell all over their apartment. Their parents held them. Her mother took care of the baby and her father gave Susan all their money and told her to keep it in her underwear. They ran up to the attic to hide with the Rabbi's family. Soldiers caught the Rabbi before he had time to escape. They looked out the tiny window and saw the Rabbi was pulled by his beard which the soldiers cut off before they took him to jail. Her father was also put in jail but let out because he was Polish. They stayed in the attic for three days and she played with the Rabbi's children. In the attic, they found a big pile of apples which they polished and ate.
- 20:00 She did not find the experience to be horrible as she had other children to play with. People from the third floor gave them food and after three days, they returned to their apartment. They knew other Jews had a similar experience but did not know that it was all over Germany or that it was called, "Kristallnacht" until she came to the US. They slept on the floor, like in a sleepover party. Her only responsibility was to take care of the money but she urinated on it and it dried. There was no bathroom within their apartment; they had to go up a half flight of stairs. She does not recall where they went

to the bathroom when they lived in the attic. They stayed away from the attic windows so the Germans would not see them there. Upon their return to their apartment, they boarded up the windows, picked up the bricks and rocks and cleaned up. Her father had to pay for what was broken. She was eight years old at the time. She was horrified and asked why this happened and her father said the Germans did not like them. They had run up to the attic without taking time to get toys or extra clothes.

- 25:00 Her mother would nurse the baby when he cried. Her brother was seven and told to be quiet and he behaved. The school was closed down as the teacher was taken away. She believes the teacher was good as she learned to read and to understand geography. Rabbi Alfred Jacob was saved and came to the US and she is still friends with his wife and children. The teacher had a hump on his back but she does not remember his name. Her father wanted to leave Germany but did not have affidavits to come to the US. They had relatives in the US but needed more money for affidavits for the five members of the family. Her parents wanted her brother and her to be safe. They knew a French lady who took children across the border by train. They had her deliver them to a cousin in Paris. He agreed to keep the children until the parents arrived. They packed a suitcase and the lady arrived and they said good-bye to their parents.
- 30:00 They got on the train and the lady told them to pretend they are sleeping when asked for their passports. She would tell the Gestapo that they are her children. The lady spoke French and told the soldiers that she had visited someone in Germany and was returning to Paris. **Tape 1, Side B** When they arrived in Paris, their cousin took them to a hotel where he lived near the Place Vendome. They had been on an overnight train. Susan was scared when the Germans checked them during the night and she pretended to be the lady's child but knew her life depended upon it. She left Germany six months after Kristallnacht and was nine years old. They had packed a trunk with all their clothes and mailed it. They found candy on the top and the cousin said not to eat it as it might have been poisoned. Later they ate it and they were all right. Susan and her brother were separated from their parents and did not know when they would see them again. They only thought of this and did not think of toys and dolls. Her brother was upset and would urinate in his bed. Later, in her father's drawers, Susan found letters from the cousin which they called, "uncle" that he did not want to keep them and the father should come and get them.
- 35:00 The uncle, who was single, found them a place to stay in the suburbs with Madame Zelitsky (ph) from Poland who had two children. She housed 15 to 20 homeless children. The girls slept in one room and the boys in another room. They all slept on burlap and straw mattresses. A chamber pot was placed between the rooms because they were not permitted to use the bathroom. The children ate in a small house outside on a picnic table with chairs. They came from all over including France and Germany. At age 10 Susan got her first kiss on the mouth from a French boy. The children were not all Jewish and

she did not know their reasons for being there. Susan felt that Madame Zelitsky was only nice to her own children who were permitted to use the bathroom and eat better food in the house.

- 40:00 They had left Germany in 1939 and lived a year with their uncle before going to Madame Zelitsky's. Next they were moved to another home run by two ladies. Here they went to school. They could look outside their bedroom window and see the Germans bombarding Paris. This happened nightly and no one ran into the basement. When the Germans reached Paris, everyone was afraid and wanted to go to Southern France. Until this time, Susan was able to write letters to her parents and receive mail from them. She wrote her feelings in her diaries which she would like to translate from the German some day. She hoped she would not be bombed and hoped the war would end. They all ran to Versailles. She took care of her younger brother and they were dependent on each other. They missed their parents and looked forward to seeing them again. They thought it strange when their mother mostly stopped writing; just added a footnote to the father's letters.
- 45:00 Later, Susan learned that her mother had a nervous breakdown from which she never recovered. There were many people in Versailles so they got mixed up with others, some were adults. People had just run out leaving their apartments open. Susan spoke French by then. They lived in the Hall of Mirrors where the chandeliers had been removed earlier and hidden. They slept in rows of burlap and straw mattresses. She saw the Germans arrive in Versailles marching in goose step. None of the residents spoke German so she asked to speak to the German major and told him that she learned German in school and could translate into French. She had no birth certificate but had ID papers from Germany with her date of birth, parents' names, her religion and her photo which she still owns. Luckily, they did not request to see it. She was a very quiet child, a good girl so the teachers liked her.
- 50:00 Like a typical first born, she was smart and got along with adults in contrast with her brother who was naughty. No one seemed responsible for these Versailles residents and she did not know what was going to happen. She remained there for a week or two and then nuns took them to the Chateau de Morelles near Vichy. It was a castle used to house Jewish children from all parts of France and Germany who had no parents with them. They had teachers who taught Hebrew and they went to the village school but the villagers did not want them to associate with their children. At a recent visit to the village, a resident said she wished they would have gone to school with the village children as they could have imparted some of their cosmopolitan ways. A non-Jewish teacher taught the 100 children all in one room. This was 1940 to 1941. They were not acquainted with the Nazi laws.

- 55:00 The counselors were all Jewish. Miriam, the Rabbi's daughter, was there and her father was in jail. Some teachers were German and some were French. Susan had no contact with her parents at this time. She wrote in her diary and she and her brother wrote to their parents (which they received). Susan made friends with the children there. Her second cousins, Sabina and Fried Foyer came to the castle and now live in DC. There were children from six to 16 in her building and four-year-olds in a different building. The children were separated by age and gender with girls on second floor, boys on the third floor and cabinets for their belongings in the attic. She no longer had her trunk. They celebrated birthdays by saving their nightly desserts and on the morning of the birthday, piling them on a tray along with flowers that they picked and sang, "Happy Birthday" to the birthday child.
- 60:00 They went outside to play on the large grounds and to attend school. Rooms on the first floor were used for different activities. They did not mingle with the town people so they would not contaminate them with their Jewishness. They learned lots of songs and taught each other things they knew and logged it in a book with the names of the songs the children taught each other. They did not have white bread but food was plentiful, especially tomatoes and artichokes which was served nightly for dinner. The children had emotional problems as did not have their parents but the friendships helped.
- 63:00

File 2 of 2

Abstract

Susan Warsinger relates her schooling and daily life while residing at the Chateau de Morelles, a castle for homeless children. When the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society found her father, she and her brother were sent tickets to the US. They took a train to Marseilles and transferred to another to Lisbon where they took a boat to the US in September 1941. They were in third class and their father met them when they landed in NY. He drove them to their home in DC and saw their mother who was sick in bed and their baby brother. Susan attended Americanization School, Junior High, Central High School and started at the University of Maryland and married Irving. After having three children, she completed her BA, MA and started working on a Ph.D. She taught for 27 years and is now retired and volunteers for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is President of her Hadassah group and participates in physical activities. She has nine grandchildren and is happy with life in the US. She only made a short visit with her family to her hometown in Germany as felt that the people were all staring at her.

Summary

- 00:00 **Tape 2, Side A** Susan Warsinger talks about her life at the Chateau, the children's home. She felt that it must have been worse for her parents than for her and her brother as they

did not know about the children's situation. Her family had been religious by keeping kosher, attending services, and resting and not working on the Sabbath. In public school, there were no classes on Thursday and Sunday so they were required to attend school on Saturday, their Sabbath. The teacher, who was not Jewish, is now the mayor of a neighboring town. On Saturday they could walk to school as it was nearby and they just talked and did not write so were able to keep the Sabbath. The school resembled a barn. Susan still has her cahiers (notebooks) with the teacher's corrections. Susan and her brother knew French which was spoken by all the children. She does not remember if she spoke German to her brother. The younger children had counselors to care for them so the older children did not have to take care of them.

- 05:00 Except for the boys playing kickball, she does not remember playing any sports. There were no organized teams. The children had no unpleasant experiences on the street. They kept away from the villagers who kept away from them. They studied the geography and history of France but not the current events. They knew that Germany took over France. They did not know about the ghettos and concentration camps. They did not see anything on the streets or stores about Jews. They lived near Vichy but did not know if Petain did what the puppet government required. She found out that the Germans asked for all the children who were then sent to concentration camps and died. She received a letter from HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) that her father was in the US. He did not speak English so supported himself by buying butter and eggs from a farmer and selling them. He saved up to bring Susan's mother to the US. The Rabbi with the beard had come earlier with his family to DC so Susan's father also came to DC. The relatives who had the affidavits lived in NY. The first plane tickets that her father had bought for the children got lost.
- 10:00 Susan was happy to hear from her parents by letter and the counselors told them that HIAS found their parents. A new set of plane tickets were sent for Susan and her brother. They went to Vichy where they took a train to Marseilles and transferred to another train which took them through the Pyrenees to Lisbon. There they got on a boat, the Sepo (ph) Pinto where they were placed on triple decker beds in the hull of the boat. They were alone with about 70 other children. Susan was 12 and her brother was 11. The three and four-year-olds from the castle had been taken by HIAS a month earlier to the US. Her brother was seasick and nervous and urinated in his bed on top of hers. The boat had a surplus of canned pineapple which they ate at all three meals. Now, her brother who is a cardiologist cannot bear pineapple. It took two weeks to reach NY. There were passengers in first class and she was in third class.
- 15:00 Susan found their names in the Archives. Her brother was listed as "student" and she as "immigrant." She also experienced seasickness but was looking forward to seeing her parents. They ate in a special dining room far from first class. In the Archives, the first class people were listed as tourist or on business. Susan felt they were elegant and she

was beneath them. She does not remember the other children on the boat, whether there were any leaders or whether any religious ceremonies took place. The boat went directly from Lisbon to the Statue of Liberty. She knew it was important to get on the deck to see the Statue of Liberty. The doctors would not permit them off the boat as her brother had a rash on his bottom so they went to Ellis Island. She was upset because she saw her father but not her mother. They were given American food including wonder bread. She was amazed that they got white bread and could eat as much as they desired. Also, she enjoyed chewing gum.

- 20:00 They landed around September 21, 1941. They remained on Ellis Island for a few days until the rash went away. No one understood French or German and some spoke Yiddish. Their father met them at the dock when they got off of Ellis Island. She cried and hugged her father and he took them to relatives who decided to buy her clothes. They bought her first bra which they said she must wear in the US and, also, bought her a fancy dress. She wanted to see her mother and her 2-year-old brother in DC. Her father drove his car (which he used to deliver butter and eggs) to Washington, DC. She was happy that they could have whatever they wanted (chewing gum, dressy clothes) as there was no war in the US. They had a flat tire along the way so it took 13 hours to reach DC. Susan found her mother in bed, acting strange and found out that she was sick. Her mother did not seem happy to see her and her brother. Susan did not see her younger brother until the next day as he was sleeping. Her mother did not seem to know how to love them. She had been depressed and in and out of hospitals. The mother's condition continued which was sad for Susan.
- 25:00 Susan attended Americanization school for two months to learn to speak English and then her brother entered elementary school and she entered junior high. She was placed in a higher grade than her age as she looked mature so she graduated at age 16. The school had a track system and she was placed in 7A with the bad boys who did not know how to read, spell or behave. She sat in the back and learned English and soon was transferred to 7C. Later she graduated from Central High School and attended the University of Maryland. Then she got married and had three girls. Afterwards she returned to school and got her B.A., M.A. and started on her Ph.D. Her children married and she now has nine grandchildren. At first she never spoke about her experiences as she felt different from others. She felt that she was intruding on society and felt low on the totem pole and not as important as others. Later she found out that others did not speak of their experiences either. When she learned what happened in the ghettos and concentration camps, she felt guilty as she was saved and others died. Susan searched in the Holocaust and found that all her aunts had gone to concentration camps. In DC, her father kept busy to learn to become an American and make a living. He had a good business in Germany which he had to sell and then made a living by selling strawberries and other berries.

- 30:00 Jews came to their recreation room and donated clothes and packed them up to send to the Jews in Germany. **Tape 2, Side B** Sometimes she talked to her brother about their experiences. He lives in NY and she feels close to him. She wanted to become an American and forget the horror. She had been two years without her parents. She was with her brother and knew that eventually she would see her parents. Susan believes that children are good survivors and can adjust to different situations. She does not believe her experiences affected her much but she wants her children to have a normal, happy life. She wants to be there for her children and be a good mother and do her best so nothing bad happens to their children and to the children the world over.
- 35:00 She is no longer religious because her husband is reform so she became reform and is less religious. Her father continued being observant. When they arrived, Rabbi Jacob lived two blocks away so every Saturday she learned with him and studied with him three times a week. She learned to translate the Chumash, had a good education and kept traditions at home. Her children keep the traditions. Susan does not get reparations as she does not want to have anything to do with Germany. Her father might have received some reparations for her mother being in the hospital. Susan has not returned to Germany on a grant as others have done. She took her family to Bad Kreuznach. They stayed in a hotel just two days and felt uncomfortable so went to Paris. Her mother's brother, Adolph Trimmer (ph) had a non-Jewish lover who he did not marry as she would have been considered Jewish and would have ended up in a concentration camp. It was awkward seeing her again, now living with a German soldier. The people in the town seemed to know that Susan was a former resident as they stared at her out of their windows behind the lace curtains. This made her feel uncomfortable. She discusses her three successful daughters.
- 40:00 Susan is married 48 years to Irving who accuses her of being overly sensitive to noise and smells from Bad Kreuznach. She does not believe any sights bring back memories of her German town. After teaching 27 years, she retired three years ago and started participating in many athletic activities including swimming, tennis and biking. She is a volunteer for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum education department where she teaches the Holocaust to Baltimore and DC inner city students. If she feels that she is losing her audience, she may tell her own story. She is the President of her Hadassah group where she works for Israel and women in the US. She feels that now she is a happy, normal person and is happy to be here in the US.

44:00