Interview with Marianne Liebermann
January 9, 2004

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Marianne Liebermann,** conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on January 9th, 2004 in **Bethesda, Maryland**. This is tape number one, side **A.** What is your full name?

Answer: **Marianne Sorter Liebermann.**

Q: And your name at birth was?

A: **Marianne Sorter.**

Q: Did you have a middle name?

A: No.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born in **Vienna** on October 29, 1929 in the **Rudolfina House** and it was a Tuesday.

Q: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your family and the background, how fa -- how far back in **Vienna** it went, or other countries.

A: As far as I know, both my grandparents, my father's parents and my mother's parents were born in **Vienna** and they all lived there, fairly close to us and I remember them parti -- partially from memory and partially from my dad's pictures. And we were, I guess, an average, middle class, Jewish, Viennese family. And my

father was an attorney, my mother was a housewife and my grandfather was a doctor and my other grandfather had a leather business in which my father worked.

Q: And what were the names -- your parent's names were?

A: My father's name was **Eric Alexander Sorter**. My mother's name was **Gisele Sorter.** My mother's parents were **Adele** and **Emil Koernig** and my father's parents were **Emil** and **Hilda Sorter.**

Q: And did you have a large extended family of cousins and aunts and uncles?

A: Well, not really. My mother was one of three, and my father had one brother.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I had no brothers and sisters, I was an only child.

Q: And what kind of neighborhood did you live in?

A: I would say it was a middle class kind of neighborhood. We lived in an apartment which we owned and it was quite large, and in those days people had lots of servants, and we had someone who came in to do the laundry because it was before washing machines and dryer. And my mother always took care of me, but when she had to go out, there was always someone there with me. The last one I remember was **Umgayla**.

Q: And was it a Jewish neighborhood or a non-Jewish, or a mixed?

Interview with Marianne Liebermann
January 9, 2004

A: You know, I really don't know. I really don't know because a-as people probably know, when you lived in **Vienna** in the thir -- in the 30's, you considered yourself Viennese before you considered yourself Jewish. We lived across the street from the Temple, and there was no separation of church and state, and so when I went to school -- excuse me -- we had religion in the school. And the Catholic kids went on one floor and the Protestant kids went on another and the Jewish kids went upstairs. And I remember I had a teacher and her name was Mrs. **Wolfe** and she always told us we shouldn't be afraid of her because her name was **Wolfe.**

Q: Was she a Jewish teacher?

A: I believe so. But we had cards, I still have one, with ma -- a picture of **Moses** on it and we had to get the cards punched when we went to services every Saturday. That was like, you know, our homework.

Q: How religious was your family and how affiliated Jewishly were they?

A: Well, we belonged to the Temple. You know, you -- in **Vienna** at that time you were taxed according to -- through -- through the Temple, because the Temple had to send in lists of who was a member. That's why it was so easy, you know, for the Nazis, and you were taxed according to that affiliation.

Q: And you said -- so you obviously went to a -- what we call a public school today.

A: Yes.

Interview with Marianne Liebermann
January 9, 2004

Q: And wh-what age did you start?

A: I -- there was no kindergarten in **Vienna** at that time and I went to a private kindergarten and my teacher was Miss **Sophie** and she taught me French be -- and then, when we were going to emigrate, my mother asked her to give me English lessons, but the only English lessons she gave me were nursery rhymes. I was very good on **Humpty Dumpty**, that was one of my specialties.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: German. Viennese German.

Q: Did you know any Yiddish?

A: No, no. Nobody in my family spoke Yiddish.

Q: Did you celebrate any Jewish holidays?

A: Yes, we c-celebrate, especially with my mother's father. We usually had **Seder** at my grandparents, I remember that, and I have a German Hebrew **Haggadah**, which I still have. And that was about all I remember. Now, in **Vienna** at that time, I had a Christmas tree. My parents, at a -- there was no, you know, there was no discussion about it. Every kid I knew who was Jewish had a Christmas tree, the Christmas tree was for me and the maid. It was like, that's what you did at that time and I got th -- we didn't have stockings or anything like that, but I got my presents under the tree. That was a Viennese tradition.

Q: So there was no discussion of what the holiday really meant?

A: You mean Christmas?

Q: Chri-Chris -- Christian-wise.

A: No, no. It was just, you know, I mean, i-it's contrary to here where, you know, you make a big deal out of **Hanukkah** because you don't want the kids to feel inferior. Everybody I knew got their presents at Christmas.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And what about friends? Did you have non-Jewish friends also?

A: Most of my friends were -- I think all my friends were Jewish, I think. I-I -- I still have a very good friend who lives in **New Jersey** and she and I went to kindergarten together and we've kept up all these years.

Q: Did you observe **Shabbat**?

A: No.

Q: And wh-what -- **Kashrut?**

A: No.

Q: No. **[indecipherable]**. Did you feel Jewish?

A: Not particularly. Not particularly. I mean, I -- there was no problem about, you know, kids going to different places for their religion. I mean, I never felt that I was better, worse, inferior or anything like that. It was just a fact, you know? I wa -- I

knew I was Jewish. You have to remember, I was eight years old when I left, so from the time I was six to the time I was eight, that -- those were the only years that I wa -- I was in -- i-in school. By the way, I-I was a very protected child, I never went to school by myself. There were no school buses, my mother walked me to school every day. She walked me home t -- for lunch, she walked me back from lunch, she picked me up again, a-and so on. So --

Q: So even though you were -- obviously you were quite young when you left, you -- you were not that independent as a very young child.

A: Not at all, not at all. As a matter of fact there was a grocery store I remember, very close to my house and I was never allowed to go there by myself. I -- it was just -- you know, it never came up. And then when **Hitler** marched into **Austria** in -- I think it was March third, '38, my mother took me out of school. Now, I don't know whether she had to take me out of school, whether she wanted to protect me to -- you know, and so on. And that's when I started those English lessons with **Humpty Dumpty.**

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So up -- up to the time of the **anschluss** you were leading a normal life --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and a child's life.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: We'll get to that point in a minute.

A: Okay.

Q: Did you have -- and again, you were very young, of course --

A: Right.

Q: -- did you have any other interests of hobbies or playing, or did you have any favorite toys? Anything like that that you can describe, as a young child?

A: I had a beautiful doll carriage. It was gray and it had windows and it had a roof that rolled -- you could roll up and it had blue curtains on the windows and when we were here for a few years, my dad and I always used to take walks, and one day we passed the -- we lived in an apartment on **Riverside Drive**, and I passed the garbage bin and there was my carriage. My mother did not ask me if she could throw it out, she just did it. And it -- I'll never forget it. It was like the worst shock of my life.

Q: What was her rationale for throwing it out?

A: Well, at -- at that time my grandmother and my aunt and my cousin, we were all living in one apartment. And I guess she figured, you know, I was old enough not to need the doll carriage. But again, I had -- my granddaughter **Lauren** had interviewed me and I explained to her how -- you know, she asked me if I was

scared when I had to come to **America**, and I tried to explain to her -- she's 15 now -- how in those days, in 1938, if you were a child in **Vienna**, or at least in my family, if your parents said, we're going to **America**, which my mother did, I never questioned it. It was just, you know, that's what you did. You didn't say, oh I'm sorry I'm not going, or I'm sorry, I'm staying with a friend or -- or anything like that. It was just a very different time. And my mother always did say, cause sh -- I think she wanted to paint it as black as possible, that we were going to live in a basement. And I was such a naïve kid that when we got here and we didn't live in a basement, I said, how come we're not living in a basement? But you have to remember, I was eight years old, it was 1938, that's the way it was.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: My parents were actually really wonderful in retrospect, because I -- I really never was scared. I know we didn't have a lot of money, in retrospect, but I never had the feeling that **A**, I was going to starve, **B**, I was poor, **C,** I wouldn't have enough clothes. I never had that feeling, so they -- they must have just been very positive people to convey that message to me.

Q: How old were -- were you when you first heard of man named **Hitler**?

A: Well, I remember very clearly. It was the President **Schuschnigg,** was his name, in **Vienna**, when he abdicated, and I remember everybody sitting in our living room

and my mother crying. So it must have been very shortly, you know, before the **anschluss**. So I was -- I was eight.

Q: Mm-hm. And what are your memories of the **anschluss**?

A: Well, my mother took me out of school. She didn't really explain it too much, but I think all my -- my three best friends also, you know, couldn't go to school any more. But, I mean, they didn't tell us that anything horrible was going to happen to us if we continued to go to school or anything like that. Again, it was this naiveté, you know, of your mother says you're not going to school, you're going to have English lessons cause you're going to **America**. You know, that's how it was.

Q: So you and your friends, did you talk about that --

A: No.

Q: -- at that time?

A: No. I think we must have talked about, you know, who was leaving first and -- and -- and those kind of things, but I -- I really don't remember.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And so then your -- your mother started to prepare and your father started to prepare to leave?

A: Right, well --

Q: What -- do you know what they did?

A: -- a very dramatic thing happened with my dad, tha -- ma -- as I said, my dad was an attorney, but he worked for my grandfather and he was like -- I don't know how you called it in -- in German, but he was the attorney at the -- at the office, because my grandfather's office was in **Vienna**, and the factory, the leather factory was in **Poland**. And --

Q: What -- what -- where in **Poland**, do you know?

A: In **Warsaw.**

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And not many people know this, but before the Nazis started to wear swastikas, they wore blue carnations. And the accountant in my dad's office wore a blue carnation. And after the **anschluss** he had a gun and went into my grandfather's office and said, this office is mine now. He didn't shoot my grandfather. But my father, who was, you know, young, saw the writing on the wall. And the people who gave us our affidavit were customers of his in **America**, who are not Jewish and saved our lives.

Q: O-Okay, let's talk about that, the -- the pe --

A: Okay.

Q: Yeah, if you could go in more detail.

A: Sure. Well, their name was **Simon**, **Helen** and **Leroy Simon**, they lived in **Abington, Pennsylvania**. And they gave my parents and me our affidavit so we could come to the **United States**.

Q: And how did they get contacted?

A: I guess my father cabled them or called them or -- you know, somehow. Mr. **Simon** used to come to purchase leather, you know, from my grandfather. So that's how my father knew him, but only very slightly.

Q: What was the name of your grandfather's company -- business.

A: **Emil Koernig** and son.

Q: **Emil Koernig** and s --

A: **Koernig** and **sohn** really, and i-it means **Emil Koernig** and son.

Q: -- and son. So then your father was able to -- this is after the **anschluss**, he --

A: Right.

Q: -- ca-cables the **Simons --**

A: Right.

Q: -- in the **United States**, and then they send the affidavits.

A: Right.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Well, we didn't -- we left **Vienna** in September of that year.

Q: Okay, okay. What was -- again we'll -- we'll -- we'll talk about that soon.

A: Sure.

Q: Did you see German soldiers?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember.

Q: Did you see any swastikas?

A: I must have, but again, you know, I -- I don't remember that.

Q: Or banners, or any outward symbols?

A: I mean, I've seen -- I've seen a lot of movies, you know, about that time, but I -- I -- I don't remember, I -- I really don't. I mean, I -- I never remember being afraid, I-I know that. And there must have been situations, you know, that came up, but I don't rem -- know.

Q: So except for school --

A: Mm.

Q: -- not going to school --

A: Right.

Q: -- your life -- I mean, that was a big change, of course, but in other aspects your life did not change in da --

A: My life just continued.

Q: -- continued. Tell me about your private lessons then, when you didn't go to school.

A: Oh, well I think either Miss **Sophie** came to our house or I went to her house. And, you know, she had like picture books in -- in English and so on. I was an English as a second language teacher, and you know, what comes around goes around, and she tried to teach me English.

Q: Was that some --

A: She helped my French too, at the same time.

Q: Was that something you enjoyed doing?

A: No, I didn't particularly like it because I really preferred going to school. I didn't really like, you know, one to one so much because y-you always had to show your homework and, you know, things like that.

Q: Were you upset that you weren't seeing your friends, or did --

A: I saw my fr --

Q: -- you see your non-Jewish friends after school?

A: I don't think I had any non-Jewish friends, so, you know, we just kept up, you know, in th -- in those days it was before television, before a lot of movies, you know. Seeing your friends meant you went to your friend's house or they came to your house, and that -- that kept up. And I'm sure in my house and their house there

was a lot of talk about emigration and where were you going and what were you doing, but I wasn't part of that, I was a child, you know.

Q: Uh-huh. So when you played with your friends, you didn't talk about th -- being fearful or being frightened about what would happen?

A: No, no, I -- it-it's like that's all gone. So I -- I guess it didn't make a big impression on me, or I was too stupid, or something, I don't know.

Q: I think you were young.

A: Right.

Q: So to get back now to what was happening. So your father cabled these people, they got the affidavits --

A: Right.

Q: -- and then?

A: Well, we left in September and we went to **Cherbourg**, which is in **France** --

Q: Wh-When you left, you said you -- you -- you didn't question, your parents told you that's what you do.

A: Right.

Q: What did you take with you?

A: Oh. Well, my clothes and my doll, which I still have. And my doll carriage,

which my mother threw out, and books. I ha -- I have some German books that I -- I took at that time.

Q: Is that because you liked to read?

A: Yeah, mm-hm. Maybe my mother said, you know, you'll need some books to read on the ship, I don't know. But my mother --

Q: What -- wh-what was it like to say goodbye to your friends?

A: I don't think it was very traumatic because I presumed I would see them again. As far as I know everybody, you know, escaped. Not necessarily to **America**, but they all escaped. And -- so anyway, getting back to the ship. So we went to **Cherbourg.**

Q: How -- how did you get there?

A: I think by train, because I remember my grandparents being at the station and that was very sad and I -- I still had two great-grandmothers at that time, who were killed in the camps, so a -- we never really heard through the Red Cross or anything, what ever happened to them.

Q: Do you remember what your grandparents said -- said to you as you left?

A: Well, everybody was crying, that I d -- I do remember, and lots of hugs and kisses, and so on and so forth. My grandfather died shortly after **Hitler** came, my father's father. And my grandmother moved into a **pensionne**, like a -- like a -- kind

of a hotel. And she and my uncle ev-eventually, you know, came to **America** and she lived with us all of the rest of her days. And my mother's parents -- my uncle had been sent to school before **Hitler** came to **England** and he was in **England** and he managed to get them to **England** after **Hitler**. And they were there the whole time during the bombing, which was very bad for them. My grandmother had a stroke and so on. But eventually they did come to the **United States**.

Q: While you were still in **Vienna**, what did **Hitler** mean to you? Did it have photographs, or was it a symbol of anything?

A: I -- I don't have any recollection of that, I-I just don't. I guess at eight I didn't read the newspapers, you know. There was no television. My parents probably turned off the news, you know, so I -- I really --

Q: I was going to ask if you heard his voice on the radio.

A: No, I -- I don't believe so. I-I mean, as I said, I remember shu -- **Schuschnigg,** you know, I remember that, but I don't remember anything about **Hitler**. I know that -- I don't know who taught me that, but to this day, if I see a movie or anything that has **Hitler** on it, we -- we all go **ssssss**, like that. And I still do that, even on -- at home, in a -- in a -- you know, on my television. That was sort of ingrained in me.

Q: Uh-huh. So you take the train. Did you -- did you feel bad about leaving **Vienna**? I mean, this is your home.

A: No, I was with my parents. We were going on a trip, I -- you know, it -- it was -- it was okay. **Cherbourg**, you know, was in **France**, I could speak French so I didn't -- I didn't really worry about it.

Q: Ha-Had you gone away in the summers? Had you ta-taken coun --

A: Yes.

Q: -- country trips when you -- before you left?

A: Yes, I have pictures of my cousin and I going with my grandparents, you know, to a place where there were a lot of deer. And I learned to swim when I was very young and I know that we went to **Baden**. And I was three when I learned how to swim and I still like to swim. So -- I forgot, where were we?

Q: Well, it we -- we were talking about your leaving, going to **France** --

A: Oh

Q: -- and I was asking if you had experience --

A: Right.

Q: -- traveling outside of **Vienna**.

A: Yeah, yeah. And my grandfather had a car with a chauffeur, so I was used to, you know, being in a car, so I -- I don't know if we took the car to the train or, you

know, whatever. But anyway, when we got to **Cherbourg**, we got on the ship, the **Europa** and --

Q: Now we're talking about th -- September 1938?

A: Yes, yes. And it all seemed very glamorous to me and so on and so forth. And a few days out to sea, it was the time of **Chamberlain,** when **Chamberlain** went to **Hitler** to try to appease him, they recalled the ship. And of course --

Q: This was the **Munich** conference in mu --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- in **Munich.**

A: Right. So, I mean, I didn't know anything about what was going on and I'm sure my parents were really scared, but they didn't convey that to me and my father just told me that we were going back to **Paris**. And I was thrilled because I could speak French, and -- you know. So we were in **Paris** for a week and I'm sure that must have been very difficult for my parents cause they didn't know, you know, whether they'd ever be able to leave again, but we did.

Q: Tell me about the ship, the name of the ship.

A: **Europa**.

Q: And what line?

A: German. And we were able to go first class because you couldn't take out a lot of money, but you could buy first class tickets. So we had a very nice stateroom, and you know, all that.

Q: What did your parents take with them, do you know?

A: Well, my parents packed their furniture and the piano and all that in what was called a lift. It was like a cargo container. And that came --

Q: On the boat with you?

A: I'm not sure, but it was there when we settled, finally.

Q: Right.

A: And so anyway, after a week in **Paris**, the ship continued --

Q: Wa -- do you remember that week and what you did?

A: Not really. I guess we walked around. You know, we didn't have a lot of money, so I remember being like in a café, you know, my parents drinking coffee, that kind of stuff, but I do -- I don't really remember where we stayed.

Q: Di-Did you sense any tension among the people in **France** at that point?

A: No, no. Pa -- I think it rained a lot. I sort of reme -- I sort of remember that. And anyway, getting back on the ship and it was in the middle of the night, I remember that, and we had to climb up ropes to get on the ship, there was no gangplank. And when the ship started to sail the next day, I got very sick. I probably had like a strep

throat. It was before penicillin and my mother kept saying to me, you have to get well, or we have to go to **Ellis Island** and we can't get to **America**. Then, I think she was really, you know, like petrified. And I remember there was a woman on the ship, she was probably a nurse, and she -- you know, in retrospect she was like **Brunhilda**. She was very big and very blonde and had a very loud voice. And the way they treated, you know, fevers at that time was to wrap you up in lots of towels and make you sweat. So that's what I did, and thank God I got well, and we didn't have to go to l -- **Ellis Island**, and we landed, I think in -- probably lower **New York.** And my dad's very good friend and later his business partner met us. And I remember he brought me some **Coca-Cola** and I didn't know what it was and I didn't want to drink it. It was a big deal. Anyway, we lived in **New Jersey.**

Q: Okay, let's talk a little bit about ma -- the voyage, what you remember about the voyage.

A: Well, just I was sick and I had to sweat and I had to get well.

Q: So were -- di -- were there other people in your position leaving, Jews leaving on that same voyage?

A: I imagine there were, because my husband, whom I didn't meet til ni -- til 1947, came on the next voyage on the same ship. And he and his mother were waiting for the ship and it was so late because they didn't tell them that it had returned.

Q: So you're assuming that there were people on --

A: Right.

Q: -- in your -- in your journey.

A: I mean, I was in bed. I was in bed sweating so I -- you know, I didn't know what was going on.

Q: What condition were you in when you landed, were you cured, were you better?

A: I was probably a little **shvakh** and pale, you know? And my granddaughter, who did this interview for school for me made up a story that my mother probably took her lipstick and rouged my cheeks so that I would -- you know, look -- look all right.

Q: What did **America** mean to an eight year old from **Vienna**?

A: Well, my mother said we were going to live in a basement. I knew I was going to have a birthday soon. I was looking forward to my birthday. My mother was a wonderful Viennese baker and as it turned out, my first birthday -- we landed here on October third, my ninth birthday was October 29th, and we lived in this rooming house in **Union City, New Jersey** and my birthday present was two blue plastic barrettes. And I thought that was the cat's meow, I was thrilled. My mother, I don't know where she got all the ingredients, but she made me a beautiful cake with candles and everything. And my dad's friend and his wife lived in this same

boarding house. So they all sang "**Happy Birthday**", I don't know whether it was in English or German, but that was my first birthday. And I went to the **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** elementary school. And there the kids made fun of me because I really had the wrong clothes. In those days I -- I h -- I had, you know, German high shoes. Now, you know, they're in style, but in those days -- so after a few weeks, I don't know, my mother managed to scrape up some money and bought me American clothes, cause that was really important to me.

Q: What were your parents reactions? Do you have any memory of that when they landed, and the dock?

A: No, I just remember the **Coca-Cola.**

Q: So have you studied about **America** before? Did it have any symbolic meaning to you as a very young child?

A: No, I think I must have realized it was a safe place, you know? But other than that I really didn't know anything. But it didn't take me very long to learn English, and I always did very well in school, and I o -- never had any trouble making friends, so -- you know, I had friends. I had the language. And when we moved to **New York** wa -- a short time later, a few months later, there were many other refugee kids, because we lived in **Washington Heights,** which -- in **New York,** which was sort of refugee land. And then my grandmother came, my uncle came.

And it was very hard for my dad to start bi -- his business because you know, you weren't allowed to take out a lot of money. Fortunately my grandfather had some connecti -- he was a doctor and he had some connection with the **Phoenix** Insurance Company. And somehow my dad was able to obtain the monetary death benefits after my grandfather died in **America.** And that's how he was able to start his business. It was **Sopter** Fabrics, it was an -- originally an import - export business and then after the war it became a textile business.

Q: So you stayed in **New Jersey** just for a few months --

A: Few months.

Q: -- you said, and then you moved to **Washington Heights.** Why did you move to washingt -- or how -- why was that chosen as a place to live?

A: Well, I guess that's where a lot of refugees lived, and maybe my parent's friends knew other people, you know, who lived there. And I remember we lived at 40 **Thayer Street** and we had an apartment. And then when my grandmother came, she and I shared a room. And a few years later we moved to **Riverside Drive** and we lived there a number of years because eventually my aunt came from **England** with my cousin and she lived with us also. And --

Q: Wh-When you first came to the **United States**, did you miss **Vienna**? Did you think about it? Did you think you'd want to go back there?

A: I do -- I -- I don't remember missing anything. I had my parents, you know, and I had my school work and I had friends, and I was eight years old, you know, and as I sa -- as I tell my granddaughter now, being eight years old then and being eight years old now is an entirely different story. I mean, you were -- I mean, at least in my circle of -- of friends, I mean, we weren't independent. We did as our parents told us, you know. If they'd say jump, we'd jump. If they said red, we'd say red. You know, that's how we lived.

Q: All right, now you're in **Washington Heights** --

A: Right.

Q: -- and you attend a new school.

A: Right.

Q: So you had to adjust, as the child --

A: Yes, you're right.

Q: -- to a new school and new friends. What was that like in the beginning?

A: Well, there's a funny story connected at it -- it was **P.S. 152** in upper **Manhattan**. And I never did have a sense of direction, and I met this girl **Agnes** and she showed me how to get from the front door to our classroom. And I was in that school -- I started school in **New Jersey** in **3B**. At that time the grades were divided into **A** and **B.** And for the -- from the time, I-I guess until sixth grade, I

went the way **Agnes** showed me, even though I knew there was a shorter way. But I was just one of those kids, I mean, you know, somebody tells me what to do, so I -- I -- I just did it. But I had to relearn the way we did math, the way they set up division problems and multiplication problems in **Europe** and **America**, that was different, so I had to learn that. But the kids were very nice to me at that point, because I had the amer -- quote unquote, the American clothes, you know. And I could speak some English and they -- they were just nice kids, you know. Like one showed me math and one showed me about the lunchroom. And so I don't remember, you know, having any traumatic times. I had my best friend **Toby** who was a bridesmaid at my wedding and i-it was okay.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Marianne Liebermann.** This is tape number one, side **B**, and you were talking about now that you're living in **Washington Heights** and you were at school and getting around the school building and your friends. So you did feel accepted there?

A: Mm.

Q: And were there other children in your situation?

A: I believe -- I believe there were. I know that my friend **Gerda** lived right close to me and we went to school together. And I heard about some other people who had come from **Vienna**. They didn't, you know, necessarily go to my school. I do remember then when the war started and we all had to wear **I.D.** tags. And we moved to **Riverside Drive** from **Thayer Street**, and --

Q: Now, we're talking about September '39, is that when the war --

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: -- started in -- yeah. Wha-What did your **I.D.** tag say?

A: It had my name, my date of birth and maybe my phone number, I'm not sure.

Q: Was this - all children had to wear them?

A: All children, all children, because in case there were air raids. And my parents -- now, we moved before I finished sixth grade and my parents wanted me to finish **P.S. 152,** so I had a very long walk home to **Riverside Drive** from **P.S. 152.** And in later years it -- it occurred to me that here we wore these tags for **I.D.** in case there was an air raid and there was a problem, but they sent us home. And here I was, you know, by this time nine years old, walking home in this so-called air raid which, thank God was a test, but I -- I definitely remember that.

Q: So did you talk about your experiences, did you tell the American children about your life in **Vienna**? Did they ask you about that, or did the teachers talk to you

about that?

A: No, no. Not r -- not r -- not really. It was just -- I was never very good in math, and so after my -- some of the kids showed me, you know, how to do the math, sometimes I would say, well you know, in my old school or in **Vienna** we did it like this. And the teacher would say well, now you're going to do it, you know, like that.

Q: It -- did you feel very Viennese still, or were you starting to feel American?

A: Oh, I think I got Americanized very quickly. My father had been to school at the University of **London**, so he spoke a beautiful English with a very British accent, which he lost after several years. So maybe that's why I, you know, was able to learn English quickly. But I -- I sort of lived -- I know I did l -- a -- a bilingual life, because when my grandmother came -- she didn't learn too much English when she came, and so when she -- she'd come into the room I'd switch to German, and I didn't even really realize which language I was speaking, but I was, you know, living in t -- in -- in two languages.

Q: So you -- you felt very accepted, you didn't feel like a foreigner, in a sense?

A: No, no I didn't, because there were other children. I didn't necessarily know them all in my school, but there were other children who had come from **Europe.**

Q: Mm-hm. And what about the teachers? Did any of them make any remarks to you --

A: Not to me.

Q: -- or any -- did you experience any anti-Semitism?

A: No, no, I really didn't.

Q: What was your parent's reaction, if you remember, in September '39? Again, I know you were young, you were only 10.

A: When the war broke out? They were very worried about my mother's parents. And I guess by that time they were in **England**. And you know, the bombing and all that. And I'm sure my father had a lot of business difficulties, because as I said, he didn't have that much money and even though he had the money from my grandfather, it was still, you know, difficult to establish a business at that time.

Q: Were you able to do any other activities outside of school?

A: I was a girl scout and we used to have meetings with boy scout troops and I learned how to make model airplanes. And my mother was always a very good cook and no matter, you know, whether we had a lot or a little, that we always had company at the house. So, you know, there were always people around, and --

Q: Were these people American born or European?

A: No, they were -- they were also refugees like we were. And in the beginning, in order to help my father, my mother did piecework with her -- her friend. And also she made apple strudels, which she sold and I -- I vividly remember her pulling the

dough in the kitchen. And I don't know how she sold it, where she sold it or whatever, but whatever you know, she did, she did that for awhile.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you become athlet -- were you athletic in any ta -- any time and d -- and do any sports?

A: No, no, no, I was not an athlete. My parents had played tennis in **Europe** and also they skied, cause I have pictures of them when they were young and that -- but I guess at that time they were -- my father was busy making a living and my mother was busy, you know, helping and then also once my grandmother came, my mother had to help her. And then when my grandparents came, my -- my -- my father's mother lived with us **Oma Hilda,** and my mother's parents lived on the same floor as we did, in an -- in another apartment. But unfortunately my grandfather became very ill, he had **Parkinson's**, and so my mother really had to spend a lot of time, you know, taking care of him.

Q: How old were your parents at this time?

A: My mother was born in 1907 and my father was born in 1904. And my father always said -- that much I do remember, that had he been older or richer, we would have never come to the **United States**. H-He -- you know, it was -- a lot of his friends didn't survive because they **A**, didn't know anybody to get an affidavit

from, or have the guts to go. I mean, now we know all the horrors of **Hitler**, but then they didn't know.

Q: What do you attribute your parent's wise decision to? When you say other people did not realize the danger. Wha -- how do you know -- wh-what would you think were the reasons that your parents did know?

A: Well, one thing -- for one thing my father had been, you know, to school at the University of **London**, so he had -- he had traveled. And I guess it was a question of luck, that -- that somehow that -- my dad saw the writing on the wall. And -- cause I know with my husband's parents, my father-in-law was a surgeon and his hospital privileges were taken away, so he had no means of support. And that's, you know, why he left.

Q: Was there any sense that you have that your mother was not in agreement with him about leaving, or was in agreement?

A: Well, my mother also was one of these European ladies, you know, whatever my father said, went. It was a different time, it was before, you know, women's independence an-an-and all that. Th-Th-They -- I -- I never had the feeling that they ha -- or heard any arguments that they had about -- about leaving.

Q: So then comes December seventh and the bombing of **Pearl Harbor**. Do you have any memories of that time?

A: Well, I remember where we were. We were going out to -- by that time my aunt had remarried and we were i-in the car goi -- they lived in **Far Rockaway.** My uncle was an ear, nose and throat surgeon and he -- he practiced in **Far Rockaway**, and we were on the way to their house, or coming back from their house, I don't remember which, when **Pearl Harbor** happened, and everybody was very upset. And then we heard President **Roosevelt**, you know, say that we're at war. And I remember in school my principal crying. We -- we had assemblies in those days with middy blouses and ties and I remember we had this assembly and she was crying.

Q: And here you are, young, y-young student and had lived, you know, had escaped --

A: Right.

Q: -- and did you -- were you particularly fearful when that happened?

A: No, no, because I -- I felt very American. I mean, this is my country and you know, this was ha -- this was happening to us. And my uncle was drafted into the army, and he also lived with us for a short time, so we were very close to him and we were worried, you know, about him. And I remember rationing books and that a-after awhile my parents -- my father and his friend, I think together, I don't know if you could do that today, but they owned the car together, cause they -- each one

couldn't afford a car. And I remember, you know, the -- the gas rationing coupons, you know, for the cars.

Q: And what was the communication between your parents and family or friends back in **Europe**?

A: Well, I think -- I think that -- well, I know that my parents wrote to my grandparents. You know, it was before the days of you know, you pick up the phone and call **England**. And they ca -- my grandparents came, I -- I don't know the exact date, but I know that they came on a warship somehow, from **London.** And my grandmother had had a stroke and it wasn't diagnosed and sh-she really wasn't right any more. And as I said, my grandfather had **Parkinson's**, so it was a difficult time for everybody.

Q: What year did they come?

A: Good question. I think it was after the war broke out. It was ba -- either 1940 or '41.

Q: So your life continued on as a young -- youngster --

A: Right.

Q: -- and you were in the girl scouts.

A: Right.

Q: And any other interests and hobbies and so forth?

A: No, we -- we -- my father and I used to take a lot of walks. We -- we all walked a lot. And I remember --

Q: Did you -- did you speak in English to him or German?

A: I don't remember. Probably English, probably English, because I remember this business of my grandmother would walk in and it was like subconscious, I'd switch to German, but I think to Daddy -- and in those days all the refugees I knew and my family also, we were very careful not to speak German in the street. I mean, that was --

Q: Why?

A: Because you didn't want to be identified as a German, you didn't want to be like an alien, you know. So on and so forth. And so i -- I-I'm sure I talked to my father in English. And eventually I went to high school, I went to high school on -- on the trolley car. I went to **George Washington** High School. And I graduated and I went to **Hunter College** first for a semester and then I went to **Syracuse University** and then I went to **Barnard** and graduated, got marr -- no, got married, graduated and had my daughter, all in one year.

Q: As the war was going on in the 40's, in the early 40's, how aware of yo -- o-of it were you as you were getting older now? You were 12 - 13 - 14 and so forth.

A: Well, I re -- I remember seeing i-in the windows of people who had servicemen in the armed forces, they had stars in the windows, you know, that. And -- oh, I -- I liked to hear the radio. My dad and I used to wat -- listen to **"The Shadow**" and -- and programs like that, you know. And I -- I know that's what we liked to do. And my grandmother taught me how to play gin rummy, so I played gin rummy with my friends. And I joined a **B'nai Brith** youth group. And I was the editor of the paper and made a lot of friends. And that was in the city, in **Manhattan.** So I learned, you know, how to travel in the subway and -- and so on. And at one point I was a copy girl for the "**Daily News".** How that ever happened I -- I don't know, because as I was growing up, my mother still, you know, was very protective of me. I always had to be in early at night and so on and so forth. And the thought of me as a teenager being a copy girl for the "**Daily News"** on **Times Square**, during the war, in the dark, is beyond me, but I did it. You know, I think it was through the girl scouts that we -- tha -- that we did that, cause they were -- you know, a lot of the boys were in the army and somehow we were helping the war effort. And I remember saving tin foil. We used to make balls out of tin foil. I remember saving string, rubber bands, tin cans. You know, we -- we tried to do what we could. I remember my grandmother knitted sweaters for the Red Cross, for the soldiers.

Q: Did your parents talk about the plight of the Jews during the war? Were they aware of some --

A: No --

Q: -- what was happening?

A: -- no, my parents were still -- as old as I was, you know, as the years went by, very protective of me and didn't -- didn't talk very much about it. I mean, I -- I knew, I heard on the radio, I read the papers by then, you know, what was -- I knew what was going on. But we didn't have any very close relatives who were in the camps, so you know, as I said, my father was busy, you know, making a living. At that point he was supporting us, my grandparents, my grandmother, my au -- he gave my uncle a job in his office. So, it was hard times.

Q: When you would see **Hitler's** picture in newsreels or on -- in the paper, wha -- how did -- how did you react?

A: Well, we did this **sssssss** business, you know. We ju -- we just knew that he was evil and I don't think we knew right away how horrible it was. It wasn't until after the camps were liberated that -- that we learned, you know, how horrible it was. Whereas my husband knew a lot more than I did, maybe because he was a boy, maybe because his -- you know, most of his family was killed. But I really didn't know too much in the beginning.

Q: So tho-those years until ’45 --

A: Mm.

Q: -- for you were not fearful times.

A: No, not ne -- I mean, I -- you know, when -- when -- whenever, you know, I remember, you know, **Guam** and -- and all those, you know, battles, I mean, you know, we -- we cheered when we won, we were sad when -- when we lost. And I was always fascinated by **Winston Churchill**, even as a -- as a teenager and I still am. I -- I just think he was one of the greatest people that ever lived. And I foll -- I followed the news, you know, when **Roosevelt** and **Stalin** and -- and **Churchill** had the meetings and so on and so forth. And I eventually majored in diplomatic relations. I was going to be an interpreter at the United Nations. Then I met my husband and that was the end of that. And I became a teacher.

Q: What was the end of the war like for you and your family?

A: Oh, everybody was so happy, you know. My father worked -- his office then was on **40th Street**, right near **Times Square** and you know, we heard all those stories and again, it was before **TV**. You know, it’s hard for kids today to realize that. But we -- you know, of course we were all very happy, and life went on.

Q: And so by the time the war was over you were what, 16?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So you were still in high school.

A: Right. I was.

Q: A-And then you continued on to college, you said?

A: Right.

Q: And -- and -- and you studied interna -- did you say international relations?

A: Right, right, right. I went to the **Maxwell House** of -- **School of Citizenship** and I also met my husband when I was 17. I didn't know he was going to be my husband when I was 17.

Q: How -- how did you meet him?

A: We were on vacation, my parents and my grandmother and I in **Lake Placid** and we stayed in the same hotel and we were the only two people under 40 at that hotel. And we spent -- we wasted several days of I looking at his table, he looking at my table and nobody said anything. And finally our two fathers got together and decided, you know, to end this torture. And well, we spent, you know, a few days together. And my father and I would go horseback riding every morning and the morning that **Frank** left my dad was thrown from the horse. And **Frank** and I had decided that we were going to write to each other and I wrote him that my dad was okay, but he had a concussion and I had to go back to school with my grandmother and they stayed at the hospital, you know. But he -- he was okay. But I was pretty

scared and I wrote to **Frank** and he wrote back and he signed the letter love, and that was the beginning of the end.

Q: And wher -- and where was he at school?

A: He was going to **Western Reserve** and I was going to **Syracuse** and he used to toodle back and forth a lot. But those were the days of curfews and house mothers and fraternities and -- it was a different world.

Q: Mm-hm. And -- and then when did you get married?

A: We got married November 23rd, 1950, and we lived in **Kew Gardens, New York,** and then we moved to **Great Neck** and then we moved here.

Q: Mm-hm. And your children?

A: Well, we have three children. My daughter **Joan, Joanie** and my daughter **Nancy** and my son **Jerry.**

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we have five grandchildren.

Q: Mm-hm. And when you met **Frank Liebermann**, you had similar backgrounds in a sense, both coming from **Europe**, and you said traveling on the same boat, another voyage later.

A: Right, but we --

Q: Di-Did you talk about with him th-the feelings of being a refugee and so forth?

A: No, no, but I know that **Frank's** tol -- **Frank** told me then that I was the first girl from **Europe** that he had ever dated, because I guess in **Dayton**, **Ohio** there weren't that many refugee kids.

Q: Did you feel a connection because of that refugee status that you both had?

A: I don't know, but our parents did because our parents were lifelong friends, even though my in-laws lived in **Ohio,** my parents lived in **Kew Gardens.**

Q: But they met at that **Lake Placid?**

A: At that hotel, yeah, yeah. The chalet.

Q: Did you speak in English with **Frank** in the beginning or German?

A: English. We always spoke English until our kids were born and then one day we decided maybe they should learn a little German. And **Frank** and I discovered that we spoke an entirely different language. That the German they speak in **Vienna** is not the German that he spoke. And then, of course, the kids learned all those phrases about going to bed and, you know, all the things that kids at that time shouldn't know.

Q: So then you -- you started raising your children.

A: Right.

Q: And then eventually you moved down here. Let's now talk a little bit about your feelings of what you had gone through. Do you think today that you would be a different person if you hadn't had the childhood -- the early childhood that you had?

A: Well, my husband always said that it hadn't been for **Hitler**, **A**, we wouldn't have met and **B**, that our lives are much richer living here.

Q: Da -- do you feel that way, and if so how do -- what do you mean by that?

A: Well, I don't know what our lives would have been like. I mean, we -- the chances of **Frank** and I meeting were nil. You know, he lived in **Upper Silesia**, I lived in **Vienna**. Unless his family took a trip, I mean th -- I -- th-there was -- there -- probably we -- we just wouldn't have met and we probably, you know, would have married different people and had different interests and children and so on.

Q: When your children were the age that you were, eight, nine years old when you had to leave **Vienna**, did that bring back memories of your childhood and leaving?

A: No, but I remember telling **Joanie**, my oldest daughter, when she was eight that when I was that age, you know, that -- what -- but it didn't make a big impression on her. I mean, she just knew -- it was just something that happened, you know, it -- it didn't -- it didn't affect me, it didn't affect her, it was just a fact.

Q: How did you present your family history an-and -- and what happened to the Jews in **Europe** to your children?

A: Well, they knew that their father and I had been born in **Europe**. I mean they stu -- they studied. We were very active at Temple **Beth-El** in **Great Neck** and they -- they studied what happened. And you know, they'd ask us questions an-and -- and we'd answer it. And -- oh, I don't know what year it was, but when I was teaching in **Great Neck** at the **John F. Kennedy** school, there had been the program on the Holocaust on television. And my principal and I were talking about it and she asked me if I wanted to, you know, give a talk to the fifth graders. At that time fifth grade was the highest grade in our school, and I did. And I told them my story, and kids, you know, would ask me questions about it and so on.

Q: So you were very open with them and I know you said your husband lost relatives. Were you -- was he -- or -- were y-you or he open with your children about that?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes, because it was very traumatic. I mean, he lost his grandparents and three uncles and one of the uncles was married and they had a little girl, **Vera**, and my first daughter's middle name is **Vera**. And th-they always -- they always knew the story and **Frank** told me how hard it was for his parents because they would send money to various consulates all over the world and they would take the money and never give them visas. And his grandparents were on the way to

Shanghai when **Italy** joined **Germany** in the war and so their ship was turned back and they were all sent to the camps and killed.

Q: Mm-hm. So your children, at a young age -- relatively young age were aware of this.

A: Right. It's like -- you know, y-you -- I-I don't know some -- we -- we're a very open kind of family and you know, it -- it was always part of their past. I mean, they -- they always knew about it. They -- you know. I mean, both my husband and my parents and my in-laws had accents, so I think this sort of, you know, brou -- brought about questions. And my son, unfortunately, when he was in med school, got leukemia and my s -- husband was the bone marrow donor, twice. And the big joke always was, was **Jerry** going to get an accent, or my curly hair. He didn't get the accent. He got my car -- curly hair the first time, he didn't get it the second time.

Q: Do you feel Viennese, Austrian in any sense now? And what are your thoughts about **Vienna** today?

A: I don't feel a -- I know that I'm probably a little different, because people have said to me -- it -- it's not so much that I -- I feel different, but w-we've traveled a lot and when I go to **Europe**, I really feel that people in **Europe** look more like me than people here. I don't know why that is, but it -- it is. I -- I -- I have that feeling. And -- but otherwise -- once in awhile I'll joke around with -- with old friends of

mine and they'll use a -- a word that I'm not familiar with and I'll say, hey, you know, English is my second language and they -- everybody laughs, you know, cause I've been here for such a long time.

Q: Have you been back to **Vienna**?

A: Yes, we went back eight years ago because my husband wanted to see where I lived and so on. And he got food poisoning and I really didn't want to go in the first place.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I live in the present and the future and to me the past is the past, it's -- it's gone. It's -- that's the way it is. I mean, I -- I know people who live here in **Maryland** who dwell on their past. They're sometimes -- they are older than I am and maybe they had some horrible experiences, because I have a -- a step-cousin who was in the camps and she and I are pretty close, she lives in **New York.** And we've talked about it, that some people who had very bad experiences, as she did, that she was in the camps, either talk about it all the time, or never talk about it. And she's one of those people that never talks about it. So, people are different. I mean, you can't say that all Viennese kids who at the age of eight came to **America**, you know, think one way or -- or -- or another. But I -- I mean, I could pass for **Yankee Doodle Dandy** any time. I am proud to be here. I am thrilled every

time we come back to the **United States**, you know, from -- from a trip. Cause I am thoroughly American, except for those eight years when -- when I -- when I lived in **Europe**. But the interesting thing is, since my husband and I were recently in **Poland** and the kids saw where he was born and where he grew up, my daughter **Nancy** suggested, and we took her up on it, and two of our granddaughters are going to be **Bat Mitzvahed** this year, we're going to take them and their older sister to **Vienna** and show them where I grew up. This was not my idea, this was my daughter's idea, but wa -- I'm going to do it, I want to show them, you know, th -- where I went to school, and the Temple and -- and so on. We're going to take them to **Vienna** and to **Prague** to see, you know, the Jewish district that they have studied about. And -- but I have no -- no real, you know, connection to **Vienna** except that I was born there.

Q: When you went back to **Vienna** -- what was it, seven, eight years ago you said --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- did you go back to your home and --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and if so, what were your responses?

A: Well, we -- we -- we saw where I lived and the only thing that had changed was the front door. And as I said there, my husband got terrible, terrible food poisoning

and I couldn't wait to get out of there. He was really sick. And I -- I think

[indecipherable]

Q: Y-You couldn't -- you couldn't wait to get out of there because he was sick or because it was **Vienna** and you -- and your **[indecipherable]**

A: It was a combination -- it was a combination, I think. And I remember feeling at a time when -- I don't know how many years I was here or how many years I had spoken English, that I really didn't want to speak German and I didn't want to read any German books because I was -- inside myself I was afraid that I would forget my English. It was -- I -- I don't remember how old I was, but I remember that feeling. And I -- and I didn't want to do that.

Q: So English was comforting to you?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. It -- I mean it -- this -- I-I -- you know, I'm 74 years old. This happened a long time ago.

Q: Are there any sights today or sounds today that trigger your childhood in **Vienna**?

A: Yes. My father was a very good dancer, and he loved to waltz and he t-taught me how to waltz at a very young age. I taught my husband how to waltz, and very often, you know, when we hear a waltz, you know, I get all mushy about my dad. I was very close to my father. But other than that, no.

Q: N-No other sights or --

A: No, no.

Q: -- smells or anything?

A: Well, as I said, my mother was a very good cook and even though she went to junior college, she also went to cooking school in **Vienna**. And she -- you know, an -- name it. **Zacher torte,** the **Linzer torte**, the -- whatever, you know she could make it. But I never learned how to bake any of those things because my family was very equally divided. My father ha -- you know, had the business. I was the scholar and my mother took care of the house. And -- so my kids are better cooks than I am because I never went into cooking.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Marianne Liebermann
January 9, 2004

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Marianne Liebermann.** This is tape number two, side **A.** And let's talk now a little bit about your teaching experience, when you started and what you taught and so forth.

A: Well, I taught in **Great Neck, New York** for 27 years. I was at first a part-time teacher and I taught in several schools, and eventually taught at the **John F. Kennedy** school. It was an elementary school, and I taught middle and high school **ESL** in the summer.

Q: Which is English to speakers of other languages.

A: Oh, yes. Well, actually in **New York** it's called teachers of English as -- to speakers of other languages, so it's called **TESL** rather than **ESOL** as it is called here.

Q: And you obviously had children from other countries who came here and you having that experience yourself as a young child, did you feel a connection to them?

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: And could you understand what they were going through?

A: Well, I did, except their problems are very different. A lot of my students were from **Iran**, who came after the **Shah**, and they had -- they were totally different

socio-economic background than the refugee children who came in 1938 from **Germany** and **Austria**. And their problems were -- were different. It was not only the language, but a lot of their mothers had really not been their caretakers. There were a lot of servants who really brought up these children. And when the mothers were faced with bringing up the children, there were a lot of problems. Some of the children didn't change their clothes day after day after day, they slept in their clothes. They had a lot of trouble getting used to the food here that -- that -- it was very different. Like school lunches, you know, were a big problem for them. But all in all, children are children and the younger you are when you learn a second language, the easier it is. And my job was to take the children from their classroom in small groups and teach them, rather than have a whole class of children. And as I said, I had children from **Iran**, from **Japan,** from **South American,** from **Central America,** from **Europe.** My first two **ESL** students when I started teaching, were the sons of the **CEO** of **Lufthansa**. And I had to swallow just a couple of times, but they were two of my best students and they did very well in their lives.

Q: Did you speak in German to them and --

A: No, we were not really -- oh, I wouldn't say -- allowed is -- is too strong a word, but we were encouraged not to speak anyone's native language because our groups were mixed, and so it wouldn't be fair that, you know, if I speak Spanish, I spoke to

the Hispanic kids, and you know, the Iranian, I don't speak Iranian or Japanese. So the goal of an **ESL** teacher is to have the children think in English. And that's what we tried to do.

Q: So you said you did not tell them about your background and having to -- to learn a new language yourself at a young age?

A: Sometimes I did, as I got more into the program and as I had the older children. You know, the fifth graders were the oldest ones, but the young ones, I certainly didn't tell them, too. And it was very helpful when computers came into the schools because some children really had difficulty learning. They had difficulty learning anything. And some children came from countries where there was very little education for them, and we had to teach them, you know, how to tell time and tie their shoes and -- and -- you know, very -- very basic things.

Q: Di-Did you feel any kind of connection to these children, having to have left their country of birth and coming to the **United States**? Kind of a deep seated connection, in that sense.

A: I did, but we had a very, shall we say strict supervisor who advised us in no uncertain terms that our job was not to be social workers, but to teach them English. And so ex -- we had a lot of after school things. We had parties for the children and their parents and we had different kinds of foods, and -- and you know, we'd have

like an Iranian lunch, where their parents could participate, or a Japanese sushi lunch, or you know, things like that. But there were social workers attached to the program, and that was really more their job than mine.

Q: Let's now talk a little bit about the religious aspect of your experience. Did having to leave because you were Jewish, when you were a young child, did that enter into your thoughts and were you angry that these things -- you were having to leave because you were Jewish?

A: No, because in 1938 in **Vienna**, if you were Jewish, if you were part of a Jewish family, you really felt that you were Austrian before you were Jewish. And my parents were not particularly religious. And it wasn't until many years later that I realized, if I hadn't been Jewish, would my life be very different? Would I have not left, a-and so on and so forth.

Q: So as you matured and you raised children, did you become more religiously affiliated than you were as a child?

A: Yes, I did. I did. My husband and I joined Temple shortly after we were married, and I was vice-president of my sisterhood and very active in the Temple and saw to it that the kids went to religious school, and --

Q: So why is it that you did that, as opposed to your feelings as a young child?

A: I think being an only child, you need affiliation and so that was very important to me and always has been, and probably always will be.

Q: What about -- your thoughts about the -- when the **Eichmann** trial came up, and -- in **Israel**? Did you have any special feelings about that because of your background?

A: Well, I mean, I was -- I was as horrified as anyone else, and hoped that they, you know, **A**, would be able to find him, and then would be able to pro-pros -- prosecute him. But I'm not really a hateful person and I -- I mean, I didn't personally really, you know, connect, I mean -- a-as everyone I knew, you know, was happy that they found him and that they prosecuted him and that they were able to do it and th-they had the trial. But other than that, I don't remember having any other thoughts about it.

Q: Mm-hm. During the Civil Rights struggles -- struggle in the 60's and 70's and so forth, and knowing what you did about **Hitler's** taking away the civil rights of countries, again, was there any special meaning to you about that struggle here?

A: Well, I was getting my Master's at **Adelphi** University at th -- and I was driving home when **Martin Luther King** was killed, and I -- I was just horrified and shocked, because I have black friends and I -- you know, I -- I-I was speechless, I was horrified.

Q: More so because of your childhood experience?

A: No, it had nothing to do with it. I -- I just felt, how could this happen in **America?** I mean, land of the free, etcetera and so forth. You know, when you grow up in **New York,** yes there's prejudice, there's always prejudice of -- of -- of -- of all kinds, but I don't think I fully realized how much hatred there was between blacks and whites until that happened to **Martin Luther King.** I didn't really know about segregated schools, I didn't know about segregated bathrooms and drinking fountains and things like that. I had read about it, but I never, you know, was really aware of it.

Q: Did you ever connect in your mind the si-similarity between those kind of restrictions and the Nazi restrictions?

A: No, never, never. Maybe I was dumb, but I didn't. I didn't. I mean, that was then and this is now.

Q: So politically today, you feel the way you did whether or not you were born in **Europe** or not.

A: I'm not sure what you mean?

Q: Your political views today a-are n -- are they influenced --

A: No.

Q: -- by what your family experienced and your relatives experienced?

A: No, not at all, not at all. I -- I don't think so. I don't think my parents were particularly political as -- as such.

Q: Were they Zionists?

A: No, no, uh-huh, no.

Q: Did they talk about **Palestine** when you were very young?

A: No.

Q: And when the State of **Israel** was formed, was that a --

A: Oh, they were very -- they were very happy, a-as was I, of course, and anyone who's read **Exodus,** seen **Exodus**, how could you not -- how could you not be? And, you know, as you said, a-as I got older and matured, I -- I realized all the horror that had gone on and how lucky I was. And there was a long time, when I took a shower, I thought about the people in the camps, I did. That was a long time, and even now, once in awhile, I think about that. And I've always tried to do a lot of volunteer work and th -- in connection with helping people, even when I was working and certainly now, because I feel that somewhere or somehow, there is a reason that my family and I were spared. Because we could have just as well, you know, gone to the camps and been killed.

Q: Do you have any sense of guilt that your family did get out, thank -- fortunately.

A: No, I have no -- I -- I-I have no sense of guilt. I wonder why it happened. I'll never know why -- I mean, I -- my dad had the courage and the guts, but sometimes I -- I think about it, you know, like why? And there's no answer.

Q: Again, what was it about him and his courage and his guts to make that decision and oth -- that others did not?

A: Well, as I -- as I told you, my dad said, had -- had he been older or richer. Not that we were poor, but I guess, you know, I don't know what he meant by that. H-he wouldn't have just pulled up stakes, or maybe, you know, if he had a bigger family, many more children, or -- you know, it would have been harder. Or -- I -- I guess a lot of it was luck, that he thought of the **Simons**, you know, to -- to give him the affidavit and that they, as non-Jews did it. Because, let's face it, who -- who -- it's not so easy to be responsible for three people. I mean, they never had to help us monetarily, but still. I remember we were at their house when the war broke out in **Europe.** That was a very horrible weekend. But --

Q: Can -- can you describe that weekend?

A: Well, they -- they lived outside of **Philadelphia** in a beautiful gray stone mansion. And I guess their kids were teenagers at that time, I know they were about 10 years older than I am, and -- well, everybody was really crying. I mean, you know, everybody was just so sad, and sa -- an-and so upset. And my mother and my

dad, too, but more my mother, remained friends with the **Simons** all the years until they died, the **Simons** died. And as I said, she was able to bring over a lot of her possessions, you know, crystals and figurines and so on, and I think -- you know, like for Christmas she would send them something like that, or she would bake them a cake, or you know, I mean they -- they really kept in touch. And this Mrs. **Simon, Helen Simon** was such a wonderful person that when my daughter **Joan** was born, she sent her a silver spoon for her birthday and for Christmas every year until she had a dozen. And each spoon is engraved with her na -- with her initials, **J.V.L.** and the date. And it's become a tradition, because when **Alyssa** was **Bat Mitzvahed**, she did the sh -- Jo -- you know, **Joanie** is gung-ho, she bought the whole set at once for **Alyssa**. So that's the story that's gone on in our family.

Q: Did the **Simons** sponsor other people, did they write out affidavits for others?

A: I don't know. I don't know that. But I know when **Joanie** went to the University of **Wisconsin**, **Helen Simon** was very upset. She felt that there were a lot of radical people out there and she wouldn't be happy, and so on and so forth. And **Joanie** went to **Wisconsin** and unfortunately was there when they had all the trouble with the bombings, but she got a good education. That's how it was.

Q: Do you think that the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

A: I hope so. I just hope so, and certainly the museum here and all the museums that talk about the Holocaust all over th-this country, you know, are doing their best to let people never forget, and that it did happen. And my husband was at the opening of the Holocaust Museum and he described to me how there were people there with signs that said that the Holocaust never happened. That's a little hard for me to believe, but I know that there are groups like that in the **United States**. I don't know why they feel that way, but that's how it is.

Q: Is there anything you wanted to add to your thoughts about your experience, or your childhood? Do -- d-do you plan to go back? I know you said you were going to take your children back --

A: Yes.

Q: -- to **Vienna.** And can you maybe talk a little bit about the previous trip that you just took this fall, this past fall with your family?

A: Well, we went back to my husband's hometown, which originally was in **Germany**, but after the second World War was given to **Poland**, and the name, in German it's **Gleiwitz** and it was changed to **Gliwice** in **Poland**, and it was under the Russian influence. And through the Holocaust Museum, this forum found out about the fact that **Frank** was born in this town and contacted us, and they erected a memorial to the Jews that had lived in this town. And it was a very, very moving

experience for us. We also went to **Berlin** and I really wanted to be very unhappy in **Berlin** and I really wasn't, because I could understand everything, and we stayed at the **Hilton**, which is like staying in **America** i-in -- in a -- another country. And two of my children had been to **Germany** 20 years ago when the wall was up, and they could not believe the change in **East Germany**. It -- it was just mind boggling to them. And **Berlin** is such a modern city and so many new buildings and a lot of hustle and bustle. And in **Frank's** hometown also, there'd been a big change over the eight years. As I said, it had been under Russian influence, and now it seems to be, you know, a -- a -- a great place to live now. The people that live there were all forced to leave where they lived in the **Ukraine** and settle in this town. And they've made the best of it, and unfortunately there's a lot of pollution there. There had been a coal mine there, which it was closed, but there'd also been industry and all the waste had been dumped into the river. And so there is a great deal of pollution, and also they still use coal to heat their homes. So at night there's like a smog, it makes your eyes itch. And my son, being a doctor, wanted to find out the statistics about lung cancer there, but we -- you know, we -- we weren't able to -- to find that out. And also, **Frank** wanted to s-show our children the apartment where we lived because the house is still standing. They changed the name of the street and the house number, but the people at the forum, **Andre,** said that the people were afraid

to show **Frank** the apartment because a lot of the Germans who had lived there are now trying to reclaim those apartments. And so the people somehow connected that with us. So we couldn't see the apartment, but we saw the outside of the building and **Frank** showed us where he learned how to ride his bicycle and where he went to school, and so on. And the memorial that they erected was a beautiful -- they had commissioned a Polish sculptor to make this memorial. It's a broken **Torah** wi -- and with an eternal flame in it, and they weren't able -- the synagogue had been destroyed on **Kristallnacht** and so the land where the synagogue was was transferred to a Jewish group, but the group is about a hundred miles away from there, and they're in dire straights and they were in the process of selling the land. So they had to get the permission from the building next door and that's a cooperative building and they did get the permission of all the people who lived in that building and so the memorial is attached to that -- the wall of that building. And my son-in-law -- one of my son-in-laws passed by there after they had the ceremony, and there was a mother and a little girl. And I don't know whether they're speaking German or -- somehow he understood what they said. And I don't know what the mother said to the little girl, but the little girl said, what's a synagogue? Which sort of gave us the chills, you know?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we just hope that nobody will destroy this memorial, or you know, put graffiti on it or -- or so on. But it was a very moving trip.

Q: Do you or **Frank** have any desire to go back to **Gleiwitz** again?

A: I don't think so. I don't think so. We -- my husband has a distant cousin, a painter named **Max Liebermann.** And they ha -- are in the -- that -- that painter's summer house is just outside of **Berlin**, in **Wannsee.** And they're in the process of transferring his pictures, which are now in one of the museums in **Berlin** to this building, and they're in the midst of fundraising because it's very expensive to make a building safe and **climately** controlled for, you know, works -- works of art. And possibly some of my kids -- they're supposed to open it in 2005, s -- possibly some of my kids might go back to there. But there's no reason, you know, for us to go back to **Gleiwitz.**

Q: When did your parents pass away?

A: My mother died in 1990 and my dad died in 1979.

Q: And your mother was able to manage once your father died?

A: Yes, yes. I mean, she didn't have to worry about money and things like that, and my husband helped her with, you know, writing checks and things like that. And eventually she became too ill to manage on her own and she was in a nursing home right near my house in **Great Neck** for three and a half years before she died.

Q: You have two children who are physicians --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and one who is a lawyer?

A: Right, right.

Q: Uh-huh, and -- and d-do they talk to you about your childhood frequently, or --

A: Well more so now than before, but it -- it's not a big deal in our family, because it's something they grew up with. I mean, we never made a big deal about it. Our kids are all married to Jewish spouses, spices, however you say that. And people in today's world say to us, you know, how did you do that, and so on. And I don't think we ever overdid it with that, and we never overdid it with our backgrounds. It's just part of who we are.

Q: When you hear the German language, does that trigger anything for you?

A: Yes, I -- and I understand it, even though my German is probably like an eight year old. I don't -- you know, I haven't -- I -- I did take some courses at **NYU** in his -- in German history, but I'm sure I don't speak like an adult German. But when I hear it on the radio or on the **TV,** I like it, because I understand it. And it is -- th-that was one of the reasons why -- I -- you know, in **Berlin** I turned on the **TV**, it was all in German, fine with me, you know? The kids were very -- my children were very impressed, you know. And I had been to **Frankfurt** with **Frank** on

business at the **Frankfurter messe** when he was in the textile business. And I remember at the hotel, somebody said to me, oh your German is so good. And I said, crossing my fingers, oh you know, our American schools are excellent, because I really didn't want to go into the fact, you know, that I was born in **Vienna.** I mean, it wasn't anybody's business.

Q: Why -- why didn't you want to say you were born in **Vienna**?

A: I don't know. It was just one of those things, you know. I just -- who knows? It was oh, at least 20 - 25 years ago.

Q: Were you afraid something was going to happen?

A: No, no, no. I mean, everyone I know knows that **Frank** and I were born in **Europe**, and as I said, you know, I -- we joke about it sometimes. But I don't know, it was one of those things, you know? You wake up in the morning, you do something silly, and that was the -- what I did.

Q: Mm-hm. Any message you want to give your grandchildren?

A: Be good to each other, love each other and be happy and healthy.

Q: Anything else you wanted to add to the tape?

A: I don't think so. I don't think so. This was a great experience.

Q: Before we close, do you consider yourself a survivor?

A: No, I really don't, because I feel guilty using that term, because I know that so many people who eventually escaped the Nazis went through so much in the camps, and being hidden and so forth, and thank God I didn't have any of those experiences.

Q: Even though your family and your -- your life w-was in danger and that's why your father deci -- and mother decided to leave?

A: Even so. A-As a young child, as a -- a very protected young child, I -- at that time, of course, I didn't realize the danger. And since my life continued, just in another language, in another school, in another place, I-I don't feel that I was that affected.

Q: Do you feel in any way jealous of those Jews who were bor -- your age, who were born in this country and did not have to go through what you did, and your parents -- and also that -- what your parents went through?

A: No, I'm not a jealous person, and you know, it's wherever the stork drops you, it's -- that's how it is.

Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum?

A: Yes, I have. I was there twice. Once with my husband and once with my cousin who lives in **New York.**

Q: And your reaction?

A: I didn't read everything and I didn't stop at every single exhibit. It was really hard for me to go, and I had a lot of nightmares about it after I -- I ca -- I dreamt about it a lot. And I never watch any Nazi movies or anything like that before I go to sleep because I know I would dream about it.

Q: Because of what you went through?

A: I don't know. I don't know, maybe just the -- the plain horror of it. I don't think necessarily about what I went through. It's just the fact that it happened. Man's inhumanity to man. My husband and I have always talked about, it was bad enough that people couldn't help themselves, or so they said, but that intellectual people, like professors and doctors were involved in the annihilation of so many people. We just can't understand that, we -- we really can't, and I don't think to my dying day I'll ever understand that.

Q: Is it to your benef -- or was it to your benefit that you were so young at the time when your parents decided to leave and -- and if you had been older and more aware of the dangers, it would have affected you more?

A: Probably. I mean, I-I -- I'll never know, but probably. As I said, you know, as I told you, and I told my granddaughter, it was a different time. Your parents said, we're going to **America**, so we went to **America**. That was as simple as that.

Q: Okay, anything else that you wanted to say? Well, fortunately you did come to **America --**

A: Right.

Q: -- and we're grateful for that.

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: Thank you very much for doing the interview. And this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Marianne Liebermann.**

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview