

**Interview with Brigitte Freidin
March 13, 2001**

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: -- Holocaust Memorial Museum, volunteer collection interview with **Brigitte Freidin**, conducted by **Esther Finder** on March 13, 2001, in **Rockville, Maryland**. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is tape number one, side **A**. Thank you for doing the interview with me. I -- I would like to start by asking you what was your name at birth?

Answer: **Brigitte Mandl**.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in **Augsburg, Germany**.

Q: And when were you born?

A: I was born June 3rd, 1930.

Q: Did your family have a long history in **Germany**?

A: My family came to **Germany** from **Spain** after the inquisition. There was a family history there and a family crest with the only family that I have left, which are in **Sao Paulo, Brazil**. And they were merchants, mostly.

Q: What was your hometown like?

A: **Augsburg, Germany** is the most famous walled medieval town in **Bavaria** and one of the very famous ones in **Germany**. And we l -- and it's -- it was a beautiful,

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small town, very, very famous for -- because **Martin Luther** -- is one of the places where **Martin Luther** hung his edict. And it's also the first social service -- like a -- where people are taken care of in the world. Most economists know about it, it's a family of the name of **Fucher** started it, and it's still in existence where the people have, after they retire are taken care of by the company that -- that they work for.

Q: Were there many Jews in your town?

A: There were a lot of Jews, there were a lot -- mostly Orthodox, but o -- all German Jews were Orthodox except the ones that were Reform, the Reform movement. There was no Conservative movement, which started, I believe in the **United States**, or --

Q: What were the relations like between the -- the Jews and the Germans when you were very little?

A: When I was very little my father owned a furniture store and my grandmother owned -- we lived in the suburbs, actually, in a place called **Grigg saba** at the end of the streetcar line and the store was part of our home. And the store was on the side and then we had a house like next door to it. And my grandmother owned, with her brother, a very large section of apartment buildings, with a big furniture store in it downtown. And they were respected business people, the **Mandl** family, you know, for hundreds of years. And we led a very, very wonderful life, a very nice

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life. My -- my mother and father couldn't vacation together because he ran the store, but my father would go off, I remember, to -- to **Italy** and to **France** and one time to the **United States**. And then I would go with my mother like to **Baden-Baden** where my grandmother would summer. It was a very easy life. On Sundays we'd go to -- there was a small like a zoo, with the cafés an -- and there was a synagogue also in the s -- in the suburb there, which is where we went. And my m -- we were -- my mother kept kosher. We were Orthodox and we had an excellent life.

Q: What was your father's name?

A: My father's name was **Siegfried Mandle**, and my mother's name was **Rita Mandle**.

Q: Has your father ever served in the military?

A: My father was a volunteer in the first World War, and I believe he worked in a barn shoveling manure. He was 17 years old.

Q: What work did your mother do?

A: My mother -- in those days there were two servants and my mother -- my mother did the cooking. The German **hausfrau** prided herself on her cooking. And took care of me and I -- and I guess she was in the store once in awhile. But I was an only child. And she had a sister in town and a lot of friends, you know, and lived a very nice life.

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Q: And her name?

A: Was **Rita**.

Q: You mentioned that your family was Orthodox, can you tell me specifically what religious traditions your family observed?

A: Orthodox in the sense that all the holidays were kept, but the store was open on Saturdays because it had to be. But -- and strictly kosher and my mo -- and we always had Friday night services, you know, at home and went to synagogue on -- on Saturdays, at least my mother and I did. And I don't remember if my father did or not, but Orthodox in the sense that that's all that was known.

Q: Did you have a favorite holiday?

A: Oh, I guess -- I guess -- I guess it was Passover, **Pesach**, because we always had Seders, you know, the whole, long Seders. And this was always kept up, the traditions in -- when we wa -- when we came to the **United States** too, and whenever possible. I was brought up in -- in a very Jewish feeling home.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: I was not allowed to go to the regular schools. There were no Jewish children allowed in the Jewish -- regular schools. I started -- I started out that there was a -- a teacher in that small synagogue there in the suburb. And then I started going downtown to the big synagogue, very, very famous art deco synagogue that -- and

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that's where I went with the other Jewish children. And I was only -- what was it?

Well, I was born in 1930, so I -- I was -- **Kristallnacht** I was eight years old. But -- but from the time I started school I -- I couldn't go. None of the Jewish children could go to regular school.

Q: Did you ever have any German friends?

A: Yeah, I had -- I had German -- the children next door and other children. I had German little girls, but that had to stop too. They weren't allowed to play with me any more.

Q: What kinds of things did you do for fun when you were a little girl?

A: We had a big backyard with swings and we would swing and we would go to that -- to the zoo and the circus, I loved the circus, my father would take -- took me to the circus and swimming. I had swimming lessons. And wi -- the way they -- they gave swimming lessons those days, they put a harness on the kid and like held -- held -- held you by a rope and dropped you in the water and you learned to swim. And we were allowed -- but that had to stop, too. This is when I was five or six years old, but then we weren't there because there was a municipal swimming pool. And my father had a motorcycle, I remember riding around on the motorcycle with him, which I didn't like very much. But I was a very studious child, I read a

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lot. And that was fun to me, and th -- I guess -- you know, it was so long ago, I'm 70 years old, so that's about it at remembering the fun.

Q: Do you have any memories from before **Hitler** was in power?

A: Well, these things that I'm talking about now were be-before. Yo-You mean when I was two, three, four years old? I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, who was -- when I was real little she li -- she lived upstairs. It was a big house and I guess my mother wasn't too happy about having her mother-in-law live with her, but it was a very formal life. I would have to go upstairs every morning and curtsy and say good morning to my grandmother and we went for walks and we were -- it was a very structured life in -- in -- in **Germany**. And children were seen and not heard, you know, so that -- that's what I re -- you know, remember. I know I was registered at a -- at a -- a Swiss finishing school for -- where I was supposed to go when I was like 14 or 15, and -- because my parents were, you know, of the wealthier -- wealthier position because of being business people.

Q: What anti-Semitic experiences do you remember from your early childhood?

You mentioned th-the swimming had to stop. Wha-What --

A: Well, that I couldn't play. That -- that I couldn't play with the other children, and when I knocked on the door I was told, **Gretchen** can't play with you, you know, don't come back. And I don't know if we're jumping ahead, but after

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Kristallnacht, when -- I -- I -- I don't know how I ended up at the downtown school anyway, which was the synagogue, the big synagogue, but the Nazis were there with -- with -- with the dogs and had -- were setting fire to the books that were inside, I guess the schoolrooms and the library from -- from the synagogue. You know, and they're saying get out of here, go back, go home. Because the streetcar line ended and was just a straight run. And even at that age, at -- at age eight, I guess I went on the streetcar and went to school.

Q: Let me keep you back a little bit younger.

A: Yeah.

Q: Let -- let's not go quite yet. What did your parents say to you when you went to your friends and they said go away, you can't play? How did your parents explain the situation to you?

A: They explained it that we have to obey, because it can be very dangerous if we don't, and that I shouldn't ask questions and that I have to do what I'm told. But it was the type of upbringing anyway where -- where you were obedient, so it wasn't that hard.

Q: Do you remember seeing any anti-Semitic posters or newspapers or anything like that when you were very little?

A: No, no, I have no memory of any of that.

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Q: Did you ever hear your parents talk about the political and social situation in **Germany**? Did they ever talk amongst themselves with you just kind of around, and could hear --

A: No, I have no memory -- no, I have no memory of that. I think that children were not to be worried and that it was -- I -- I knew -- my -- my memory really, concrete memory is more right aft-after **Kristallnacht** or -- or right -- right before, and the things that happened.

Q: Before **Kristallnacht**, how much did you actually understand about what was happening around you?

A: I really didn't know, really, or didn't understand much and didn't know much.

Q: Did you ever hear your parents discuss plans to leave **Germany**?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, I knew that we were planning to leave **Germany**, because my mother shopped and shopped, including shoes for me for when I would be two -- 10 - 12 years old. They were buying **Leica** cameras to se -- resell in the **United States** because the lift van was going to come and it would get filled with all our household goods and that we were going to **America**, and -- because my mother's brother was here and we -- that's where we were going. And that was the talk, waiting -- waiting for the -- for the number to come up and you know, the vi -- the - - what was it called where you're waiting for -- for your -- you had a number in

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order to get out, but that I knew, that -- and I also knew that my mother was going to -- and this was again, before **Kristallnacht**, was going to **Munich** twice a week to take cooking lessons at -- at a -- there was a -- like a chapter of the **Cordon Bleu** there, because, you know, they had no idea about **America**, that they were -- she thought she could become a cook here because she was a very famous cook in -- in **Augsburg**, you know, in -- in **Germany**. And my father had come to the 1938 World's Fair earlier in -- in -- in the year and had taken -- and had arranged for the visas with my mother's brother, who came in 1933. And so I knew -- I knew -- that I knew about, I knew about **America**. And they were taking English lessons also. They didn't learn much, but they took English lessons.

Q: Did they have any problems with getting the American paperwork?

A: They -- they had -- they had the visa and they had th-the number, but it was not due for quite awhile. In other words, we couldn't leave.

Q: Can you explain the lift van? You said there was a lift van coming.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you explain that?

A: Yeah, a lift -- lift van is -- is the same as a container on a -- on a -- on a freighter. It's a great big, wooden box and all the belongings are put in it and -- and those lift vans were -- for most people they were sent at -- for storage to **Holland**. And then

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the idea was that when you got -- were going to go to wherever you were going to emigrate to, they would then be shipped. And people paid storage and people paid freight, and there was many, many storehouses in **Holland** that had these lift vans and they were filled with all your belongings and -- and hopefully things that -- furniture and clothing and books and -- and everything that you had, hoping for the life in the -- wherever your next haven would be.

Q: Did you ever see **Hitler** or hear him speak?

A: Yes, I did. I was at my grandmother's where, as I said, she lived right downtown on **Bahnhof Skazie**, which means -- **Bahnhof** is -- is the railroad station, the main street like -- be like **Fifth Avenue** in **New York**. And sh -- we looked out from behind her lace curtains -- she lived, I think on the third or fourth floor, an apartment building. And we were crouching down, she said, I want you to see th -- see this, this is history. We're not supposed to be looking, you weren't supposed to look out. But that -- that's the evil man, that's **Adolf Hitler**. And I saw him in his car, in his open car, just like in the movies, with the hand upraised. And I wa -- I was frightened. I was very, very frightened, because it was so menacing. Well, it was all the accoutrements, you know, that was with him, all the staff cars and everything else. So yes --

Q: Wh-Why was it dangerous to be looking at him?

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A: I guess there was a rule that Jews weren't supposed to -- to be looking a -- looking at him. You know, weren't supposed to view him. Maybe they were afraid we'd get shot at or something, I have no idea.

Q: When did things start to get really very bad for your family?

A: Things got really bad -- well, I th -- I -- I'm not quite sure, but I think my father had to close up the store maybe three, four, six months before **Kristallnacht**. But people still, because they were so well known -- maybe it was even longer than that, people would come and pay their bills like behind closed doors, because Jews at that time already, their bank accounts were con -- confiscated. And I -- but because the good relationship that my family had with the town and with -- with -- with the cities, that's who we got along.

Q: What do you remember of **Kristallnacht**?

A: I remember the -- the house had shutters on the outside and my parents closed the shutters and I -- they pulled me into bed with them. Or maybe I got so frightened at the noises that I went, crawled into their bed with them. But they were throwing rocks, and the store had big shutters too, so they were trying to break down the door. And then the next morning the -- in -- in **Germany** -- because it was all very old-fashioned, the milk was brought by a milkmaid, she had like a -- a -- a little wagon with a th -- I think a dog pulling it or something. And these metal

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containers of milk and the housewife would come out with her pitcher of milk and then you filled -- filled the milk. And was -- I don't know, seven, eight o'clock in the morning and I was -- must have been about seven, because I was dressed for school. And my mother told me to go to the door and you know, get -- get the milk. And it was not the milkmaid, it was two **SS** men. And they said, where's your father? And I said, he -- he was still upstairs. And they said, where's your mother and they like pushed me aside and then came into the house. And my mother -- and they wanted to go upstairs, my mother said, I'll get him, you know, don't go upstairs -- and -- and they ki -- my mother went upstairs and got my father and he came down, and meanwhile, they took all but her wedding band, she had, I guess, I diamond ring. Took the rings off of her, but they didn't take her -- her -- her -- her wedding band at that point. And my father disappeared. And they took him away and they said they're just taking him to the police station in **Augsburg**, in -- and that's -- that's what I remember.

Q: Had you ever heard of **Dachau** before that night?

A: No, I'd never heard of **Dachau**, but that's where my father ended up.

Q: How long was he interned there?

A: He was in **Dachau** til the end of March. And the reason that he got out was because he had been a volunteer in the first World War, and because of the family's

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long, long, long established times in **Germany**, and because we had the emigration number. So he got out and he -- they let -- they let him out and he's still in the striped uniform, shaved head and he called my grandmother on the telephone, and I remember he came home and he was never the same again. My father had a terrible time holding a job in the **United States** and he -- he was -- he was not a stable person.

Q: A couple of questions. Do you know under what circumstances or what conditions he was released?

A: He was released under the condition that we had to leave **Germany** within three weeks. And the neighbors on the other side told him that if we're not gone that he would never -- never be able to leave and that they were going to put him back, you know, put him in a camp permanently. So at that point we left -- we left with -- within two weeks, because as I said, the lift van was gone and the -- the house was -- was relatively empty of -- of -- of furniture. And we went to -- no, I think what happened, the lift van was all new furniture, because we were in the furniture business, he was in the furniture business, a lift van that was all new furniture to come to **America** and the things in the house were left. We were still living in -- in the house, because they -- they were going to wait for -- for their emigration number and we went to **England** to wait out the number.

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Q: Do you know what arrangements had been made for your family to leave **Germany**?

A: The arrangements were that my father had been sending some money to a Swiss bank account, so -- just in case. I don't know whether it was for **England** or to help when we came to **America**. And that's the arrangements were, so that we were able to -- to live. And first class boat tickets on the -- at -- with a shipping company, you know, a boat company, had been purchased, but not for a specific ship, because they didn't know when our number was going to come up.

Q: Can you tell me the state of your father's physical health when he was released?

A: He looked like an old man. He was born in year 1900, so that made him 38 years old, only. And he -- he looked like an old man. He told some -- I don't know if you want me to talk about this, some stories, I remember, from being in **Dachau** and what it was like then already. Do you want me to go ahead with that?

Q: When -- did he tell you at that time, or much later?

A: Later. That h-he said he always believed in -- in -- in kismet. In -- In -- in fortune that you didn't know was ga -- th-they were standing in line, they had -- now, this was November, December. They were standing in line with just those striped uniforms. Oh, I have to add, **Dachau** -- at that point there were no concentration camps, it -- it was really a camp for criminals and political prisoners and not as you

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think of -- they quickly learned how to make it worse. And they got potato peelings and -- and herring, salt herring to eat. And stale bread. They learned very quickly how to tr -- to treat the Jews. And they were standing in line and the man next to him said, trade places with me. I feel -- I feel unlucky, or I feel lucky. Because they were -- they were going to shoot every fifth man, or threatened to shoot every fifth man. And my father, I guess believed in -- in whatever will be, will be, and he traded places with him. And that man was shot. And life was terrible, it -- it was absolutely horrible. How they knew s -- at that stage already to treat people like i -- like animals, I don't know. And I think they used as wardens some of -- some of the political prisoners, a-and so -- some of the actual thieves and like that, to be the bosses ov-over the -- th-the political prisoners, th-the Jews.

Q: What do you remember about the process of packing up and leaving **Germany**?

A: I remember being -- going on a train and we went via **Holland**. And when we got to the border, the conductor coming and saying, you're now free, you're now free. And, little girl, you're now free. And th -- I was also told during the journey to the border to **Holland** that -- how to behave myself, not say anything. And the fright, I still remember the fright of my parents, you know, that -- of being put off at any time.

Q: What could you take with you? You, personally.

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A: I personally had my autograph book, which in those days, Germans being German, everything is very serious, so it isn't like these funny stuff that's written in the ki -- kid's autograph book here. This is your aunt, your uncles, your teachers, your grandparents, write very serious, like hopes for your future and draw pictures and your friends put like these black paper cut-outs or -- or pictures of roses and write -- it's amazing what -- what eight, nine year old children wrote in this book, and -- and my teachers and -- and as I said, my grandmother and -- and -- and my -- my uncle, a-and that is really all that I had, which now the museum has and which is now in **Yad Vashem** on display, part of the display, which makes me very proud.

Q: I have to pause now to change tapes. One moment.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- uation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Brigitte Freidin**. This is tape number one, side **B**, and you were just telling me about taking an autograph book and you mentioned that some of your friends had written in it. Were you able to say goodbye to your friends before you left?

A: Yes, I -- I was able to say goodbye. I remember that it was very, very, very sad and a lot of crying and a lot of hugging. And I think that the saddest was saying

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goodbye to my grandmother and my uncle. My grandmother would not come because her -- she was in partnership with a s -- brother -- her brother, who had never married. And it's the typical story, they were afraid that -- they didn't believe it. They didn't believe it and they didn't want to just close the stores and they didn't want to lose all that money, they didn't want to lose all that property. And like it couldn't be, not -- not with their history in -- in -- in **Germany**. And she wouldn't -- she refused to leave. I have some letters that she wrote to -- I have one living relative, my father's brother has a daughter whose name is **Ruth**, and they live in **Sao Paulo, Brazil** and she wrote to -- letters to them, which my cousin has given me copies of, about how she was only worried about them and about us getting to freedom and that she -- she didn't think that she'd see any of us, you know, again. And she was a very important person in -- in my life, my grandmother, because my mother's -- I had no other grandparents. My father's father died when he was 19, so she was the great matriarch. And my mother's father died a year before I was born and her mother died a year after I was born, so there were no -- no grandparents except this one grandmother.

Q: What kinds of things did you say to each other when you said goodbye to your -- your family and your friends, what did you say?

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A: I really don't -- that's -- has no relevancy for me. You know, I -- I don't remember.

Q: Did anything happen in the time between your father's release and your departure from **Germany**?

A: I was confined to the house, I could not go to school any more, and I was -- and I -- a -- I don't think I had any more schooling after **Kristallnacht**. I stayed pretty much with my mother. My mother also went to Nazi headquarters and was thrown down the stairs, where she asked -- tried to find out what was happening to my father. I also know that she sent packages with long underwear and -- and -- and food to **Dachau**, they were told they could send it. And I don't know if it was through the Red Cross or through -- or just regular German channels, and he never got any of it. That's the things that I remember, but I -- I was -- I was really kept at home.

Q: What do you remember about the day, the actual day that you left **Germany**?

A: I-I just remember being bundled up in a coat and -- and -- and that we were going. You know, I -- I -- I remember more the train journey. You know, I'd never been on -- well, I'd been to **Baden-Baden** and I guess to **Munich**, which is only 40 miles away, but that I was going on this long, long journey.

Q: And your first stop, where was that?

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A: Our first stop was, I think in -- must have been li -- **LaHavre**, must have been in **France**. And then to get to **England** to get to -- because we were going to **London** -

Q: You took the train straight from **Germany** to **France**?

A: Right, to -- to **France**, an-and then took the boat from la -- **LaHavre** to **London**.

Q: How long were you in **France**?

A: To **Southampton**.

Q: How long were you in **France**?

A: We -- we were -- we went directly, just -- just like a day. We didn't stay. We -- we were going. Or, if there was a way -- there was no way. You couldn't have gone from **Holland**. W-We must have stayed on the boat -- I mean, on the train. I think the only way to have gotten there was -- I-I'm guessing at this, I really -- I really don't know.

Q: Do you remember boarding the ship?

A: The ship was much, much later when we came to the **United States**. You talking about coming in the **United States**?

Q: Oh, okay, so you went first to -- to --

A: We lived in **England**.

Q: Okay. So you went from **LaHavre** to **Southampton**.

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A: Yes.

Q: And how did you cross the channel?

A: It -- must have bi -- crossed on -- on -- on a ship. No, I don't remember. I don't remember that.

Q: Tell me about your -- your arrival in **England** and -- and what that was like for you personally.

A: That I remember. I remember we w -- we went by train from **Southampton** to **London**, and my father had a first cousin by the name of **Alfred Marx**, who was ha -- who was there already, and he had -- he had two daughters. And he had a brother the name of **Sigmund Marx**. They were waiting for us at, I guess, the train station in **London**, and they had gotten us a room in -- near **Green Park** in -- in **London**, in somebody's apartment. And I slept on a cot. My parents went to **Portobello Road** and got a second hand cot and it was filled with bedbugs. And I slept on that at the foot of my parent's bed, and we lived in that one room. And my mother registered me in school, and I went to the regular English -- English schools. And I played mostly with my cousins, because you know, I'd -- I didn't speak English. And my mother worked as a maid, because you were not allowed to come to **England** if you took a job while you were waiting for your emigration number. So the little bit of money they in the sw -- from **Switzerland** helped, I guess, pay for our food and --

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and -- and -- and this room, and -- but by working as a maid, she got paid, you know, like -- like illegal immigrants do here, under the table, as they say. And that's the amazing thing, what -- what these refugees were willing to do from the type of homes and the type of -- of life that they led, in order to exist.

Q: While you were in **England**, did you experience any anti-Semitism or any anti-foreign sentiment?

A: Ah, no, no. I went to school with the -- where -- with -- with the children and I -- I don't remember any -- any anti-Semitism.

Q: How long did it take you to learn English?

A: Well, the way that I learned English is that two weeks before the war started, which was in September, all the British -- **London, Manchester**, all the major cities, the schoolchildren were sent to the country, voluntarily. And how my mother and father found out about this, I will never know, but off I was packed, with my book bag on my back and a li -- and a little -- little suitcase and was sent off to the countryside to a place called **Saint Ippolyts**, which is now part of **Ipswich**, to stay with a family called the **Palmers** and that's where I really learned English, because it's total immersion. I was supposed to be with my two girl cousins and we got separated and I wasn't in the same village with them, so I was totally by myself on my own, nine years old. At that time already, tho -- that netting with -- with -- with

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the, like balloons was all over **London**, I do remember that, before the war. They thought they could stop the bombs with that.

Q: Do you remember how your parents explained to you about your leaving and why it was important that you leave them?

A: They explained to me that they will come and get me, we are going to **America**, but in order for them not to worry about me, they wanted me where I would be safe, because they could that way better take care of themselves, and they wanted me safe. So I went. You -- you know, I was a child, you did what you were told. And I don't -- I don't even remember particularly crying or -- or -- or -- or anything. I just went. Maybe I thought it was ma -- maybe that's where my love of travel -- I travel constantly -- came from, that, hey, was a new place to go.

Q: How did you learn about the German invasion of **Poland**?

A: Of **Poland**?

Q: Beginning of the war.

A: Well, that's why, because we knew that war was imminent in **England** because of that Ge-German invasion of **Poland** and **England** was preparing to go to war, and that's why I was sent to the country, along with all these other children.

Q: Let me make sure I'm understanding. So what you're saying is at the very beginning of September, you were sent to the countryside?

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A: Yes, two weeks before the war started.

Q: So when you're referring to the day that the war started, you're talking about the date that **England** --

A: **England** went to war.

Q: Right.

A: Right.

Q: And what were your thoughts when war was declared in **England**?

A: I was in the country already and I think I was still getting used to -- to the life there, which was totally different than anything that I knew, that I didn't remember.

And in a -- already we -- even a -- even in school in **England**, we had to do air raid drills and we had gas masks. And so it was -- it was already like a given, you know,

it was -- it was part of your life. And we had ditches that were dug that we -- I

remember the planes coming over and we had to dive into the ditches. And we had -

- and go under the desks at -- at school, because I went to the country school there,

of course, in -- in **Saint Ippolyts**. And so i-it -- it -- it just becomes part of your life,

part of the way you have to live. People adjust.

Q: Were you the only refugee, or were you the only refugee from **Germany** among these children that went to the village?

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A: I -- I was the only -- only refugee, the only one who couldn't speak English. But this family, this Mrs. **Palmer**, she had a four year old child -- or a three year old child, was so kind and was so nice. I have since found out that I really lucked out, that some of these children were mistreated and -- and -- and were not happy. And she would bring me up tea in -- in -- in the morning and treated me totally as a member of the family. And what the people got was, they got the ration book from the children that they took in, and they got like a pittance of money from the British government. They did this out of their generosity. And even when **Rosh Hashanah** came, my parents came to visit me. How they found their way out there, again, I don't know. And I remember mixing up **Rosh Hashanah** and **Yom Kippur**, I thought you had to fast on -- on -- on -- on **Rosh Hashanah**, I mixed it up completely. Not that as a child I had to fast, but they -- when my parents came, they had them for dinner with -- with the Sunday roast and like that. They were very kind people and I learned to speak English with total immersion.

Q: How long did you stay with the **Palmers**?

A: Til about the 14th of December. So it was September through Dece -- you know, about three and a half months.

Q: And why did you leave them?

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A: Because our number came up to come to **America** and we went to **Southampton** and got on the **SS Volendam** and -- which was the last ship to cross the ocean before **United States** went to war then, in 19 -- what, '41?

Q: When you left **England**, you and your parents, what were you able to bring with you?

A: We were able to bring one trunk, it's a great, big steamer trunk, that's what they took to **England** with them, and they had about 20 or 30 dollars by the time we arrived in **New York**.

Q: What happened to all the things that you shipped to **Holland**?

A: The Germans -- the -- the government -- German government when they invaded **Holland** robbed all those warehouse and emptied out all those lift vans and took ev -- took everything. That's what happened to it.

Q: Are there any -- any memories or thoughts about **England** that we haven't discussed that you'd like to share before I have you leaving?

A: I -- I think that the most impressive thing that -- that I have emotionally is a heritage of a tremendous love of the **United States of America**, which I learned from my parents and the gratefulness of being here and that this truly is a land of salvation.

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Q: But when you reflect back on your time in **England**, is there anything that you haven't mentioned that you -- you want to talk about?

A: There was -- while I was there -- no, I -- I -- I was happy in the country. You know, I was -- we picked berries and I had friends and I was all right. I mean, I -- my parents wrote to me, you know, what -- I think -- I think I was a very, in those days, a very secure child. That changed later in the **United States**.

Q: What were your expectations of **America**?

A: This -- I don't mean this with any sense of -- of -- of prejudice, it's just a child, but I remember it -- my storybooks in -- in **Germany** were that blacks were in **Africa** and wore grass skirts. And I remember the first time I saw -- well, now we say African American -- black on the street, I like got hysterical and was saying, why aren't they wearing -- to my mother -- why aren't they wearing long grass skirts? Who are these people? And I think my expectations were that I wouldn't be separated from my parents any more and that I would be with them, and that I knew that they would have to work very, very hard and I was told I would have to do my share, which I did insofar as that I always -- I always worked very hard, but without resentment, just like they did, to make a life.

Q: Where did you land when you came to this country?

A: In **New York**.

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Q: And what were your first impressions of the **United States**?

A: The very, very, very tall buildings in **New York City**, and the noise. And we had had a -- a wonderful journey. It was over Christmas. It took about eight days to -- to cross. We had escort ships that -- against the submarines, I guess. And I remember Christmas on -- on -- on board the ship with m -- a beautiful Christmas tree in the middle of the dining room and -- and music and dancing and my poor mother was seasick the whol-whole journey. And I had a beautiful, black velvet dress with smocking that my grandmother had made for me and that was like the last glory days, you know, because my father kept saying, you better eat up, we better eat -- eat -- and -- and -- and -- and -- and enjoy ourselves because it's not going to be like this, you know, when we get to **America**. That I remember.

Q: Were there other Jewish refugees on the ship with you?

A: I really don't remember. There must have been. I have a -- a printout, a copy, a microfiche copy of the passengers on the ship, cause a friend of mine was doing li -- research and that she got -- she found. And there were quite a few -- I didn't -- I don't remember any of them, but I know from the list that they -- the ship was filled with refugees.

Q: Where did your family ri -- initially settle when they came to this country?

A: **New York**, because my uncle ha -- had -- was there, my mother's brother.

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Q: And what were your living conditions like when you arrived?

A: Even worse than in **London**. We again lived in somebody's apartment house i-in the **Bronx**, in somebody's bedroom. And my father got a job in a meat packing plant carrying ice on his back and my mother scrubbed floors. And -- but that only lasted unt-until April. And my fa -- my father just couldn't handle it any more, his back was breaking. And my mother had a first cousin in **Washington D.C.**, and they -- by the name of **Rosenfeld**, and they -- the woman was her cousin, **Regi** and they got a job -- her husband's name was **Sigmund**, he got a job for my father at the **Hub** Furniture company, setting up furniture in the warehouse. Furniture came knocked down -- cause he worked there, too. So that's -- we went -- we went to **Washington, D.C.** and lived in their house on **New York** Avenue because they took in refugees. They had one of these big, old brownstones and -- and everybody worked and there was an old grandmother name of **Bertha**, she -- she did the cooking and we again lived in one room, and I, you know, was enrolled in elementary school in **Washington**. I'd been in school in **New York**, too, in elementary school. And there I was in a special class for refugee children, you know, for English. But by the time I got to wa -- by the time in April when I came to **Washington**, I was in a regular class. And my parents -- my mother got a job at the **Toleman** laundry sewing buttons on shirts [**indecipherable**] steam laundry,

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cause in those days buttons were still sewn on the laundried shirts, and my father worked there at the **Hub**, and they worked six days a week and this **Regi** had two sons. One was my age, one was older and I would go to school, you know, walk to school with them. And then they joined like a -- there was a club here, **Verein**, of German Jews in **Washington**, my parents met those people and I met other children and life started.

Q: Did any relief organizations help your family?

A: No.

Q: How were you received by Americans in general? Did they ask you about your experiences in **Germany**?

A: I don't remember that. I don't remember -- I -- I know that I so desperately wanted only to be an American, that I tried very hard. And I think I must have had a British accent, they tell me I had a British accent at tha -- at that point, and I -- that's what I wanted, you know, my parents, you know -- you know, I was -- I was a child. I was sent that first summer already to camp la -- Camp **Louise**, through the **Strauss** family, where the refugee children were sent for free. And they somehow found some shorts and some clothes for me and that was my first wonderful memory, was to be for three weeks at Camp **Louise**, which is the dearest thing to my heart. And both my daughters were counselors there and now my granddaughter

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is going to Camp **Louise** because of the generosity of what the **S-Strauss** family did for poor children.

Q: Was it easy for you to make friends in this country?

A: I've -- I've always had friends, I -- I -- no, I didn't find it difficult. I really had no feelings of -- of prejudice in the **United States**. I have -- I did not go through -- through any that I can remember.

Q: Was there anything that was a particularly difficult adjustment for you?

A: I think the most difficult thing was that now they talk about latchkey children. My mother and father worked six days a week and I came home by myself after s -- after school, because within a year they had saved enough money t-to -- we moved to -- above a grocery store further up **New York** Avenue, Jewish family owned, it was one of those Mom and Pop stores and we lived in an apartment upstairs and of course we took in a roomer in the apartment. And I had to come home every single day by myself and I was 10 years old, you know, at that point. And that was hard. As -- and being an only child and again, I've always read it -- read a lot and I -- and I liked to draw and I liked to -- and I was not allowed to bring other children in, you know, because I was by my -- you know, by myself and so that's what I remember from that life.

Q: Were you able to keep in touch with your family in **Europe**?

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A: No, no. My -- my grandmother -- my grandmother -- the uncle was sent to the -- **Theresienstadt** and he died there. And my grandmother was sent to **Auschwitz** and was gassed. And there was no more news since after the war started, after u -- **United States** war started. And then after the war they got a telegram from the Red Cross, you know, that she had died in **Auschwitz**. And I have looked up the records at the Holocaust Museum and have the copies of the reports in -- from the books that the Germans kept of their demise.

Q: You were a student in this country during the war -- a good part of the war. Do you remember how the war was reported by the media, or discussed in schools? I mean, in what ways did the war touch your life as a child?

A: I think the war touched me insofar as that I was always afraid that we'd get bombed in **America**. And I -- I was -- I was afraid. We'd have blackouts, you know and there were wardens, you know, and I -- I think I have -- I wa -- just plain afraid.

Q: Do you remember when **Germany** attacked the **Soviet Union**?

A: No, I don't. Well, I remember that -- that in the beginning the Germans and the Soviets were -- were allies, and then -- and then, of course, then the Russians became our allies. I mean, you know, but I remember, you know, that -- that bit of history.

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Q: When you think back about your first year in the **United States**, what comes to your mind?

A: Trying to adapt to school. Trying to adapt to learning. Trying to adapt to -- to -- told not to complain because that -- that grandmother who ran the house there, really gave us very, very, very poor food. And wanting clothing like the other children and not having it. And also nice times. I was -- I was given 10 cents to go to the movies on Saturday, and those were the days where there was like the double features and the cartoons and the news. You know, adjusting to **America**.

Q: I'm going to pause so we can change tape.

A: Mm.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: -- ocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Brigitte Freidin**. This is tape two, side **A** and I -- I wanted to have you reflect back on -- on the year 1941, before the **United States** got involved in the war. Is there anything that stands out in your mind about -- about that year? W-Were you concerned -- overly concerned about what was going on in **Europe** or did you kind of take it in stride?

A: I think I was 11 years old and I was a ch -- again, I was living a child's life and it was -- and we were moving t-to -- for the first time in what, two years, two and a half years, where we had an apartment of our own, even though I still had to sleep with my parents because the other bedroom was with a roomer, a -- where we had a roomer. But I remember the rash -- ration book -- books, and I remember the blackouts and you had to pull your window shades down, you know, window shades. And I remember the headlines and the fears that -- that people had, and that's about all that I remember.

Q: Do you remember what you were doing when news came out about **Pearl Harbor** being attacked?

A: I remember very little except now it's war, now it's real.

Q: In what ways did your life change when **America** went to war?

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A: Where we -- I think it was the ra -- the -- the -- the rationing -- the rationing and we had a radio where we didn't have -- well, nobody had televisions, there was -- there was no television. And I think it was the constant -- the constant talk, and -- and the fear and -- and the fear of that bombs might be coming, but I think that also I -- I -- I -- I -- I think that because the conversation was about my grandmother, my uncle and the cousins and all the other relatives in -- in **Germany**, and what was happening and there was a newspaper called "**The Aufbau**." I don't know if it's still in existence. It's -- means the rebuilding. But people got the news, and that was really where -- where the news came about what was happening in **Germany**, and everybody subscribed to it. It was printed in **New York**. And -- and there was always the worry. That's what I remember was tenseness and worry. And that it was wartime and -- and listening to the news every night. And I think that that's what most people remember about that time. Because I had no brothers and sisters and knew no one who was a -- well, there was terrible worry because my mother's -- had a sister by that time, whose husband -- his name was **Jacob -- Jakob** who died in the prison in **Augsburg** from a heart attack. He never even got to the camps, he -- and she came via **Spain** eventually, to **America**. And my mother and father introduced her to a widower who she then married, and lived in -- also in **Washington, D.C.**. And her son had been part of the **Kindertransport** when he

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was 14, he went to **England** on the **Kindertransport**. And **Ken** -- his name used to be **Helmut**, but they always change the names when you went in the army. Then he went to the tank corps with the Brits. And terrible worry about **Ken** -- you know, **Helmut**, what was happening to him. But that was my only big connection with somebody who would be in the service as -- as -- as a personal worry, you know, that way.

Q: The kinds of information you got from "**The Aufbau**," and the kinds of information you got from the radio, was there much overlap?

A: No, I -- I -- I think "**The Aufbau**" information was more what was happening in -- in -- in **Germany** and everywhere else, like with -- with the camps, and with -- with the -- with the carnage that was going -- going on, and probably about how the **United States** wasn't doing anything. And from the newspapers I -- I really remember more when I was 14 -- well, fort -- a -- when I was 15 the war ended, like 13 and 14, I remember, you know, reading the news and -- and -- and when things looked bad being sad and -- and getting excited. You know, a child's attitude is different than an adult's. And again I think it made a difference, the stress level because we didn't have any relatives th-that were fighting.

Q: So when you reflect back on the years of 1942 and '43 and '44, what comes to your mind? What was happening in your life?

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A: Well, what was happening in my life, by -- by that time -- by the time I was 13 they had saved enough money that they bought a house with a thousand dollar deposit, for seven or eight thousand dollars on **Dellafield** Place in the upper northwest. And I was junior high school and I was in the ju -- **JCC** swim team and I was taking art lessons and I was -- I was a very busy -- very busy person. And, you know, I was going to school and I had -- and I had friends. And like all teenagers was very involved with myself. My parents were going to the Americanization school in 1944 because they got their citizenship in 1945, which was a tr -- and during that time -- I remember one time Mrs. **Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt** was at the **JCC** and my mother, she must -- must have been the reception for German club, you know, the re-refugee club. And my mother wa -- came -- went there and she came home and she just couldn't get over that the president's wife, like the queen, should shake a commoner's hand. And it was -- it -- only in **America**, only in **America**. But it was really such a glory and just a thankfulness to be in **America**. That was a constant refrain. And I would only talk English to my parents. I really was nasty. I -- I -- I wanted -- I wanted so much to be an American, and I didn't even want to, like go out with the sons of -- of -- of -- of the other German Jews because I -- I was -- I was a f -- foolish kid in that way, where I -- but you know,

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there was -- my parents would talk German to me and I would only answer in English. And I really lost a great deal of the language.

Q: What was reaction of your family when -- when **Roosevelt** died?

A: My mother and my father just cried and cried and cried. He was the hero, the great hero. And I don't think that they knew how -- which now is in history, that he could have -- he could have saved millions and millions of people -- not millions, but he could have done something so that the carnage wouldn't have happened.

Q: Do you remember reading about the thousand, or just less than a thousand Jews coming to **Oswego** for haven?

A: No.

Q: How did you learn that the war was over in **Europe**?

A: Headlines in the newspapers, it was on the radio. It was yelled out on the street, it's over. I remember go -- being -- going outside and yelling and screaming, it's over, it's over, it's over. And then of course the hope that it would be over as far -- and then what -- shortly then, we bombed **Japan**. I forget how m -- it wasn't that long a time and then that was over.

Q: What efforts did your family make to find relatives and friends in **Europe**?

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A: They -- they knew right after the war, and even during it that people that were the closest were all -- all were -- were killed. All were gassed, all were, insofar as family that -- that was left in **Europe**.

Q: You said that they knew during the war?

A: Well, not -- not really, they guessed, they guessed.

Q: When did you begin to realize the full extent of the genocide?

A: I think right -- I think when the telegrams came from the Red Cross that -- that the family was -- was gone, and of course in the newspapers, the American newspapers, when you started seeing the pictures of the camps and the liberation of the camps, that's when the realities really struck.

Q: During this time that you were in the **States**, up through the war years, nobody asked you about your experiences in **Germany**?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Did you follow the **Nuremberg** trials?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Did you follow the **Nuremberg** trials?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Did you feel justice was done?

A: I feel justice was done, yes.

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Q: Did you follow the events in **Palestine**?

A: N-No, I really was not that concerned with **Israel**, with **Palestine**.

Q: In the years immediately after the war, what was happening in your life? So you're now 15 years old and the war is over. In those first few post-war years, what was happening in your life?

A: I was -- because we were poor, I was already working as a salesgirl in -- in -- in -- in a second rate department store, lower **7th Street**. When I was 14, I ha -- I got a work permit so that I could have clothes, cause I wanted to be dressed like the other girls and the only way to get it was to work. And I was brought up that it was my job as much, to help with the family. In other words, I made the beds and started dinner for when my parents came home, because by that time my mother was working in small fur manufacturing company called **Louies' Furs**, and she became the forelady fo-for making the linings for -- for the fur coats. And my father -- oh, my father had a -- with his friend they opened -- they bought a delicatessen on **Sheridan** Street, which lasted -- that was when I was 12 and 13 and my mother then went to work there. And that lasted about two and a half years, and she realized that I was being left alone, because it was a day and seven day a week proposition. And because my father -- my -- my father's sense of values were not too good. He had trouble with --with what was right and what was wrong. He -- he actually, I think --

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friend of ours who had met him and was a medical person said he'd become a -- like a psychopath. And this was -- this was -- a lot of it was due to his experiences at the camps in **Dachau** and -- and his [indecipherable] and losing everything. He never really adjusted. He didn't learn English that well. My mother -- my mother learned English very well, could spell. I mean, she had an accent, but could read, write, spell, but he -- he never -- he never adjusted that well, as I said.

Q: So you were in school and you were working. What about your social life?

A: That's when I -- the rejection started. That was when, because I went to a school called **Roosevelt** high school, where all the -- it was about 80 percent Jewish kids, 70 percent en -- and it was sororities, fraternities which were really outlawed. And I wanted to be part of, and I didn't have the clothing, and I didn't -- and I tried too hard, and that's where I was the refugee. That's where I was not treated right. Because I had the brains, but not the -- the -- the moxie. I didn't -- I didn't know how to be part of the American kids. I didn't know, cause I was too European and too -- tried too hard. And that's really -- from the Jewish kids is where the rejection came.

Q: Did you and your family maintain any level of religious observance when you came to this country?

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A: Oh yes. We -- my parents joined **B’Nai Israel** synagogue and -- which is a Conservative synagogue, and they did not -- she did not keep kosher any more, because she didn't have the money for two sets of dishes, or the kosher meat. And -- but it was never -- the cooking was always as if it was kosher, you know, no mixing. And all the holidays -- and we always had Friday night -- Friday night services, you know. And my mother -- my mother was really the religious one. There was -- she was always with the prayer book, she read -- they both read Hebrew fluently. And all the holidays were kept. And I think it was -- it -- it was -- I was brought up in -- in -- in a religious home where it was always as -- as -- as soon as the repatriation money comes from **Germany**, as soon as we get money, we're going to buy dishes and we're gonna -- we're gonna go back to keeping kosher and then maybe she could stop working. And unfortunately, my mother died when I was 23 years old, of breast cancer. So, they had just gotten -- they hadn't even gotten the monies yet, and I -- so she never got to -- to reap the benefit. But she felt God was punishing her, and made a promise to God that if she got well she would go back to being more religious. She -- she -- she was truly, truly a very deeply observant religious person. My father not as much, he -- I think he could have cared less.

Q: How much education -- how much formal education did you get in this country?

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A: I, of course, graduated high school. And then I had -- I went to college for three years and didn't finish.

Q: You got married?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me about your husband?

A: I met my husband when I was 16 and he was 17, and he is American born from a family that's been -- came from **Russia** and **Austria**. Mother **Austria** fa -- in the middle 1800's, so they're real **ipsy-pipsy** Americans. And he was a consulting engineer, electrical engineer, and we got married when I was 21 and he was 22. And he went to school at night to finish his degree, and we both worked very, very hard and built up all -- also.

Q: And you mentioned children?

A: I have two daughters. One is 45 and the other is 40, and they're both -- they -- which I never -- I never realized it but they tell me that the Holocaust was always like over their heads, that I kept it -- that I talked about it. I've talked about the six million, and I've talked about their heritage as Jews and that we must never, never, never forget that they're -- their Judaism.

Q: What did you do for your professional career as an adult?

A: I am a interior designer and I had my own business for 30 years.

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Q: Did you ever return to your hometown in **Germany**?

A: Yes. I went back to -- my husband was a delegate to International Engineering Council in **Denmark** when I was what -- 19 -- 19 thir -- when I was 35, so, in 1965 -- '64. And I went with him and he wanted to see where I was born and I didn't want to go but he insisted. So I went back to **Augsburg** then. And my father's lawyer welcomed us and his wife took us sightseeing and I remembered everything, I remembered every single street. I remembered everything til we got to the house in the suburbs there, and there I got hysterical and broke up, and -- and -- and -- and I just couldn't stay there. And we got out of **Germany**, fast.

Q: How were you treated by the Germans while you were there?

A: Well, the -- really, the only -- as a matter of fact, w-we were driving. We had come down the **Romantic** Road through **Dinkelsbühl** an-and -- and that whole **Romantic** Road. And it was a very rainy night and we were driving into **Augsburg**. This was beginning June, and we were lost. And there was a guy riding a bicycle next to the car and I asked him -- I wa -- I was looking for the **[indecipherable]** hotel. And he looked in the car, this is really weird -- I mean, I am now what, 34 - 35 years old, and he looked in the car and he said to me, he said, were you -- was your name **Brigitte Mandle**? And I said yes. And -- you know, in German. He said, I know you. I used to deliver the mattresses for your father. Follow me. And he took

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us to the hotel. So -- and my father's lawyer, who had been working in the underground all those years and working fo-for -- for the Brits and became the first mayor of **Augsburg** and had saved the records of the Jewish people --

Q: You mean post-war mayor?

A: Yes, post-war -- war mayor. He -- he and his wife treated us royally. And that's really, you know, the only Germans, you know, that we met. We only stayed like two days.

Q: Are you involved with any Holocaust related groups or organizations?

A: No, I'm not. I'm just a volunteer at the museum, where I do translations from German into English.

Q: What special something do you bring to your work at the museum, that's the result of your experiences?

A: I think it's what the museum has done for me. The museum has made me recognize the importance of the Holocaust, and that it can never happen again and that the world has to know. And I think I'm one of the greatest spokespeople for the museum, that everybody should see the museum. And the museum has made me realize the heritage that I have and how important it is for me to remember, and my children, and everyone else. It's done more for me than I have ever done for the museum.

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Q: Were there any special moments or experiences that you've had at the museum that you'd care to share?

A: No, I -- I -- I really just go and do my work, and --

Q: Tell me a -- a little bit about your work.

A: Oh ma -- my work? I -- I think -- I think the biggest one was I did a series of translations of the letters during -- you mentioned the **Nuremberg** trials, of the inmates of -- of -- that they wrote home to their -- to their wives, to their mistresses, to their children, and how they never, ever, ever mention, not in one single letter, I'm so sorry, or I -- I sh -- I wish I could change things. They only wrote about -- now, I realize they must have been censored, these letters, but they wrote in the typical German letters, quoted from [indecipherable] and from **Schiller** and about life. Life is beautiful and I hope the flowers are blooming in springtime and I hope you have enough to eat, because their monies were taken away and their substances and their -- the families, and it was -- and how much I miss you and how much I love you and -- but no remorse and no -- nothing of the past, just worry about their families. And that impressed me, that I was -- that I was able to see these letters and -- and to translate them. And about the **Saint Louis**. All the correspondence from the people, the telegrams and -- and -- and the letters that people have saved from what went on in that **Saint Louis**, and the -- and desperation of these people that -- I

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think that that's the -- the most amazing thing that I am privileged enough to help in bringing this to the world, you know, into English. And ha -- I'll add this, that I'm amazed that I'm able to do the translations, because I only had up to a third or fourth grade education in German. But it -- it -- now I can't do -- I don't do the technical things, they have other people that do the technical. But I am able to -- to really, really do this and it's like -- it's like a gift and -- and because of that I'm able to speak German again, even though I -- I speak no German with -- with this translation, but it seems to have gone from my head to my mouth. So this is, you know, an advantage, because it's a language to know, like any language.

Q: Do you speak publicly about your experiences?

A: The only public speaking I've done was I did a first person, in November.

Q: You mentioned grandchildren before. What have you told them about your -- your childhood?

A: I've appeared in the first grade for both my granddaughters, the ones -- local ones, with -- like a -- I -- I happen to have -- that's the only thing I have from **Germany** are two **kiddush** cups. So I took the **kiddush** cups to show that this is what life used to be, that we were able to bring things over and talked about having to escape. This is -- you know, an-and about being born in **Germany**, and about **Hitler**, keeping it mild, but you know, I talked with the teacher. But they don't --

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they -- they don't really ask me that many questions. My grandchildren are -- are age three to 10.

Q: So anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to add before we finish the interview? Anything that we haven't covered?

A: No, I think we've pretty well -- pretty well covered my life. I -- I find the older I get -- I get, the more important I think it is, the reality of -- that the world cannot forget, and that I wish that people would just care more for each other and -- and love each other and all that, you know, sort of thing, and -- and not have prejudice, not have prejudice. Have no pecking orders.

Q: I'd like to thank you for doing the interview and this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Brigitte Freidin**. Thank you.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview