

This is take 2, side A, and we are interviewing Ruth Horowitz. And you were telling me about being a Yankee Doodle kid. And you were also talking about your transition to life in this country. Is there anything more you want to tell me about your transition?

Well, as I say, we learned English very quickly. And we also learned by going to the movies. My sister and I were, as my mother used to say, "late in the movies," quote unquote. We used to be in the movies during the summer from morning till night. In those days, you could just stay in the movies and keep watching the same movie over and over again for about \$0.10, \$0.20. And that's a wonderful way to learn a language.

The school was very nice. Public school was very nice, but the kids, of course, still made fun. I had a few friends, not too many. And then when my father ultimately took a position in Washington, he came down here to Washington to live with an aunt. My mother, my sister, and I stayed in New York.

Then an aunt decided that she would take my sister. Another cousin on my mother's side decided she would take me. And we were sort of split up for a time to make things easier until my parents could establish themselves. But ultimately, we lived in New York. My mother then moved out of this horrible apartment and moved into an apartment on West End Avenue with my sister and me.

The apartment on West End Avenue was owned by a physician who had a place in the country. And this now was summertime-- this was 1939 in the summer. And at that time this doctor his family went to the country. And my mother's cousins knew this physician, and this physician wanted someone to house-sit. So my mother was a wonderful person for this, so she and my sister and I were in this apartment on West End Avenue.

When my father became more established in Washington, of course, he wanted us all to come down. He was separated from us. And he rented an apartment on New Hampshire Avenue-- 5301 New Hampshire Avenue, a one-bedroom. And my sister, and my mother, and I came to Washington and we were all together again. It was very close quarters-- my sister and I slept in the living room, my parents had the bedroom, and then every once in a while we switched over depending on who was more comfortable.

But we were together. And then we lived there for about a year, year and a half. And then we moved to Peabody Street where we had a two-bedroom apartment. And my father then was a salesman for a men's furnishings line-- like belts, suspenders, underwear, things like that, which was a little bit in his line-- the same thing that he did in Europe, except on his own. And he also took in a line of costume jewelry.

He was working for someone. And then he decided that if someone else can do that and he could do it for that someone else, then he could do it for himself. So he went into business for himself. He used to go to New York and buy costume jewelry. And we had a big walk-in closet in the apartment, and that became his little office. And that's how he started the jewelry business.

And he had a nice business. But unfortunately, he didn't move into downtown quarters. But unfortunately, after only being in this country 11 years, my father died. He had hypertension in Europe that was made worse by everything that he went through. And by the time he got to this country, he really was sick. I never remember my father being well.

He always had headaches, and I thought, well, maybe he has headaches because he's so stressed. But the headaches were a combination of the stress and his physical being. He had a lot on his head, a lot on his mind. And he did beautifully, except he had a stroke when he was about 52, going on 53. And he died. He was completely paralyzed. He lasted about a year and a half-- he died when he was 54.

When you came to the United States, were you able to maintain contact with your relatives back in Europe?

No, no. Perhaps my parents wrote for their grandparents. But I have a lot of letters that my grandfather and grandmother wrote to my mother, to their daughter. But that was before the war. That was to Hamburg. I have no letters at all that were written by them to us in the United States.

And I have no record or any inclination that my father-- perhaps he wrote, but nothing was ever sent back. So I don't think there was any contact. And we really didn't know what happened to the family until after the war. We just assumed that either they were killed or they were in a camp.

No, we didn't really assume that they were killed, because that's something that you just didn't assume-- that they were in a camp or that they escaped someplace, because you started to hear all kinds of rumors. And there really wasn't much information given out.

Tell me about some of the information that was given out. Do you remember at the beginning of the war in September of '39?

Very little-- very little. Just that the Jews were rounded up, and it was a good thing that we were out. I do remember-- perhaps there was a communication. My Aunt Flora, Rita's mother, was married again at that time to a-- [AUDIO DROPS] And I know that he was picked up by the authorities in Poland.

But I'm not sure now whether this was right before the war or after the war started. He was an engineer, and I really am not sure just when he was picked up. But we did know that he disappeared, and he was never heard from again. We heard very little about what was going on, really.

There was no information that we could get. We couldn't call anybody-- couldn't call to Europe. Once the war started, no letters went through. And if my father did attempt to write, they wouldn't have gotten through. They would have been sent back. There was an absolute void-- no information came in or out.

Do you remember following the news of the war effort?

Yes. I helped with sugar rationing. I remember the selling of the bonds and being very patriotic. Of course, I was in school. And at that time, the reason I bring up sugar rationing is because the sugar was rationed, as a lot of things were at that time-- shoes, gasoline, butter, meat.

Sugar rationing was important to me because the registration and the little chits were issued by my grade school, Brightwood School. And my class was designated to help with sugar rationing. So I do remember that very vividly. In fact, I have a little citation on one of my report cards that the teacher was very pleased that I'd helped with sugar rationing.

And also at that same time, it was written on one of my report cards that I did very well in English. English was one of my best subjects-- reading, writing. Arithmetic was not too great.

During the war years-- the beginning of the war and on through-- did you get a sense that the Jewish community in the United States was at all alarmed?

They were perhaps alarmed, but I don't think they understood what was going on-- I really don't. When we came to Washington, this is really basically when our true life in the United States started again, because anything before that was very temporary. Not that life here wasn't stressful, because my parents were trying to establish themselves, and we always have to remember that they had two young children. And that's traumatic in itself.

But life really started here. And we had no money except the little bit that my dad was making. Of course, we had to buy food and rent, but there was nothing being saved, and there was no money for extras. And I will say that of all the Jewish communities in the Washington area, the Washington Hebrew congregation was the only one that put out their hand to the newcomers.

They offered English lessons. They offered lessons in life in America. They offered tickets for the high holy days. They opened up their synagogues to the newcomers to come and meet the congregation, to meet other newcomers. My parents found this very important, because a lot of Jewish people in the area-- and I can only speak for this area, because

this was where we lived-- a lot of Jewish people really didn't want to get to know us too well.

I had that feeling, maybe because they felt they would have to give something to us-- almost like maybe we would be pariahs, who knows? They felt, perhaps, threatened. The first time I went to a camp when I was a kid was through the auspices of the Washington Hebrew Congregation and the Jewish Social Service. They worked with the Jewish social services.

When did you come to Washington?

We came to Washington in '41.

'40. '40. 1940.

You were in Washington for some other historic events like Pearl Harbor and whatnot? Can you tell me--

We also were at the inauguration of Franklin D Roosevelt's fourth. My mother's cousins in New York knew someone in Congress, and they got tickets. All of us went-- they got tickets for the inauguration in front of the Capitol, and they gave the tickets to my dad and my mother. And it was wonderful. We became very patriotic.

And of course, Pearl Harbor, we were here. That was a trauma. I mean, then we were in a full-fledged war. But again, other than what all of the Americans read in the newspapers, we didn't know any more.

What was it like for you as a German Jewish or Jewish German refugee in this country during the war?

During the war-- OK, at that point I was still in grade school. We had a lot of anti-Semitism among the Christians in this country. Talking about the Jews few feeling that we were strange, with the Christians, we were even stranger.

They didn't really know what we were, why we were here, where Germany was. I mean basically, people are very ignorant. And in today's life, children are a little more sophisticated-- they know. Having grandchildren of the age that I was when I first came here, and knowing what I knew of the world when I came here, the kids that I met in this country were very ignorant, and perhaps because the parents themselves never told the children about other people other than their own.

In these classes, I was subject to anti-Semitism. And at one point, I really felt not much better than over there when I played in the yard in Hamburg. One little boy, and his name came up recently because we're going to have our 50th high school reunion next year, and this kid went to school with me all through grade school, junior high, and high school. And he said to me in very gross way, why don't you go back to Germany where you came from and burn up like the rest of the Jews?

And of course, I went home crying to my mother. And just don't pay attention to it-- and what do you do? What do you tell a child? But that happened very often-- very often. The children were cruel because they don't know any better, and they weren't taught any different. And of course, when I started to go to Hebrew school or to Sunday school at Washington Hebrew, which, as it is today, caters to a very elite, wealthy, socially prominent congregation-- where at that time, three or four of the kids that I went to Sunday school with came to school in chauffeurs.

I felt very intimidated there also. They used to whisper, she's wearing the same dress again, and, can't her parents afford to buy her another dress-- little things like that. So you do feel a little out of it. And it took a few years till you get acclimated. And perhaps this is not that unique. Maybe this is true of any child that moves from one area to the other. But this was just my experience being Jewish.

The teachers-- I don't know if you're interested in knowing what even went on afterwards. The teachers sometimes in the upper grades gave tests, and the tests were given on the high holidays. And when we mentioned this once to one of the teachers-- I think I was already in junior high school-- she says, well, you people have to understand that you have to conform to the society the way it is.

And also when we first came to Washington and attended Friday night services at Washington Hebrew one evening, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was the speaker. And that was quite interesting. And she used the phrase, which I think she was very sorry that she used afterwards-- but she said, we are living in a Christian society. That sort of struck me also.

So here we were again a distinct minority, a talked about minority in a Christian society. And this was during the war. Her husband at that time was still president. This was, I think, during his last term before he died. We live in a Christian society-- here in a Christian society. And that also did not sit well, because when you hear that, then they have a distinction between people.

And for a refugee or immigrant, whatever you want to call us, that doesn't sit right. You're being singled out again. And here was this woman in the synagogue talking about that. And it doesn't even matter what context she was saying it, it did not sit well with the adults either.

Do you remember in the days before Pearl Harbor, was there much debate in this country as to whether or not America should get involved in the war? And was there any anti-Semitism linked to that debate?

Yes. You used to hear things on the radio, talking-- I used to hear my dad talk about Father Coughlin and all these people-- and they did blame the Jews. Why should we get involved because this is a problem that the Jews had over in Europe or in Germany? The Jews' fault-- yes, I used to hear that. I can't give you any specifics on it, but there was an undertone.

When did you start to realize what was going on to the Jews in Europe?

When did I start to realize it? Probably when I was about six-- 1936.

I mean when you were here.

Oh, when I was here. I think once the war started on both sides, we just felt there was nothing that we could do to see our families or to hear from them. We knew once Crystal Night happened that that was the beginning of the end. There was no communication.

Let me rephrase my question-- when did you begin to realize about the extermination?

Oh, the extermination camps-- probably not until the end-- I personally. We knew that there were concentration camps. Those camps were in existence. We used to hear rumors about that-- detention camps, whatever you want to call it. But as far as the death camps, I don't think I really became aware of that. I personally didn't become aware of that until after the war-- right after the war when all of this came out.

How did all of that, as you said, come out?

I think in the press.

How was it presented in the press?

Well, the British, the Americans talked about it-- the liberators very vividly. It was appalling. They talked about it on the radio. They had the newsreels-- vivid newsreels. It was incomprehensible-- just incomprehensible that something like this happened or could happen. It was like a dream. And then, of course, you start to think what happened to your families. We weren't the only ones that thought that.

What was the reaction of the general public in this country to the news that was coming out about the camps?

The general public, I don't know. Among our Jewish people, very disturbed, but not as disturbed as I would think they should be or that we thought they should be. My father always seemed to feel that way too-- not disturbed enough.

Perhaps if they had been more disturbed even before, a lot of this stuff would not have happened.

The United States-- this I do remember my father talking about a lot-- the United States was not very liberal in letting in a lot of people in the '30s. They were very liberal in letting people in at the turn of the century-- the 20th century-- but not in the '30s. They had quotas.

And they let in certain people like scientists-- they had a brain drain over in Europe in the '30s because a lot of these people wanted to leave, and the United States was very happy to have them. But for the general population that wanted to leave because they were being persecuted, no. The doors were basically shut very tight.

And unless you were on the quota or came from Northern European stock as opposed to the Eastern European stock, you were just not let in very easily. It was very, very tough. We all had numbers.

Is there anything that stands out in your mind from the war years from your experience in the United States during World War II that you haven't mentioned that you'd like to share before I start asking you some post-war questions?

During the war years, my father, of course, tried very hard to make a living. His living was based on his traveling. And it was always a trauma-- did he have enough gasoline to visit all his customers? If he didn't have gasoline, he couldn't travel to see his customers. And if he didn't see his customers, he didn't make any money. So this was always an issue.

The issue was, do I have enough coupons for gasoline? And I couldn't understand it too much at that point either. I said, why is he always so worried? He'll get where he's going. No, you couldn't get where you're going if you didn't have the gas to go. And sometimes it was a problem.

Sometimes he would exchange coupons for one thing or something else with someone. Or we had an uncle here who didn't use his coupons, so he'd fill up my father's gas tank using his coupons. This was a big issue. Food was rationed-- that was not a big issue. People in this country had plenty to eat with the rationing. And I think a lot of us hoarded more because when you got a coupon, you felt you had to buy the item-- be it canned goods, sugar, butter, or what have you.

There was plenty to eat here. We lacked nothing-- we really didn't. The only thing we lacked is trying to make a decent living and an honest living. Honest living was always the prime target-- making an honest living. Because a lot of people made a living, and it wasn't too honest during the war years. It was very important.

And of course-- well, we didn't become citizens until '47, which was a big thing. It was a wonderful thing.

I'm not ready to go to 1947 yet.

The war is over, what attempts were made to find relatives?

When the war was over, I do remember my father immediately went to HIAS, which was a group that was like a Jewish social service group. It was international. I'm not quite sure exactly what the letters-- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, right. And we found out through that grapevine that cousin Rita and her mother, Flora, survived and were living in Sweden in a DP camp.

And when we found their address, my dad immediately went downtown on Connecticut Avenue to Mackey, which was at that time like a Western Union, and he sent them a message and sent them I think it was \$50. And that's how we started to communicate with them. And then we wanted to bring them over.

What is very interesting-- as I had mentioned, my mother and my aunt Flora-- this is my cousin Rita's mother-- had cousins in New York. There were, I think, six brothers and a sister. They were very nice, and they helped us a lot-- giving us information, et cetera. They were very affluent all of them. They were artists and in the advertising business, and they were artists.

However, my father and mother could not send an affidavit to Flora and to her daughter because we were not citizens

ourselves. So there was a problem how we're going to get them over here. You still had to have somebody to sign. So they wouldn't do it up there in New York for whatever reason. And my father approached his mother's sister here-- the one that he lived with briefly, his aunt Dora Allman, who was also an immigrant from the early-1900s. She was an elderly lady. She had no children.

So he approached her and her husband, if they would please sign an affidavit for Flora and her daughter. And they did-- not that they had to give any money at that time, they never had to. But it was just the idea in case, god forbid, something happened, somebody would be responsible who was an American citizen, which they were. And then shortly thereafter, they came over.

And they lived with us for a very short time. We were still in the apartments. And then we found out that my father's mother was also in Auschwitz at the same time with my mother's parents. And we found out that my father's sister was killed and various cousins. And we never found out where uncle Roman was, because he was in France. And we didn't find out about him until a few years later when he suddenly appeared. Well, he sort of was looking for us. He knew that we were in the States. And it really is very easy to find people if you know that they settled in a certain area and through the social services.

Did you follow the Nuremberg Trials?

Yes.

What do you remember of the trials?

I couldn't wait until they all hung. But unfortunately, they didn't, because Mr Goering, I think, killed himself, didn't he? And a few of the others were sent to jail. And I think any punishment would have been too kind. It was an interesting era with the Nuremberg Trials-- very interesting.

Everyone is entitled to a trial, but I keep thinking, why? Which is not really a humane thing to think, but they were not humane. These people were not humane.

Did you get a sense of what the American reaction was to the Nuremberg proceedings?

I think they just thought it was appropriate. I really have no input with that. I do know one of our neighbors here-- and this, of course, is since we're married-- was one of the lawyers that was attached to the Nuremberg Trials. And what I found very interesting was that while he was over there in Germany, he married a German woman who was from Stuttgart.

And then ultimately, he brought her over here, and then she worked for my husband for a time. And I never could quite understand her position, but she never talked about it either. And then we used to think, well, it wasn't her fault, but maybe her father's fault, or her brother's fault, or whoever's fault. But that's really my only reaction.

I was very disappointed that Mr Hitler was not around to be looked at. And I think my father, of course, was. I know he was-- and that the others were just sitting there gloating. And the fact that a couple of them killed themselves, so what? That was an easy way out. They were military. They had expected to get shot, or shot down, or whatever anyway. That's what one, I guess, expects. But other than that, no-- no other feeling, really.

Do you remember the debates in the UN about the partition of Palestine and the ultimate birth of the state of Israel?

A little bit, yeah-- we were very happy. And again, why not have a state of Israel? Why did they make it so difficult after all of that, what happened in Europe?

Tell me a little bit about your life since the war-- your life in this country. You mentioned your husband.

Well, my husband and I were married in 1950. My father at that point was already sick. He had not had his stroke yet,

but he had been ill. My mother was helping him in his business, as was my sister and me. We used to go down after school. I went to George Washington University for two years where I met my husband.

He was going to school at the time as well. And my father adored my husband. He liked him very, very much. We were very young when we got married. I was barely 20, and my husband was just 22, which was, by today's standards, very, very young. But we got married, and here we are-- a very nice life, not easy.

My in-laws were not affluent, and obviously my parents were not either. My father made a very nice living. And I might mention what I find very interesting and we have always found very interesting, even when I was growing up after we came here and observed our parents-- my mother was always quite conservative. She was very level-headed, very conservative, and basically ran the household.

And even though she worked for my father, she knew very little about business, she knew very little about writing checks or paying bills-- he did everything, everything. My dad loved the good things in life. That's why I think he moved from Poland to Germany, because he liked the arts. He loved music. And he just liked the nice things in life. He liked to dress well. And he liked to partake of everything.

And sometimes we think-- my sister, and my mother, and I used to talk about this-- that perhaps there was a reason for all of this. And he didn't deny himself too much. Whatever he had, he enjoyed. And when he made it, he used it. Maybe there was a reason for it, because he really had a tough life leaving home.

He didn't have too much at home in Poland, made it in Germany only to be torn down. And then coming here, and having a tough time, and being ill, and he only lived a short time here. He died so young that perhaps it was nice that he had that kind of an attitude that, darn it, I'm here, and now I'm in the United States, and I want to enjoy everything. After my father died, my mother, of course, was devastated.

She really took very good care of him, but it didn't work. She went to work in the office. She had somebody stay with my father at home because he could no longer work. And he became totally paralyzed. And when he died, she really had to be reborn. She learned how to write a check. She learned how to run a business. And she did a complete turn-about. She was a Hausfrau that became a very worldly person.

We have to pause so I can flip the tape. This is tape 2, side B. We're interviewing Ruth Horowitz. And you had told me about your father passing away and your mother rebuilding her life.

Yes. at that time, my husband had just graduated optometry school-- this was in 1953. And my dad passed away in October. We were living with my dad and her, because we were looking for a place to live ourselves. We had been living in Philadelphia while my husband was going to school.

In any case, we decided that we would stay together. And we did for about seven years until we moved to this house here on Meadow Hill Road. And then my mother lived with us. So anyway, my mom, who was a helpmate-- she did everything that my father needed to be done, in business as well as at home-- but all the things like writing checks, worrying about a mortgage, or bills, or anything like-- that phone bills even-- she depended on my father to take care of.

Well, suddenly, she had to do these things herself. And she did. She did beautifully. And my mom, and my sister, and brother-in-law maintained the jewelry business for some years. And then my mother decided that, enough. And she was working for a jewelry store in Silver Spring. My mom always worked. She worked until about two weeks before she got sick and went into the hospital.

She lived with us another 13, 14 years. We were together a long time. And then she moved to Florida. I basically was her housekeeper at that point. I worked for my husband. Originally, I worked at Walter Reed as a secretary. And then when my husband opened up his business, his office, I should say, I went to work for him.

And to this day, I still work 2 and 1/2 days a week, which I really love. He's very easy to get along with, and I do like the people contact. We have two children. Our daughter, Marcia, is married. And she has four little boys. And our son is

Edward, and he's 42. And he has one son who was born after 12 years of marriage. So we have five grandchildren, all boys, which is a delight.

One little boy is named Max after my uncle Max who my father lived with. The first grandchild is named after my mother. Our son is named after my father. And the other boys are named after-- and I can't think right offhand after whom, but that's OK. They are Ross, who's now seven, and there's Henry, who's six there's Andrew, who's five, and Fletcher is three. And Max, our son Eddie's boy, is a year and a half old.

So we have a wonderful family, and I'm just sorry that my father, who worked so hard to get us out of this horror, never really had a chance to see any grandchildren-- any great-grandchildren, I should say.

Did you, and your parents, and your sister ever talk about what you missed by getting out when you did?

Yes. We missed being killed, because, ultimately, we would have been annihilated, I'm sure. I'm sure. My father for sure, because he was not well. I don't think he would have been able to work. Perhaps my mother could have done something, and perhaps my sister. But I think my father and me, since I was younger, I don't think we would have survived this unless we were hiding someplace.

And especially I feel this now, after we've gotten more educated about the Holocaust-- and believe me, I've gotten very educated now about the Holocaust myself, because I feel 20 years ago, 30 years ago, I really didn't know enough. And perhaps we should have, but we didn't. And we should have really talked about all these things more. That's my regret. I never even spoke about it that much to my children.

Are you familiar with any Holocaust related groups?

The Holocaust Survivors and Friends of Washington, and, of course, the museum.

What do you do for the museum?

Right now just money. I don't do anything much right now. I would really like to. As I say, I'm still working the 2 and 1/2 days, and I would like to do something down there, even if it's just greeting people. And I am going to look into that before the fall.

Have you been back to Germany since the war?

Yes, we went back in 1995 in August. And at that point, I was 65 years old. We had just celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary. As a matter of fact, we celebrated it on the airplane. And this trip was a trip, truly, of a lifetime.

I will say that my sister and I have talked about this a long time, and we had never really thought we would go back unless they sent us money, which we really never got. My sister and I really never got anything from Germany. And we always felt, well, why should we go back? Why give money to their economy? Well as it turned out we were solicited to come, all expenses paid for one week.

We flew Lufthansa. My sister and I did not go together, because there was a problem in time. I couldn't go at the time that she wanted to go. So ultimately, they went first, she and her husband, and my husband I went in August of that year. We went Lufthansa-- beautiful, we got an upgrade to first class.

We were met at the airport. There was not one thing during the seven days that I would say offended me that anyone did to me personally. A lot of the things that offended me were stupidity-- like this young girl who didn't quite understand the time frame of the war and when people left. There were some things that offended me by just seeing some of the elderly people that looked at us with suspicion.

But in a way now, I'm sorry that I went back, because it just opened up a lot of thoughts. It opened up a can of worms, because I now feel, how in the world could anyone get away with what the Germans did, including the people that are



still alive? They are still there, the ones that took part in all of this horror.

And what also made me so much aware of this was, number one, we went to visit a synagogue. This is not the synagogue that we belonged to. This is an entirely different building. This is actually inhabited by people that are Russian immigrants-- Jewish Russian immigrants. There are very few Jewish people now that live in Hamburg-- very few.

When you look at the synagogue, it's on a street that's blocked on both sides by police cars. Now, if that doesn't tell you something, nothing else will. In other words, why do they have to have this kind of security. There must be still a lot of anti-Semitism there, obviously. They have a buzzer door. You just can't walk into the synagogue. You can walk in front of the building, but if you even want to go through the gate, you have to wait for the security guard inside to buzz you, in just like they do at the B'nai B'rith Building downtown here in Washington, DC where they've had problems.

Then another thing, I didn't realize that Hamburg had its own concentration camps. That, we didn't realize until we went there. They had concentration camps way before the war where they used to take people for whatever reason. And also, the last full day that we were in Germany, in Hamburg, we asked the two very lovely young ladies-- who were historians and who were taking our notes and our interviews-- we asked them to take us to Bergen-Belsen, because someone said that it's quite close to Hamburg. It's West of Hamburg.

I never realized that Bergen-Belsen was so close. It was an awesome ride. It was a ride of about 35 miles, maybe 40-- a beautiful, beautiful ride-- birch trees on either side of the road, houses. The girls decided not to take the Autobahn, because they thought we would enjoy a scenic ride more, which we did-- nothing not to like-- little towns like a Frederick, Maryland or like a Sykesville.

They have an inn where you can have lunch. You can stay overnight-- beautiful. And you go for miles and miles, and you see lovely homes, mansions, farms-- a lot of potato farms. And suddenly, you come to a little clearing, and it says Bergen-- not Belsen, it says, Bergen. And you drive in, and there you are in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, or what is left of it.

I couldn't quite believe what I saw-- not only because of the place itself-- how enormous it is-- but they have plaques-- 10,000, 5,000 bodies. These are the where they had the pits. And all the pits now are burned. It's a very awesome, a very beautiful place. You could smell the heather.

And I kept thinking to myself, how in the world did these people that live on either side of the road not know that there were human beings being transported there? Now, this was not a death camp as such-- not a extermination camp. This was a death camp because at that point, a lot of these people were sent to Bergen-Belsen from the East toward the West. And they also had Russian prisoners of war there that just perished because they were starved, they were diseased, they dropped dead in their tracks.

Thousands, and thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people-- how did these people get there? They didn't drop them from a helicopter. They didn't jet them in a tube. They must have gotten there by a truck. Nobody seems to know. I even asked these two women that drove us there in their darling little red convertible-- can you answer me a question, how did all these people that died here get here?

I guess at night. I says, what do you mean at night? Nobody knew. I have such a resentment against this whole German thing, you have no idea. When we went to the apartment two or three days before-- the apartment where we live-- the apartment is frozen in time. It's beautiful. The downtown area is beautiful.

Everything is new. We were entertained royally in the Hamburg City Hall-- the Rathaus, what they call the rat house. It's Rathaus. We were served on beautiful gold dishes with white-gloved waiters. The hall is the most magnificent thing that I have ever seen.

I understand it was completely bombed out. How did it get so beautiful? Did they win the war? I thought it was bombed out. The areas that were not bombed out are still beautiful, not even from being restored. That's just the way it is.

Everything is the same.

We are not the same. We didn't live the same. Why did they? And this is what gets to me. When we went to the apartment, I walked up the steps, and I said to my husband-- I kept talking my whole life with Harvey about the mirrors and the apartment and the hall, with a winding staircase and an elevator on the right. I remembered that, because every day when I came home from school, I used to see myself in the mirrors like infinity. You know you have two mirrors, and you see yourself forever.

And this beautiful marble floor-- and we walked up the steps-- I said, I don't even want to take the elevator, because I used to walk. And we walked up to the floor, and just when I was standing in front of the door just looking-- there were only two flats on every floor, they were big, big apartments-- this woman gets out of the elevator. She took the lift up, and she says to me-- I'll say it in English-- what do you want?

So I said, nothing. I used to live here. And I was so excited, and I had a smile on my face-- I used to live here, and I just wanted to see what the apartment looked like. So she looked at my husband and me, she said, when did you live here, in a very arrogant manner.

I says, oh, we left in 1938, with which she took her key, opened up the door, and shut the door in our faces. She never said one word. She knew. Now, she wasn't probably the resident of my apartment since then, but yet maybe she was. Maybe she thought I wanted to go in. Maybe she had something in there that she felt belonged to us.

After that experience, we went downstairs and I started to walk through the neighborhood. And as little as I was, I knew exactly where all the little stores were that I went to. My husband was completely amazed at the recall that I had. He says he never really thought that I remembered. And we went to the dairy store across the street, which is now an Italian ice cream place-- I said, the counter is on the left.

And I remember it had a greenish cover on it like a Formica. And sure enough, that's the same. Why is everything the same with them? And better-- it's the same and better. And for the people that were in the camps who died, things certainly weren't better. They're dead. They never even had an opportunity to have any life or children-- three or four generations are gone, never to multiply. That's lost.

And the ones that did survive, their life has changed forever, and not necessarily for the better. Their life over there is better because of people like us-- not even people like me, people that sat in a concentration camp and built up that country because they worked as slave laborers. And we left our possessions, whatever they might have been, and somebody took it over. Why?

That is my-- I can't even describe it. I am so discouraged by it, and I feel so bad that I feel, why in the world did I ever go back there? The school is still there. Everything is there-- the bathroom, it's all the same.

And if it wasn't bombed out, which most of the stuff in the residential areas was not, then the other things were completely built up, with American dollars for sure. Hamburg itself is a beautiful city. It's almost like Venice. It's got canals, the beautiful houses are there, the homes that were owned by the Jewish people-- everything is there, and there are non-Jews living there. How did they acquire all of this?

Where is my mother's furniture? She always used to say, she wondered who's sitting in her dining room? Of course, these are such little things. Who took over my grandfather's office and all the beautiful antiques and things? I have pictures of my grandmother-- who took all that jewelry? Where is all of that? I guess the same people that knocked out the gold fillings.

It's horrendous. When you really start to think about it, it's worse than seeing anything on a television screen, or a movie screen, or seen in a picture. I think it's even worse what a human being remembers. You can't even put that on celluloid on a screen. You can't.

That really bothered me. What happened to all the Torahs? All the things? And I know I was always told my whole life,

now, Ruth, don't get hung up on things. You do get hung up on things. That's you, that's us-- all these things when you think about it.

Any way, we should not dwell on things. But I just wanted to share this-- my feeling about going back. And I did write a letter. I wrote all my thank you notes to all the people that were very nice to us in Europe. And they tried very hard. My feeling toward it might not be the same as someone else's. Some people were absolutely thrilled, and they took other trips besides going to Hamburg.

I didn't feel that way. I don't think I would ever go back again. I had thought when we came back, maybe I'd like to take our children. You can go home again, but you don't want to live there. And I don't think I even want to visit it again, because it really has turned out to be a beautiful place but not for us.

It was built on something horrible. And I think all of the cities-- in Germany especially, were built on something horrible. And if I might just add one more thing-- I know that the United States has relations with Germany, Israel has wonderful relations with Germany. To this day, I can't stand looking at a Mercedes. That logo gets me, because that's what I used to see the SS guys go in and out of.

A Jew was not allowed to have that car, so why is this now the car of choice for African-Americans as well as Jews? These were hateful people. And the people that are still running it in 1997 are still there. It's going to take a few generations for this all to be washed out, to be dilute. This is how I personally feel-- it has to be diluted by a few more generations.

Is there anything you'd like to add before we conclude?

I just want to add that I feel that we all should remember, talk about it. Even though I was not in a concentration camp, that does not make my experience of lesser value. I think any child 10 years up should learn about the Holocaust and what it means-- every Jewish child for sure, what it means. And if we don't take care of our own people, who is going to? Nobody. And take pictures, because that's your record.

Thank you very much for doing the interview with me today. And this concludes the interview today.