Interview with Hilda Seftor
June 12, 2006

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Hilda Seftor**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on June 12th, 2006, in **Annandale, Virginia.** 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.** Please tell us your full name.

Answer: My name is **Hilda Seftor**.

Q: And the name that you were born with?

A: **Hilda Cohen**.

Q: And where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in **Edinburgh, Scotland** on the 21st of August, 1923.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. How long had your parents been in **Scotland**?

A: My father was -- my father was born in **Edinburgh.** My mother was naturalized in, I imagine, 1897.

Q: Your father's name was?

A: **Louie Judah Cohen**.

Q: And how far back did his family go, do you know, in **Scotland**?

A: I don't really know. I know that either his father or his grandfather was a **dayan,** who I believe was a holy man, holier than the rabbi, but I don't know much about his father at all. He had five siblings, two sisters and three brothers.

Q: And what kind of work did your father do?

A: He was in business, he and his -- the brother in law and their brothers had what was called -- they were the -- one of the first people to use the trading stamps and they used to import tea, and in the teabags were black and white stamps. And after the people bought the tea, they saved the stamps, they came back to my father's place and they traded them for all kinds of things, household items, toys. It was very successful. And when -- when my father realized what was going on in **Germany**, he stopped all kinds of business with **Germany**, and he used to import beautiful German baby dolls, and he stopped this immediately.

Q: Yeah, we'll get to that time soon.

A: Sure.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's too long.

Q: Tell me, did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I have one sister and I had one brother.

Q: And their names?

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A: My brother was **John Bernard Cohen,** we called him **Bernie**. My sister's name is **Fay Stein.**

Q: And where are you in the -- in the order of children?

A: I was the middle one.

Q: And tell me about your mother's family, and her name.

A: My mother's name -- she was born **Ettie Pass**. She was one of eight children, she was the third eldest.

Q: And she came to the -- to **Scotland** when?

A: She came to **Scotland**, well, I believe prior to 1897, because they were naturalized in -- you know, so I don't know how long they were in the country before they were naturalized, cause my si -- my husband and I had to be here five years before we became citizens. So I don't know when she came.

Q: Do you know why they came to **Scotland**?

A: No, I don't. No, I don't.

Q: And th -- her family came from?

A: I believe they came from **Riga. Riga, Latvia**, and I believe that my grandfather was born in **Kovno**.

Q: And did you have a large extended family in **Edinburgh** when you were growing up as a child?

A: Yes, I did. As I said, my mother was one of eight, and so many of them lived in **Edinburgh** and we had a very large family there.

Q: Tell me about the Jewish community in **Edinburgh** when you were small.

A: The -- the Jewish community was very small, it was -- it comprised of 300 families. There was only one synagogue, which was Orthodox, and it's a very, very close knit congregation.

Q: And were your parents active in the synagogue?

A: My parents were always very active in the synagogue. My father was the treasurer of the congregation, my uncle actually was president. They were a-also very involved with all of the -- the Jewish -- the societies. My mother was president of the Ladies Benevolent Society and of the Zionist Society. My father was active in other ones, I'm not sure which ones actually. But I think they were both members of the -- the Scottish National Council of Refugees and -- and -- and of course it went on from there, because from there we brought in the 35 children.

Q: Yeah, we'll -- we'll get to that in a moment.

A: Yeah, I know, I know.

Q: How religious was your family?

A: We were Orthodox. We -- they're strictly kosher, you know, they didn't drive at the weekends. It changed all our dishes at Passover and we used to -- of course we went to all of the Jewish holidays and we went to services every Saturday morning.

Q: What was the n -- what is the name, or what was the name of your synagogue?

A: It you know, I don't know. I think it was just the **Edinburgh** Hebrew Congregation.

Q: And where was it located?

A: On **Salisbury** Road in **Edinburgh**, about 10 minutes walk from where we lived.

Q: What street did you live on?

A: We lived on **[indecipherable]** Road.

Q: And the synagogue was located where?

A: On the eastern side of **Edinburgh,** near the King's park.

Q: Do you remember the rabbi's name?

A: While I was growing up, the famous rabbi was Rabbi **Salis Daiches**. He was a wonderful man and my father was very, very close to him. He died, and when I married, I was married by a Rabbi **Cohen.**

Q: What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a Jewish and non-Jewish neighborhood, or strictly Jewish?

A: None of the neighborhoods were really Jewish. It was a small -- it was a small

congregation, it was very scattered, and I would say it was a non-Jewish congre -- non-Jewish community -- area, yeah.

Q: And the friends that you had, were they Jewish and non-Jewish?

A: Both, Jewish and non-Jewish. Mainly Jewish, I'd say, as I was growing up.

Q: Where did you go to school as a young child?

A: I went to a private school, it was a -- it was a girl's school called **Saint Margaret's Ladies College**. Had about a hundred pupils in all. And -- and my sister and I and my two cousins and my -- and my sister-in-law were the only Jewish children there. We were five children in the -- in a school of a hundred pupils.

Q: Was that difficult? How were you treated by the other children?

A: We were treated very well. The only thing that I remember is that they had the prayers in the morning and we had to stand outside the hall waiting for the prayers to finish before we could go in.

Q: How did that make you feel?

A: It didn't really bother us. You know, we knew that we didn't sing the hymns and that sort of thing, so we waited outside and we usually sort of chatted among each other. Then after the prayers were finished, then we walked in and we had -- we

were told the general news that was going on. There was no anti-Semitism in our school as I remember it.

Q: And what about the teachers, or were they all non-Jewish?

A: They were all non-Jewish. My brother went to the **Edinburgh Academy,** was a very prestigious boy's school, and he either -- met with no anti-Semitism. My husband also went to that school, and as far as far as I knew there was no problem there.

Q: Your parents were active Zionists?

A: Yes. Yes, they were. They -- they felt very strongly about **Palestine** and anything they could do to help, they were always in the forefront.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Did you go to Hebrew school after school?

A: No, we didn't. We had -- we had a Palestinian student that used to come to our house and teach us Hebrew, and he used to teach us modern Hebrew, which I have - forgotten.

Q: Do you remember his name?

A: No, I don't. My brother, of course, went to the rabbi for his **Bar Mitzvah** preparation and then the two boys that we had, the two Austrian boys, also went to the rabbi for their **Bar Mitzvah** preparation.

Q: Were -- did your parents raise you to be independent? How did they raise their children?

A: They raised us to be independent, but I think they would have been very unhappy had we not dated Jewish people.

Q: All right. Let's start talking now about when you noticed a change. You said you were born in 1923?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So you were very young, of course, when **Hitler** came into power in 1933. Do you -- wha-what is your first memory of this man named **Hitler**? Do you -- can you recall when that was?

A: You know, I don't really, but we went abroad on vacation and we were in **Holland,** now called the **Netherlands** and we always went to Jewish -- Jewish hotels if possible. And we were in this -- in this Jewish hotel in -- I think it was **[indecipherable]** just outside **Amsterdam**. And we were all eating at dinner and three men walked in and they looked round all the tables and they talked among themselves and then they walked out again and we were told that they were Nazis, looking for people. That was the first that I remember. And that was about -- perhaps about 1936.

Q: So y-you as a child weren't aware before 1936 that -- that conditions were changing at all -- were -- I mean, were -- or were you? Did your parents talk about it, did you -- you were able to read, of course, or listen to the radio. Did you have any inkling as a youngster?

A: Yes, we did, and I think that we did more than other people, cause of course my parent talked about it to us and -- and we heard them sort of talking among themselves and I remember very, very clearly that my father had a book, and in it there were -- there were diagrams, or there were photographs of Jewish men in **Germany** that had been beaten, and I remember that very, very clearly and it has stuck with me fa -- all through the years. So my father was desperately concerned about what was going on.

Q: Did you have relatives on the continent?

A: Not -- no, I think that my mother had we didn't seem to have contact with them, but I remember -- and my sister jogged my memory on this, that we used to see my mother tying up packages with cord and with thick paper to send to -- to send to **Riga.** But I -- but I don't know who they were, and I don't know -- and they didn't -- I mean, we didn't hear anything about it afterwards.

Q: When you saw those upsetting photographs, did you talk that over with your parents?

A: My father talked about what was happening in **Germany** and he was desperately concerned. He was desperately concerned about the probability of war and of what might happen to us. And he was very, very concerned to the point that when the war seemed inevitable, he and my mother drove around the country, looking for a house that we could live in and -- outside the city, because we didn't know the city will be bombed. And they eventually found this beautiful farmhouse 30 miles away in -- in the **[indecipherable]** in a village called **Walkerburn**, and we lived there for two years.

Q: Wh-When was that?

A: It was from 1939 til 1941. But they had been looking. And of course when -- when **France** fell, and they knew that the Germans were just across the channel -- we thought it was a kind of an adventure, but he was desperately -- he was desperately concerned.

Q: Let's move backwards a little bit before that. What about when **Chamberlain** went to **Munich**, were -- did your parents talk about that? Does that strike any memories?

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: Ta -- please tell me about that.

A: Yes, it did, and my father was very skeptical. He could see what was happening. He -- he must have had some kind of knowledge that other people didn't have about what was going on in **Germany**. He could see what **Hitler** was doing, he could see that -- what was happening in **Czechoslovakia**, and then when he went into **Austria**, and he just felt that **Hitler** was going to just run rampant unless he was stopped. And of course, he worried desperately about -- about the Jewish people.

Q: Did your father speak German?

A: No, no. My -- my parents spoke some Yiddish, especially when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about, but not German.

Q: And so he -- though he -- though he did not speak German, he obviously was reading and listening.

A: Oh yes, yes he did. I mean, he -- he was a very, very quiet man, but the things that he did, we found out afterwards, he -- he was looking out for everybody. I mean, he was the sort of person that after he died, we found out that he'd been supporting the two -- two of my mother's brothers that weren't doing well in **South Africa,** because they wrote to say, well why is it -- why has this stopped? And then we found out that he'd been doing this, hadn't told anybody. He was just great.

Q: And how would you describe your mother?

A: She was a lovely person. Unfortunately, from when my brother was born, and he was five years younger than I, she was an invalid. She had problems and she had periods of intense pain -- this is not being recorded, is it, no --

Q: Yeah, this is.

A: Okay. She had -- she had gallstones. And just after my brother was born and when she asked the doctors about surgery -- now this was in 1920 -- I mean, '28 or something, they -- the doctors, they casually said, oh, if anything happens to you, your children will always have one parent left, so she never had the surgery. And they got worse and worse and she suffered wi -- we never knew when she was having an attack, and she was in intense pain. But she was wonderful, I mean, she -- as I say, she was one of the mainstays of the Jewish congregation, and she was in the heart of everything, and as I say, she was president of the Ladies Benevolent -- the society. They were active in the Zionist Society, and then when war came along, she was a member of the -- of the Scottish National Council of Refugees. And she was the one who arranged for the 35 children to come in from **Dovercourt** camp in **England.** And this was not easy because there were only the 300 families and many of them didn't want to have the responsibility of taking refugees, but she found homes for all of these 35 children.

Q: All right, let's talk about that. When eng -- when **Germany** invaded **Poland** in September '39 -- September 1st, 1939 --

A: September -- yes.

Q: Oh -- September 1st, 1939 --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- your parents -- did that cause a change in your parents' perspective or activities?

A: Yes, we -- my father was almost certain that this was what was going to happen. He knew that war was inevitable and by the time -- so **Germany** invaded **Poland**, we were already in this house in the country. In fact, we went there for the summer vacation. So that we were there, and I remember very, very clearly that Sunday morning on September third, when we sat round the -- at -- around the radio and -- and listened to **Chamberlain** telling us that we were at war. And so we decided to stay there. My school -- my sister had already graduated, and she was actually going to become a lawyer; that never happened. She went to work and eventually she had to do the war service. And she was -- and she was sent to -- she was sent to a factory in **Glasgow**, and -- just 45 miles from **Edinburgh** and she used to work there -- she stayed with my aunt in **Glasgow** through the week and then come back at the weekends. I had one year to go in school. I was -- war was declared 10 days

after my 16th birthday. And I should have had one more year of school, and my school closed down. They closed down and evacuated to the north of **Scotland**. My parents didn't want me to do this, so my schooling was finished. And of course my -- the brother also. And we went to live in the country for two years. They went to the village schools there, the three boys, my brother and the two refugee boys went to the village school there, and as I say, my schooling was finished. After two years we went back to **Edinburgh. Edinburgh** itself was not badly bombed, but **Edinburgh** is 45 miles from **Glasgow** and in **Glasgow** there was **Clydeside -- Clydebank,** which was the biggest shipping factory in the world. So the Germans used to come over practically every night to bomb the **Clydeside,** and in doing so they came over **Edinburgh.** So we never knew, and I think we had about 150 air raids and we never knew what was happening and we always knew the Germans planes because they had a missed beat. The British planes had a very steady beat, the Germans had a missed beat. You could hear them above and know what -- what they were. And my sister and I were both air raid wardens and we used to go out in the dark and patrol the streets and see what was happening.

Q: Let's move back a little bit in time about the young people that your parents, those 35 children, and especially the two boys, how did that come about?

A: I don't know how my mother too -- got this all together, but we heard about the children in -- in the **Dovercourt** camp, and we heard about they were looking for families to take these children. So my mother did her thing and went around and found these 35 families and they all said that they would take a child, and we said that we would take one boy. We said -- my brother was nine or 10 at the time. We thought a ni -- a boy will be nice for him.

Q: Wha-What year was this?

A: This was 19 -- the winter of 1938. And they came in on a very, very cold wintry night, I think it was in December 1938.

Q: Wh-Where did these children come from?

A: I believe they came from **Dovercourt** camp in **England**. I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

Q: Now, were these English children, or were these children from the con -- Jewish children from the continent?

A: Oh, oh, these were Jewish children from the continent. They came from **Germany** and **Austria**, maybe other countries, but they were all -- they were all refugee children. And they came on the **Kindertransport.**

Q: Right, and so they were at this **Dovercourt.**

A: Right.

Q: And -- and then your -- your mother -- how did -- how -- what did she do, go knock on people's doors? How did she get people to accept these children?

A: She just about -- knocked -- knocked on people's doors. I mean, they knew all of the Jewish people. In fact, if I da -- a funny story was, when my sister was ma -- my sister was married a year before I was, and everything was rationed. Food was rationed, everything was rationed. So they decided that in order to have a wedding with a sit down dinner, they couldn't -- they couldn't have very many people. Well, my parents knew everybody in **Edinburgh**, and the people that hadn't been asked were very, very upset. So I was married a year later, and we had a wedding in the assembly rooms in **Edinburgh**, we asked 700 people. I mean, it was more of a buffet thing, but I'm saying this to tell you that they knew everybody. They were -- because my parents were so involved in the congregation and because of this, they were invited to every wedding, every -- every **bris**, a-and my father was, you know how you -- what -- if you're a **Cohen** you buy back the child or something, is that right?

Q: Th-The **Pidyon HaBen.**

A: Right. And my father used to go to all of these, he -- you know, and he went to every wedding, and every **Bar Mitzvah,** everything, so naturally when we had a wedding and didn't invite them, they were very hurt. So we took care of that.

Q: So you're -- n-now we're talking about what, January '39? Wh-Wh-When are we talking about, the year your mother and father are taking -- taking responsibility for these 35 children?

A: Well, I'm not sure when they -- when they started, but you go -- I'm not sure when it all began, but I know that the children came in in December '38 - 1938.

Q: Oh -- okay, so -- so -- so this was after **Kristallnacht** --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and they were on the **Kindertransport.**

A: Right.

Q: Did they speak any English, these children?

A: The ones that we had were especially hard because the two boy -- when the children came in, we'd arranged to take one and -- and they came in this very cold night and there were these two boys that were standing hand in hand and nobody could understand them. They didn't speak German, they didn't speak Yiddish, but they spoke this sort of dialect. So it was established afterwards that the -- that they spoke this kind of **sub-patois**, and where they came from was, they came from a little tiny village called **Lackenbach** in **Burgenland**, which was, I think, in northern **Austria**. So they managed to find out from somewhere that these boys had promised their parents that they would never be separated, so we took both of them.

Q: How old were they and what were their names?

A: **Max** was either eight or nine and his name was **Max Kodigstein**, and his brother was **Agon**, and he -- he was -- must have been about 11 or 12. (Hey **Jenny**, come on. We go. Go on. Yeah, scoot. Stay.) **Max's** brother was **Agon** and he was about 11 years old, and **Max** was a rather rotund little boy with brown hair, and -- and **Agon** was taller with -- with red hair. And they were completely bewildered. I think that they'd never been in a city before. And we had arranged a bedroom for this boy that we thought that we were getting and luckily we had a double bed. So we brought them in on this very, very cold night. The next day all of the -- all of the children were assembled at the shul and the particulars were taken, and then my parents, they took them down to the big department store and outfitted them, cause they were wearing **lederhosen,** thick, white socks and this sort of thing. And they stayed with us for quite some time before they learned some English and then -- and then they went to the nearby school.

Q: So how long did these boys live with you?

A: They lived with us for six years. They lived with us from 1938 til after the war finished, and then after the war finished we found out -- I don't know how we found out, my parents found out that there was distant relatives in **London**. Their parents, of course, had died in -- in the camps, but they had distant relatives in **London**, so

they went down to be with them. And after my father died -- and I'm not sure what year it was, but both boys married girls down in **London**, Jewish girls, and my mother and I so traveled by train down to both of their weddings. I lost touch with them when I came over here.

Q: So these two boys moved into your house and the other 33 went into other homes --

A: Right.

Q: -- in -- in **Edinburgh**. And did you have contact with these other children, or did your parents have contact? Did the children get together as a group?

A: Yes, in fact, as I say, it -- it was a very a close community. Our boys actually had the two cousins, they went to other families, and -- and they used to get together -- we used to have -- we tried to arrange things where all the children would get together so that they would feel that they were part of something, you know, that they weren't th -- completely isolated. And -- and of course we all went to services, and -- and we used to have an **Oneg Shabbat** afterwards, and the children were there. So they were very well treated. I mean, I know that there were some families, unfortunately that thought that they were getting a cheap domestic. This happened -- I think this happened everywhere, but in the main -- I know that we felt that we had suddenly got two new brothers, and they were part of our family. As I say, my -

- my mother's -- one of my -- my mother's proudest things was that she had one child -- one boy but she made three **Bar Mitzvahs**. And it -- on this side of th -- you know, we lost touch with them. I have tried through the -- through the -- is it the survivor's registry, to see if I could find out where they were, but no.

Q: And what was their state of mind in the beginning, psychologically?

A: They didn't say much to us. They were quite bewildered and they were very, very happy to be part of a family, but I knew that -- I could hear the oldest one crying at night.

Q: And what kind of connection or correspondence did they have with their family?

A: None at all. None at all. When -- and they came to us, there was no connection at all. I -- since working at the museum, I've tried to find out about where they came from, from **Lackenbach** in **Burgenland** and the interesting thing was it looked as if this was a little Gypsy village. I really have wanted to look more on the internet, but so far -- come here, shoot -- so far, I haven't done so.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I mean they -- they had to be quite old now too, you know?

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

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Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Hilda Seftor**. This is tape number one, side **B.** And you were talking about the two boys that came into your family, that came over from the **Kindertransport** and stayed for six years. Tell me about their **Bar Mitzvahs**.

A: I don't remember much about them, I think they were very quiet affairs but -- but we had the family there and we made a little -- and we tried to make a little party for them and I think they were very, very happy.

Q: When were the **Bar Mitzvahs?**

A: I don't remember. **Max** was, I imagine, nine or 10 when he came, so I imagine it was three years after that **[indecipherable]** and of course, **Agon** must have been earlier, because he was 11 when he came, yeah.

Q: Di-Did the children talk about their family at all?

A: They didn't talk about their family at all. We didn't know if their relatives there, or what kind of a -- what kind of a life that they lived before then. I think that it was completely alien to what they came to. I think they lived in a very, very remote village and that everything was so strange to them that they couldn't have a comparison.

Q: How did they manage at school?

A: They seemed to manage very well. And the other children, I think may have thought they were a novelty and they treated them very well. They treated them very well.

Q: And the teachers and so forth? They went to the same school that your brother went to?

A: They went to the same school in the village. When we went back to **Edinburgh**, then my brother went back to the **Edinburgh** Academy and they went to the local school, and did very well. I mean, this is 60 years ago, it --

Q: So when you -- when they moved into your family, you were in your country home, is that --

A: No, when they first came to us it was in the winter of 1938, and we were -- we were at home. That following summer we all went out to our country home for the summer vacation and stayed there, and that's when we went out there.

Q: All right. Now let's talk about the other part of your family's life and your life, the -- the -- the **Whittingehame** part of your f-family s-story. When -- tell me a little bit about how this all began and what th -- how it came about and the location.

A: Well, **Whittingehame** is located on the outskirts of **Edinburgh** and it -- it all came about because Viscount **Traprain**, who was the -- who was the nephew of L-Lord **Balfour**, who initiated the **Balfour** Declaration -- Viscount **Traprain** was the

owner of this house and couldn't afford to keep it going, he -- he couldn't afford the taxes. And in **Scotland** if you can't -- if you can't pay the taxes, they will take the roof off your house. So he came to the Jewish community and offered it as a home for children. And we were overwhelmed, and we were a small community, but we said yes, let's do it, and my father went round the country raising funds for it, and then when it was all decided that we could do it, he was made treasurer of this. A- And both of my parents were governors of -- of **Whittingehame** Farm School, and what they did was -- excuse me. Can we stop for a minute. **[tape break]**

Q: You said something about if people don't pay taxes they take the roof off of their hou -- the house tha -- th-the roof is removed from their house? Is that true or is that just an expression?

A: No, this is actual -- this is the actual truth. Lord -- Viscount **Traprain** had this huge house and it was a very, very definite problem that they would take the roof off. And if you take the roof off, then they didn't have to pay taxes.

Q: All right. It's an unusual story. So what -- now what year are talking -- what month and what year are we talking about that he came to your family and to the synagogue and offered this?

A: I am not sure. It was, I would imagine, round about 1938.

Q: So this was before **Germany** invaded **Poland**?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And then, when funds were collected, my father was the one who was completely responsible for furnishing this as a school for the children and for getting all the equipment that they needed. And then when this was done, they hired a teaching staff. And because they -- the idea was that **Whittingehame** Farm School was going to be a school that -- that taught a complete school curriculum and also taught the children how to work the land so that if they went to **Palestine** and were in kibbutz after the war, that they will be able to work there. And -- and the teaching staff was absolutely great and the first headmaster was not Jewish, he was called Mr. **Maxwell** and at times he wore a kilt, which the children loved. And once this was all done and this -- and the school was repaired and we bought 160 teenage children up from **Dovercourt -- Dovercourt** Camp in **England**, and --

Q: Who were these children? Were these other **Kindertransport** children like the fir -- the 35 that your parents were helping out?

A: Yes, it -- these were all **Kindertransport** children, I think between the ages of 14 and 18, though I'm not really sure about that.

Q: Mm-hm. And they came from a camp on isba -- on the coast, is that what you said, of **Dover**?

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A: At -- at **Dovercourt** camp -- I'm not sure where it was in **England**, but it was a big, very temporary camp for children who were first brought over to the country and kept there while homes were trying to -- were found for them. And they went all over. I mean, **Great Britain** was absolutely wonderful in the -- in the fact that it arranged to take 10,000 children. It was a small country and once we got them there, we had to find out who would take them. And they went to large homes, they went to small homes, they went to schools and so we heard about - **Dovercourt** Camp, we arranged for the 160 to be brought up. And they were there throughout the war. Actually, at a certain point, **Britain** declared that all -- all people not born - all people from **Europe** were enemy aliens, so the boys were taken over to an -- to interment camps.

Q: When was this?

A: I'm not really sure when. I think it must have been about, perhaps 1941 or 1942.

Q: Okay, mm-hm. All boys over what age?

A: Sik -- over 16 years.

Q: Let's talk aga -- also about the financial commitment your parents had to make. They obviously had to make it for **Agon** and **Max**. What about for the school?

A: Well, the school had to be subsidized by the whole Jewish -- whole Jewish community. This was an enormous undertaking, so as I said, he was the treasurer of this, and he -- he went throughout the country raising funds for this.

Q: But when you say throughout the country, throughout **Scotland**?

A: No, I think it was **England** also. **Scotland** does not have a large Jewish community. As I say, there were 300 families in **Edinburgh**. The -- **Glasgow** there were several thousand, but even then, I mean, this was not enough to th -- take care of this, so I think -- my father had business in some of the big English towns in -- in **Leeds** and **Liverpool** and other -- I mean, he had branches of -- of his business in some of the big towns, in **Cardiff** and **Wales,** in **Liverpool** and **Leeds.** So I think that he went to the Jewish congregations there. I'm not sure where he -- he raised funds, but I know that h-he went throughout the country.

Q: And your mother stayed home with you all?

A: Oh yes, yes. As I said, apart from anything else, she was a semi-invalid, and -- and it was not easy for her.

Q: When you say your father had businesses in -- around the countries, wh-what -- the same kind of business that he had back in **Edinburgh**?

A: Yes, exactly the same, and as I say, he was in -- in partnership with his brother-in-law, who was also called **Cohen,** although he was no relation. And his brother --

I think there were about three or four of them, and it was the same business, and unfortunately during the war, many of them were bombed. The one in **Liverpool** was bombed, I think the one in **Leeds** was bombed, and -- and it goes on from there.

Q: And this is the business where people came in with stamps and redeemed them and -- in your father's o -- stores? Isn't that what you're talking about?

A: Yes, his business was called the Ideal Trading Stamp Company, and as I said, he imported tea and then had the stamps in there, and then -- and then people would redeem the stamps for merchandise.

Q: And where did he import the tea from?

A: I don't know, maybe **India**. I honestly don't know.

Q: S -- let's t -- also talk now about this school. So the -- the -- these children came to the school at -- en masse, did they come as a group when the school finally opened, when your parents got it going and other people got it going?

A: I believe it -- they came en masse, I think that some of them may have come later, but I think that -- they came en masse, you know, sort of -- mostly.

Q: Mm-hm. And describe what these -- the set up was, how the children slept and so forth. And d-do you know, the physical layout of the -- of the building.

A: They had dormitories -- it had dormitories for the boys and dormitories for the girls. And there was -- there was an excellent matron, Miss **Lacker,** who was, I

believe -- I think she was Austrian. Perhaps she was German, but she was a lovely lady and my mother was, as I said, one of the governors and she was head of the house committee and my mother used to have many, many meetings with Miss **Lacker.** And, you know, sort of trying to bring in a kind of family thing for the children so it wasn't just a school. They wanted to bring in a -- a sort of homely attitude so that they would not feel so homesick. And as my sister wrote in her memoir, what -- wa -- one of the things that we used to do is, we used to go out regularly -- my father didn't drive, but we had a chauffeur, **David**, he was wonderful. But anyway, we used to go out several nights a week and my father used to take great cartons of ice cream and the thing was this, that some of the children were very, very Orthodox and there were two dining rooms there, one for the strictly kosher, and one that was not so kosher. And we used to take the ice cream out in a great big -- whatever you call them? And it was ice packed **[indecipherable]** because the children used to have you wait for two or three hours before they could have the ice cream. And one of the other things is that where my father's business was, right opposite was an ice cream factory, and my father was very, very fond of this man that owned the ice cream factory. He was it -- he was Italian and he was called Mr. **Valenti**. And my father -- and ma -- and Mr. **Valenti** used to get together and **[indecipherable]**. The sad thing was this, that in 1940 all

of the Italians were rounded up in **Scotland** and they -- and they -- and they were put on this -- on this ship, the **Arandora Star** and sent to **[indecipherable]** and the aras -- and the **Arandora Star** was sunk by a German patil -- torpedo off the Irish coast and Mr. **Valenti** died. My father was very upset about that, because he was such a good man.

Q: Speaking about good men, which your father an -- ce-certainly sounds like, was he -- was he unusual in the -- in the **Edinburgh** community or were there a lot of other men like him, who did so much and put so much effort and time and caring into these children? Or was your father unique in this?

A: Well, I know I'm prejudiced, but he we defin -- he was definitely unique and he was -- he was one of a kind. My uncle was a governor, but he didn't do half as much as what my -- my father's whole heart and soul was tied up with this school, and he was constantly sort of trying to find things for the school. Food was very strictly rationed, and he'd go around the farms looking for eggs for them. He would -- he would try and supplement the rations in every way he could. I mean, he was always there for them.

Q: Now you were 16 - 17 - 18 - 19 at the time. You were obviously following what was happening and your parents, of course were following what was happening

during the war. What about the children? Were they also as aware, the children in the school?

A: Oh, I'm quite sure they were. If you see i -- if you see the pictures that the museum has, that my sister provided, there is a whole -- a whole group of -- of mail they were getting. I don't know where they were getting it from, possibly from **Switzerland**, but I mean, they knew what was going on and of course, you know, we had air raids, which they were involved with. And -- and they had first -- and they had first aid classes, you know, they were taught to do what they had to do in case a bomb fell, this or this thing. They were -- they were very much aware, and -- this was a regular school, you know, I mean, it -- we knew they must -- it must be so much heartbreak there, but you try and be there for them if they need it, -- but try and encourage them to go on with their lives.

Q: So was it a memb -- a matter of lay people counseling these children, or were there any professionals there counseling these children psychologically?

A: You know, I don't remember that, you know. I was just a teenager myself and it was 60 years ago, so I honestly don't remember that.

Q: So what was your role with this school? As you say, you were 16 when it all started, what did you do in th -- in -- beginning then?

A: I didn't do very much. As you say, I wasn't old enough to drive then, and I used to go out with my parents and make friends with the children and do -- you know, try and make them feel comfortable. My sister did have her license and she w- would often go out by herself at night and yeah -- and be wi -- I think it was about 15 or 20 miles from the city, and she would be there at night and she would be **[indecipherable]** with the children, you know? And she was the one that wrote the memoir and she possibly has better memories than I do, though when I talked to her the other night she said, I don't remember, it was so long ago.

Q: Mm-hm. Ca-Can you describe what kind of farming techniques the children learned, you s -- had mentioned that they were learning that, agricultural techniques, in preparation for what?

A: I don't know what kind of -- the techniques. I know that when **Whittingehame Farm,** the estate was given to them, they were given the land with it, and with the farmers that worked the land and they took these children under their wing and they taught them the farming as they knew it. Now, I know that the idea was that if their parents were not still alive when they left, that they would go to **Palestine**, and many, many did go to **Palestine** on kibbutzim -- on kibbutzim. But I don't know what kind of farming. I know that I saw them on tractors, I saw them making hay, I saw them, you know, doing all this sort of thing and in these photographs that the

museum has, it also shows that it was especially -- were taught how to sow fields and this sort of thing.

Q: Did you have a sense that these children were coping well, or was there signs of depression among the children, when you would go out there?

A: I really was too young, but thinking about it now, I think that they were coping well. I think that the matron was a very nurturing person. I think that my mother was wonderful there, she was there to talk to them, and to be there for them if needed them. The other thing was just that **Chaim Weitzman**, his wife was very, very much involved with it, and she -- **Vera Weitzman**, and she was out there a lot and -- and she worked with the children.

Q: Did she live nearby?

A: I don't know where she lived nearby, but she was always there. And actually, Viscountess **Traprain's** wife, they lived in the **[indecipherable]** house, and his wife was always there too, helping. So there was **[indecipherable]** and there's a corps of women that were sort of there for the -- them if they needed, apart from working in the kitchen and doing these things.

Q: Did you sense any negative feeling among the non-Jewish residents in surrounding areas about these Jewish children being there?

A: Absolutely not, it was -- it was a building apart from itself, it was set in the country, amid fields. But no, I didn't -- I didn't see anything at all, or my parents didn't either, I know, because I would have heard about it.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And so how often would you go out there?

A: We go out -- we would go out there a-at the weekends and perhaps one or two nights a week.

Q: Did you stay overnight?

A: No, I didn't. No.

Q: And the children picked up English quite easily?

A: Yes, they did. In fact, they did very well. As I say, **[indecipherable]** had a very, very qualified teaching staff. And after Mr. **Maxwell** left, they had a Jewish headmaster called **Berner Cherig**, who now, I believe, is in **Israel.** And they seemed to do very well. In fact, one of the -- in one of the photographs that we have, it shows the -- the girls all in the sewing room, and there's a sign above it that says, speak Hebrew.

Q: In Hebrew.

A: In Hebrew, yes.

Q: Were all the staff Scottish?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember. I don't think they were Jewish, I think they were -- that they were regular teaching staff, but I could be wrong.

Q: Mm-hm. Now, what were you doing from the age of 16 on?

A: Well, the two years that I was in the country, I was -- we had a very, very large country house. It had seven bedrooms and goodness knows how many bathrooms, and they had the apple room and the gun room, and I mean, you name it. It was a very, very sprawling farmhouse, and -- and the domestics that we had all went to do war work, so they -- there we were in the country, my mother was an invalid, so I was looking after the house. And then, that time there was no central heating, so you know, you would light the fires in the morning for heat. So the first thing I do was light the living room fire, light the kitchen fire, do these sort of things. I was looking after the house and I was -- I was very domesticated and I loved to -- I loved to cook, so that kept me busy. And then when we went back -- back to **Edinburgh**, I was accepted into the -- the **Edinburgh** College of Domestic Science, and I was there for two years and I got degrees in household and institutional management. And institutional management meant that you learned to cook for many, many people. In fact, after I got married, and with four boys, and my family used to tease me that I was still cooking for institutional management. And so I

graduated from there and then I was told that I had to do work of national importance. Well --

Q: Th-This would be 1943 now?

A: Yes, possibly 1943. My sister was already away doing work of national importance, and I was told that I had to do this. Well, my mother needed somebody. We had a big house in **Edinburgh**, no staff. So they said that I could stay at home. Th-They wanted to make me what they called a messing officer. This is a British phrase. A messing officer is a commissioned officer in the British forces that -- that deals with -- with -- with the catering, the cooking. Looking after the troops. They wanted me to be a messing officer and they said that I could -- I could stay at home if I got a job of national importance. So I went to work for the **Edinburgh's** school system, sort of cooking meals for the schools -- for the Scottish schoolchildren. And what I did was this, I had to be there at six o'clock in the morning and it was dark, it was blackout, there was no transportation. It was luckily about 15 minutes walk from where I lived. And I get -- I leave the house about five -- I'd get up early, I would light the fires in our own house. I would wash the kitchen floor, do everything that had to be done so my mother wouldn't do it. Then I'd leave the house at 5:30, walk to my work. And what we had to do is we had to work with the food, so that the food had to be ready by 8:30. Then it was put in insulated

containers and the trucks used to take it off at 8:30 to the various schools. And we were finished by three o'clock. Well, after we sent the food out at 8:30, we began preparing the food for -- for the next day. And during that time I got a vaccination. They had smallpox in **Glasgow,** which came into **Edinburgh**. And -- and without telling my parents I went to have a vaccination, because for some reason I was not vaccinated as a child. So I went to -- I went to get a vaccination that was not good and I had a very -- a very swollen arm, and the doctor said, you're working too hard. So they put me in -- in the -- in the largest wartime nursery, it had a hun 150 children. And I used to go -- I used to get the -- the tram car by that time, to this nursery and I used to go there and I used to cook for the 150 children and for the staff. And it was -- it was an old -- it was an old church run by an -- and ran by an -- and ran by a canal. And there were -- there were rats and this sort of thing. And I remember one year -- I lliked to knit. One year I made about 20 or 30 pairs of mitts for the children, to th -- when -- for Christmas and one year they -- the Duchess -- the Duchess of **Kent** was going to come to visit. Great excitement. And I had managed to hold some white flour, which was always, always unwrit -- unobtainable, and I made this wonderful cake. I mean, I made this absolutely wonderful cake and took it in there and the next morning when the Duchess was supposed to come, they found out that the rats had eaten part of it. So this was a --

this was an experience. So I worked there and actually where I should backtrack and say that when I went to work for the -- for the schools, after I was there for six months they say that would I be in charge of sending the food out to all the wartime nurseries in **Edinburgh**, which I did. I think there were about 1500 children, and I used to send out the food to all these children. Then when I got this, the smallpox thing, I h -- I went to work for the largest nursery. And finally my mother's health deteriorated and they said that I could stay home. And that's when I started my volunteer work and I went to work -- I looked after her and I went to work at the Canadian Legion Services club on **Princess** Street, which is the main street in **Edinburgh.** And my parent's house was always open house for everybody. I mean, when -- I mean, for **Pesach**, for Thanksgiving, any time. We always had lots of people and f-for our two Seders, -- we always had four or five or six servicemen. So we had open house and we always had many, many servicemen coming back, and it was very, very nice. I had a great -- I had a great childhood, really.

Q: Let -- let's get back to **Whittingehame** a little bit.

A: Sure.

Q: Did any rabbis come to the -- to the house to teach the children or work with the children or talk to the children?

A: That I don't know. I'm -- I'm pretty sure that they must have visited and they must have come and talked to them. I'm not sure if they actually taught them.

Q: Uh-huh. So there was no religious trainings? It was more secular, Hebrew, conversational Hebrew to get them ready to go to **Palestine**.

A: I think you're right, but I honestly don't know.

Q: Mm-hm. Now, so much was going on, obviously, with **Hitler,** we -- and -- were you and your family aware of what was happening to the Jews in '41 - '42 - '43 over in -- in the -- on the mainland?

A: We were very much aware. Of course we --

Q: How -- how did you know?

A: Well, news was getting through by this time. I mean, news were getting through by this time. And of course, the children that came on the -- on the **Kindertransport** and our own boys were very much aware of how -- how their parents had been treated, what was happening over there. So we knew, probably far more than the non-Jewish population. So we did know what was happening and it is a very tense time, you know, because -- because when, one by one, the countries over -- over in **Europe** fell, and we were left by ourselves -- we were only 18 or 20 miles from the -- from the German troops, and -- and my father especially was desperately concerned about it, because you know, he - what were -- what was

going to happen to us? Were -- were we going to be sent over to the camps ourselves? It was -- it -- it was a -- I realize now, far more than I ever did when I growing up, what it must have been like for them, for our parents, cause I often think, what would I have done if this had happened when I had -- had my four boys? And luckily -- I mean luckily, but luckily, none of my family actually went and were killed, but we saw it all around us, obviously. My brother was too young.

Q: And when did the correspondence between the children in the house and **Whittingehame** and their families stop?

A: I don't know. I have no idea. I mean, I don't know where the correspondence came from. I can only think that it must have come through -- through **Switzerland** because when I was -- when I was transcribing it for the museum I -- I did a very touching series in which this little girl had been sent on the **Kindertransport** to **England** and she was writing to her parents in **Berlin** and they were each trying to buoy each others up, and the little girl was saying, you know, what is happening over there? How are things with you? And the parents were saying -- they had a guest house in **Berlin** -- oh, everything's wonderful, this is happening, this is happening. And you could see. And then -- and then finally, when war broke out, the little girl said **[indecipherable]** said, what am I going to do, I can't write to you any more. And I have this on the computer here. It's a heartbreaking thing, but I

realize that from the time that war broke out, that all correspondence, it did stop and that any that came through must have come by through **Switzerland**. So I mean, I don't know where the letters came from.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I know that our b -- our boys didn't see anything at all, they were completely cut off.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they started speaking with Scottish accents.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Hilda Seftor
June 12, 2006

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Hilda Seftor**. This is tape number two, side **A.** Did **Agon** and **Max,** the two young boys who moved in with your family, whom your family quote, adopted, ever come with your family after **Whittingehame**?

A: Yes, they usually came with us unless they had something else that they -- that they wanted to do or had to do. They came with us as part of the family. And I think that they liked to be with the other children, I think that they gave a feeling of almost family, you know, that there were other children who -- who were not so Scottish. And it -- it worked out very well.

Q: When they would go, how would they talk to the children, in English, or in German, or how would they talk to them?

A: I think they would ha -- have to talk in English, because I think that the language that they spoke would not be very easily understood by -- by other people.

Q: And t-tell me a little bit about the high holidays and whether the children at **Whittingehame** celebrated any of them, or other holidays, like Passover and so forth.

A: The children definitely celebrated all of the Jewish holidays. I am not -- I can't remember so clearly exactly how it was, but I know that my parents made sure that

there was a **Seder**, that there were **Seders**, that -- that the other holidays that there were some -- there were some religious observance, so that the children would remember their heritage. And sad to say I can't remember who exactly went out to conduct the services, but -- but they were always made very, very much aware that they were Jewish, and where they came from, and what their heritage was.

Q: Do you know if any of the children kept journals?

A: No, I don't. We're trying to find -- pretty late in the game but we're trying to find children who might remember a-and who can tell us if they kept journals or not. I have some inquiries going out now as I'm trying to find children who were there. And so far I found one lady who now lives in **New Jersey**, who was out at **Whittingehame** and she remembers -- she remembers my parents picking them up in the car as a group and taking them to classical concerts in **Edinburgh** in the **Usher Hall**. Now, I don't remember that, but when I talked to her she said that she always remembered my parents had taken them to concerts.

Q: Were there any negative comments made by non -Jews in **Edinburgh** about harboring these children, taking care of them during the war? Did you ever sense any of that?

A: No, no, I -- I'm trying to think. I didn't sense anything at all. I was -- I was young myself, but I think that had there been any negative, any negative or -- views

at all, or any -- any sort of sign of anti-Semitism, that -- that my parents would have been aware of those and -- and they would have spoken among themselves. And w- we listened to what they said, but no, I didn't hear anything at all.

Q: And then you said when the law came about enemy aliens that the young men 16 and over had to leave, what was that like for these children?

A: I think they were very unhappy, obviously, that they were in they were th -- classified as enemy aliens, but this was the law of the land. In fact, one of my -- one of my uncles -- my mother's sister married -- married an Austrian before World War I, and he lived in -- he lived in th -- **Scotland** all his life, in fact he was -- he ran one of my father's businesses in **Glasgow**. Never thought of taking out citizenship. He'd been there what -- 30 - 40 years or more, and he was classified an enemy alien and he was interned. So I mean, all of the -- all of the men who were not of British birth and -- and who came from these countries, were automatically interned.

Q: Did your parents have any communication or relationship with these children from 16 on, once they left to these internment camps?

A: I think they must have done. I don't honestly know, but I think that they must have kept in close contact with them. I can't see that they wouldn't have done because they were so -- they were so **[indecipherable]** of making -- they were so

involved in making sure that these children knew that they -- they were loved and wanted, and I -- I just can't see that they would have just let them go like that.

Q: Now once these 16 year olds and over left, did new children take their place, or was there just less children at **Whittingehame**?

A: It was less children.

Q: Do y -- can you tell me a little bit abo -- more about the other staff at **Whittingehame**? You had mentioned some of them.

A: Yes, the -- the agricultural side of their education was under the supervision of a Mr. **Markham**, who was Lord **Traprain's** factor. Now, a factor, the -- the translation of that is the bailiff. He was -- he was Lord **Traprain's** chief man who did the farming and -- and he took the children, he took the boys especially under his wing and taught them how to -- how to sow crops and do all the things that are necessary in farming. He was a great man and he -- he was -- he was very brusque but very, very kind, and -- and the boys liked him very much. And the other members of the staff was of course, Mr. **Maxwell**, who was the headmaster. There was Miss **Lacker**, the matron, who was German and who was a lovely lady, very, very -- very warm and compassionate and very competent at what she did.

Q: This is a -- she was a German Jew?

A: Yes, I'm sorry, yes, she was a German Jew. There was Mr. **Drew,** who was not Jewish, who -- who was the English teacher and who was also the photographer and any of the photographs that we have were taken by him. We're not sure of what happened to him after the war. There was a Mr. **Likelbower** from **Palestine**, who taught Hebrew, who was Jewish. A Miss **Trauss**, who was German and she was a cook and she was Jewish. And a Miss **Mundy**, who was English, who was the school secretary and I doubt that she was Jewish. And I don't know any of the other members of the staff, but I think that it was a fairly mixed group, partly -- partly Jewish and partly not.

Q: And did they all get along with each other? Di -- was there any friction among the staff?

A: Not as far as I know. I think that the ones were hard and came to work with the children were very, very much aware of what had happened, of where the children came from, of how they must be missing their families and I think that they -- that they worked very, very well together, and I think the children appreciated that. There were so many cases of home sickness and -- and sadness, and a -- and I think that they tried to help in every way they could. Plus, my mother was there, Miss **Lacker** was there and the **Chaim Weitzman's** wife was there, and they knew they

could go to them and talk to them if there really was -- if there really was a problem and they needed to talk to somebody.

Q: What happened if there was a health problem, if a child needed emergency medical attention?

A: I don't remember that, but I'm quite sure that my parents would have made sure that there was medical facilities there, also close-by that were available for them, because obviously there had to have been some kind of emergencies during -- or health problems during that time, but everything seemed to go smoothly and I think that if there were health -- health problems they had, th-there was medical there -- medical people there to take care of them.

Q: Was there a bomb shelter on the property?

A: I think there was, I'm not very sure. I know that the children were all taught in -- in first aid and what to do if a bomb fell. I-I don't remember seeing a bomb shelter myself, but if not then I think that they must have been told where to go in case of -- in case of an air raid.

Q: W-Were there air raids?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes, there were air raids. We were just -- the school was only a-a-about 20 miles at the most from the city and we had air raids in the city, so -- a-and then of course there were **RAF** stations -- Royal Air Force stations of -- the bases, I

think you call them, all around there, so -- and the Germans tried to bomb them, so yes, we had frequent air raids. And -- I'm sorry -- and -- and of course, a -- the school had to practice strict blackout. All th -- all of the windows had to be completely covered at night and a-a-a-at -- the same sort of things that we had to do in the city.

Q: So the staff that you mentioned stayed there at the school and were there during the evening and -- and nighttime? Who -- or -- or was there another nighttime staff?

A: Oh no, the staff lived there. They lived on the premises. As far **[indecipherable]** as far as I was concerned -- as far as I can remember, there was no other staff there, I mean, these are the people that were there.

Q: Mm-hm. So they were there with the children during the -- the air raids and the blackouts?

A: Absolutely yes, yes. And at one time I think that a bomb did fall -- I think my sister was -- was staying there that night and I think that a bomb did fell -- fall on the nearby air force base and there was quite some consternation, but everything was taken care of. And the children knew, I mean, they knew what was happening, they knew the -- the danger of air raids and **[indecipherable]** during war time, and after what they'd gone through I think that they were just prepared to do anything that had to be done.

Q: And where did new clothes come from? Obviously, if they'd lived there for six years, the children got bigger, heavier, so forth. Whe-Where did they come from?

A: It must have ga -- the clothing must have come from a fund that -- that the -- that -- that the Jewish community provided for the running of the school. I think that -- that the -- the clothing must have been part of it and of course, all of us were under very, very strict clothing rationing. So, I mean, it was -- it was -- it was not so easy to get the clothes that you wanted. I think that we all wore very functional clothing, clothing that would -- the clothing that would last and that ge -- that we could wear for more than one occasion. So I think that the -- that the children were definitely well-clothed, but there was very, very sensible clothing. And of course, they all had -- as I say -- we all had ration books -- we all had ration books for food and -- and for clothing and for anything, so I mean i-i-it was very hard to buy things spontaneously that -- at that time.

Q: What kind of activities did the children do for recreation there? After all, they were still children.

A: I don't remember precisely, but I know that they had -- they were divided into various **[indecipherable]** squads and -- and they had all kinds of games and they had play sessions, they had games. I'm not sure if-if they played -- if they played British soccer. I should think that they did, I'm not sure. The girls played hockey,

but they all seemed to have some kind of very rounded education. Yi -- which included sports, and -- and physical education, because these were very, very -- very sensitive years for these children. They were growing fast and they had to have a proper education.

Q: Mm-hm. Di -- was there any discussion, let's say your mother or your older sister to the girls who were maturing physically?

A: Yes, I believe that -- and I think that my sister was involved with this. I think that -- that the girls would come to my mother, and I -- and to ask for advice, and I think that they could talk to my sister. She was only two years older than I was, but she seemed to be more mature at that time. These are years of which I -- a couple of years can make a great deal of difference. So they were there for them, and I think that there were times where some of the children felt that they had a crush on some of the other children and I -- I remember that my mother especially was there to kind of adjudicate what was going on. And it -- it was a community, but it was a happy community and the children all lived and thrived and after the war they all went their separate ways, and some went to **Palestine**. Some, very few, found family and made new lives for themselves. A-And they all survived, a-and that was the most important thing of all.

Q: Were your parents in touch with the other -- the other 33, I guess, children that your father helped to place in different homes? Not the **Whittingehame** children, but --

A: No, no, I know, yeah.

Q: -- did your father and mother keep up with those children at all?

A: Well, yes, I mean sa -- mainly because they were part of the community. I mean, it was a very, very small congregation and i-i -- we knew everybody. I mean, the people who -- who had agreed to take these children in were all -- I wou -- I would almost say some friends of my parents. So we kept in close touch. As I say, I think that our boys had two cousins, th -- and they were in one of my mother's friend's houses and this **[indecipherable]**. I think my aunt -- I believe my aunt in **Glasgow** took one of them. And my -- my mother-in-law, as it turned out to be, she took one of them, so they're all people that we knew and they're all part of the congregation. Another thing which is nothing to do with these children is that when the refugees came into -- into **Edinburgh**, I think my parents were largely responsible for establishing a refugee club for them. And they would -- they would find -- they would rent somewhere, a little hole or a big room somewhere, and once a week, or so -- twice a week, they could come together and gather and just talk to each other. And we used to go to refugee club and talk to them and see what was going on. So,

I mean, apart from the children, they were also trying to help the grownups and just to see that they had some kind -- some kind -- some kind of connection with each other, that they weren't so completely alone.

Q: These were adult refugees.

A: These wer -- yes, these were adult refugees. These were people that had managed to come in -- in fact, my -- one of the people that my father signed an affidavit for was called Dr. **Adler** and he and his wife came in. One -- another refugee was the Dr. **Schneider**, who became a very, very good dentist. But Dr. **Adler** became my mother's physician and you know, my par -- my parents kept -- kept in close touch with them, which is rather interesting thinking about it, cause I'm wondering if they had to sit exams before they could -- if they could practice in -- but they definitely did. And we had refugees come into the house all the time. And -- and my father was constantly trying to see what he could do. He knew what was happening, he knew what was going on and as time goes by we could see more and more newsreels and stuff of what was happening in **Europe**.

Q: Di-Did you know about the camps?

A: Yes, we -- yes, we knew about the -- about the camps. I think that we knew more than other people and just agonized about them. I mean, we were just so lucky that we had no close family members that were -- that were caught in there. And I think

that my parents felt this. I think they felt that they were so privileged that we escaped this that they wanted to help the people that wer -- that were so unfortunate.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That's why -- one of the reasons why, a-as an aside, when I came to **Washington** -- came to **Virginia**, I was so happy that I could work for the museum and try and keep on the work that my parents were doing. It was the one thing I wanted to do.

Q: We'll talk about that a little later. I know with the **Kindertransport** children, many of them were placed in homes of non-Jewish families. Were any of the 35 children that your father helped place, placed in non-Jewish families, or all were placed in Jewish families?

A: They were all placed with Jewish families.

Q: Okay.

A: I think that a -- I mean, thinking back, my parents were completely involved in the Jewish community and I think that all of their friends really -- their close friends were Jewish. And -- the people that my mother felt that she could contact and ask them, they were Jewish, and then she knew the kind of homes that they would be going to.

Q: So it was never necessary to then move out into the -- into the non-Jewish population?

A: No, I think that -- thinking back on it that if they had they might have been able to bring more -- more children in, but it was a real feat to bring the 35 in, it really was.

Q: And again, could you just go over how your father heard about these 35 children?

A: I don't think he heard about them, I think that we knew that -- that -- that there were children being brought in on the **Kindertransport.** We knew that there were thousands being brought in and I think there was a -- there was a plea sent out to all of the Jewish communities, could they take people. I mean, he had no knowledge of who these children were, but it was just this -- this -- it's a question, can you help, can you take children. That's what they responded to.

Q: Mm-hm. Were there any Jewish residents who were negative about this, or was it all a positive response?

A: Oh, I'm quite sure that some people said that they would rather not. I mean, I'm quite sure, I mean I don't know, but I'm quite sure there was some, really.

Q: Why do you say that?

A: Well, I don't know, I mean, but thinking back and knowing the nature that

there's some people that would and some people that won't. And I -- I just can't think that everybody that my mother sa -- contacted would say, oh yeah sure, yes of course we'll do it. I'm quite sure there were people that said, hey I'm sorry, we can't do this.

Q: Because of the responsibility, yeah. Is there anything more you can talk about, about **Whittingehame** during '39 to '45 that we haven't covered yet, because I wanted to then move on to aft -- you know, when the war was over. Is there anything else that you remember? Were there any crises that happened at **Whittingehame**?

A: Not that I remember. No -- I-I think there was a -- a small crisis when -- when some -- some girls said they were heartbroken because they -- they had this crush on one of the boys or something like this, and -- and they'll be some -- people will go and talk to them and, you know, -- and **[indecipherable]**. Nothing really, nothing really. I think that it -- it was a regular school and I think that there were ups and downs and I think that obviously -- perhaps some of the children were sick sometimes, but it all worked out, but very, very well. It was an excellent teaching staff and there were people there like the **Chaim Weitzman's** wife, like the **Masons** or like my parents, who were always there on hand to be there if they were needed.

Q: So **Vera Weitzman**, she didn't teach any classes, she was just there for suppor -- ma -- emotional support?

A: I don't believe that she taught, no, but she was always there. And she was very, very -- very enthusiastic about it, and very, very involved with it.

Q: And did the children get report cards?

A: I don't know, I -- because it was a school, I'm pretty sure that they did, but I don't know. I really don't know.

Q: And the food came from the -- the farm land that -- the surrounding farmland that it was a part of?

A: I don't know where the food came from, I know that -- that it was strictly rationed. I know that all of the -- all of the people **[indecipherable]** it was strictly kosher and therefore had to come from **Edinburgh** from the -- from the Jewish butchers. I'm sure that -- that the dairy stuff came from the surrounding farms, but there again, it was rationed, everything was rationed. And I -- I know that my father, as I said before, was -- was himself **[indecipherable]** trying to find extra food for them. I mean, h-he was always going out. He wa -- because of the person he was, he knew people and -- and he would go out and say look, there's a school here, you know, so can't you help? And they would respond to it because they knew what kind of a person he was. In fact, I tell -- in fact I tell a story which is co --

completely different to this. When we lived in **Walkerburn** during these two years i-in our country house, it was a little tiny village, and -- and there was -- and there was a convent there, and we used to go visit the nuns, and -- and they were sewing -- bless you -- robes for the -- for the **Edinburgh** bishops. Anyway, it was terribly cold, it was pitifully cold. I mean, and -- and we had no heating at all. And they would sit and sew these beautiful, beautiful embroidered gowns and the -- and th- their fingers would be blue. And they told us that they were -- they were praying for a miracle to get coal. Coal was also rationed. So we told my father and my father went around, around, and he had two tons of coal delivered to them. And they said, you see? We asked for a miracle. That was my father.

Q: How did he get all the, as you say, petrol to keep driving out to **Whittingehame**? It took a lot of gasoline.

A: I don't know how he got it. I know that -- that he had to be very careful because they would -- they would put dye in the petrol so that you know if -- if you -- you had a certain ration, and afterwards if you got black market petrol, it is -- very often it -- it had dye in it so they could tell if it was non-kosher. And -- and I'm not sure how he did it, but -- but he -- I mean, he had ways of doing it. And he'd ask people. He'd just go and say, look, you know, we need this.

Q: What did the children call him?

A: Do you know, I don't know? Possibly Mr. **Cohen**, yeah. Called my mother Mrs. **Cohen**.

Q: So now the war is winding down and it sounds to me the -- the negative part was when the young -- young men had to leave to go to the internment camps. But when that happened, did the atmosphere change at the school? I mean, the -- all these children were enemy aliens.

A: Yes, they were.

Q: Were there -- was there any restrictions on the children who remained at the school a -- from that point on, when the older children had to leave -- the older boys had to leave, were there any restrictions or did life go on the same once the boys left?

A: Well, I think that when they were declared enemy aliens, they were -- they were under much stricter -- they were under a much stricter rule. I mean, they couldn't move around the country, they couldn't leave, they had to say where they were this time, but of course, for these children they were -- they were in the school, there was nowhere for them to go to, but I think that had they wanted to, that they would have had to sign papers or this sort of thing that, you know, they were enemy aliens, and -- and -- and it -- it -- th-they would have to report if they went anywhere. But apart from that I think that – that -- you know, that was it.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And did we talk about the children who were in the city who were in the different houses coming out to the 30 -- the 35 children coming out to **Whittingehame**? Did they ever do that?

A: I don't believe they ever did. I don't believe they ever did. I don't believe that -- I can't remember any of the Jewish community really going out of their way to go out there. I think that they -- I think that they -- that they -- that the board, the governors of the school used to go out and take their families, but I don't remember any of the other ones going out.

Q: Mm-hm. So it was just the staff and the governors and people like that, who had a direct interest going out, but otherwise, the regular Jewish residents did not go.

A: No, as far as I know they didn't and as far as I can remember, I don't believe that the -- the 33 childr -- or 35 children went out either. It may -- it may have been because of an petrol restriction, I don't know, but as far -- I don't remember there ever being any sort of get together with them.

Q: So now the war is ending, and then what -- what happened?

A: Well, the children all went their certain ways, as of say -- the children who found out, sadly, that their families were no more. Other went to other people, o-others went to **Palestine**. Most of them sa -- went to **Palestine.** Some di-did find family, went to join them, a-and --

Q: Were -- were you out there when the children actually heard that the war was over?

A: No, I wasn't.

Q: Do you know if there was any kind of celebration?

A: Oh, I think there had to be. I mean, I remember what it was like for us on -- on **V-E** Day, and **V-J** Day and I mean, it was sheer jubilation, and I think -- I think that -- my own feeling was that, well of course there was -- there was rejoicing, there was also a lot of fear and uncertainty what will -- what's going to happen to us now. I mean -- I mean, there had to have been. I mean they had -- they'd been there for what, five or six years. They had some kind of -- the security feeling that here were their ties, here was a basis. All of a sudden they were going to go out on their own again.

Q: And the youngest were 14 when they entered --

A: Right, right.

Q: --- wasn't that -- so they're now 20 years old.

A: That's right. Yes, yes, absolutely. I mean, it was six years for us, I mean, the war was six years and of course the -- they were young adults by the time they left. Which was -- I mean, which was good, I mean, it had had this time to -- to grow up in a community that was very, very safe and solid and wherever they went to, they

had a good back -- had had a good background, you know, and -- and I'm quite sure that the people that taught them were very, very -- very, very careful to make sure that they had something to fall back on.

Q: Were you there when any representatives from **Palestine** came over to try to encourage these young people to move to **Palestine**?

A: No, I wasn't. I think though that -- I don't think they had to encourage them, I think that the children that found out that their families were no longer alive, didn't have much -- or, I mean, i-it sounds bad to say, didn't have any alternative, but th-they were lost, I mean, and they thought that th-there was a home for them in **Palestine**. It was obviously the best thing for them.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Hilda Seftor**. This is tape two, side **B.** And we had started talking about what happened when the war was over, and you said some of the children went to **Palestine**. How did they hear -- do you know how they heard about what happened to their families? Did representatives come to the school? Do you have any information about that?

A: No, I don't. I think that some of them had written to their homes and hoped and hoped and waited and waited and I think -- I believe I remember that some of them got the envelopes back saying that -- that their parents were no more. But I don't know -- you know, this is the only thi-thing that I do know. It -- it was a very, very hard time for them.

Q: And how involved w-were your parents when the war was over? How involved were your parents at **Whittingehame** when the war was over?

A: I don't remember ho-how it wound down, actually. I really don't. I mean, I have -- I have no -- so maybe you told us what happened when it closed.

Q: Whe-When did it close, do you remember?

A: No, I don't. I think -- I think that it must have been -- I don't know if it -- if it remained after war finished in 1945, if it went on or not. This is something that I've been trying to find out, but I have no memory of it. I think that it just wound down that the children one by one went to the various places, and I think that they just quietly closed.

Q: What happened to **Agon** and **Max**?

A: **Agon** and **Max** found out -- my parents found out that they had distant relatives in **London**, so they -- by that time they were -- they were young adults, and they went down to live with them. I believe that **Agon** went into the construction

business, and I believe that **Max** went to work with a furrier. That's much as I know, they both a -- they became very involved in the Jewish community where they lived, and they both married girls from **London.** And my father was no longer alive at that time, but my mother and I, I remember sa -- that we caught the train twice, to go down to their weddings. Andthey were very, very happy that we did so. Unfortunately, when I came to this country I lost complete touch with them.

Q: Uh-huh, mm-hm. And what about any of the children from **Whittingehame**?

A: I have no idea where any of them went, I -- I've been sending out inquiries just now, trying to find out and hopefully that I might find where some -- some of them are. This lady in **New Jersey** who I talked to has given me the names of some. Some of are in **Pales** -- some are in **Israel** now, and some **[indecipherable]** in **England** so I'm -- I'm trying to find out if I can get in touch with them. And it will be great.

Q: Did you ever go back to **Whittingehame** once the children left?

A: No, I didn't. I've looked it up on the internet and I see the house is still there, and I believe it became a correctional li -- school for boys afterwards. And I'm not sure what it is now. According to what I read on the internet, it has been divided into private apartments, but it is still owned by the **Balfour** family. It is still a beautiful, beautiful area, a beautiful, beautiful home.

Interview with Hilda Seftor
June 12, 2006

Q: Let's now talk about what happened to you after the war, summarizing on how you got to this country and so forth. So the war is over in '45, and what happened with you?

A: Well, the war finished in 1945, and unfortunately my father died very suddenly on the 19th of June in 1945, just before **V-E** Day. He was only 59 years old, it was a great, great shock to us. My mother was very sick at the time and we went through a very, very sad time at that time. After the war I became engaged to a man -- to a young man from **Edinburgh,** one who -- because we knew all of the families in **Edinburgh**, I had grown up with, I had seen him at the Jewish holidays and at the synagogue and I had been very friendly with -- with his sister, who went to the same school I did, and he went he joined the -- the British army during the war, he was a captain in the Royal Engineers and was stationed out in **India**. And he came back after the war and I met him at a -- at a Jewish charity dance, and we became engaged and married. And he was working for his mother, who was a furrier. Didn't work out so we decided to emigrate. And we ha -- by that time we had one little boy who was two years old, **Lawrence**, and my mother was desperately upset when we said we were going. She loved her first grandson. And I remember saying to her, don't worry, we'll come back and see you in two year's time. We got to -- well, that's another -- we -- we sailed on the -- on the first **Queen Elizabeth**. We sailed in

February, and these ships really rolled. It was a very, very stormy crossing and most of the passengers spent all of their time in their cabins. We -- she either lost or gained an hour each day, so we were five hours -- I'm not sure if it's ahead or behind when we got to **New York**. We got to **New York** and I remember sailing up the **Hudson** and seeing the Statue of Liberty. We stayed there overnight and -- and a Jewish friend of ours who we befriended when-- he was in the American army, met us at the boat to go to our hotel, and then took us to his home for our first American meal. And his -- his wife was a daughter of a Jewish butcher, and she had prepared huge steaks for us, and we couldn't eat them. And she was very upset with us until we sort of explained we can't do this, you know? Anyway, the very next morning we got a taxi to **LaGuardia** airport and it was bitterly cold, that was -- the 28th of February I think it was, bitterly cold and as we got on the -- on the plane it -- they were -- they were brushing the snow off the wings. And I was terrified. We had a two year old child, we were going to **California** and I was absolutely terrified. My husband was promised a job as a furrier there, so we had to get there right away. We got on board plane and my son **Lawrence** started screaming and he screamed all the way to **Chicago**. In **Chicago**, all of the pay -- all of the passengers were told to get off to get boxed lunches, but by that time **Lawrence** had stopped screaming, he'd fallen asleep, so we stayed onboard. And five hours later we got to

Los Angeles. When we got to **Los Angeles** it was 90 degrees and I almost died. I honestly almost died, I had never known such heat in my life. We had bought clothes in **Edinburgh** that was not suitable and we -- and we're met by this friend of ours and he took us to a motel in **Studio City** in the **San Fernando Valley** and left us there and the very next day so **Jerry** found out -- **Jerry,** my husband found out that the job that we'd come for was no longer there. So he started looking around and he ended up by working in the film labs. He worked for **Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**, he worked for **Universal**, this sort of thing. And we lived there for three and a half years and in these three and a half years I had two more sons. One was born - on July 13th in one year, one was born August 13th of the next year, they were 13 months apart. Well we didn't stay in **Los Angeles** because **Jerry** had very, very bad sinus trouble, so we packed up and drove to **Denver**, **Denver, Colorado** and we lived in **Denver** for 15 years. Worked out very well, our fourth son was born there and I love **Denver**, had a wonderful time there. And --

Q: Wha-What year did you come to the **United States**?

A: Came to the **United States** in 1951. And been here for over 50 years now. And -- and **Jerry** and I became citizens as soon as we could, it was five years after we got here, in 1955 -- I think it was in 1955, and our son **Lawrence** became a citizen also. The other children, of course, we born over here.

Q: What did it mean to you to become an American citizen?

A: Meant an awful lot. I'd always, always loved everything I'd read about **United States**, it was always like a fairy land to me, like another country, and of course the films, the movies that we saw were, you know, were like the **Andy Hardy** movies and things all looked as if things were so wonderful here, and I'd always wanted to come here. I had been engaged to an American during the war, a wonderful fellow who lived -- who actually lived in **Denver, Colorado**. He was in the -- he was a navigator of a Flying Fortress. And he was my best friend until he died. I mean, he was a wonderful fellow. And it didn't work out, so **Jerry** and I got married and -- and we came over here and -- and **Bob** continued to be a very good friend and when we found out that we had to leave **California**, we decided to go to **Denver, Colorado** and he and his -- he and his wife were our very good friends here. And -- and we stayed there for 15 years. Then after 15 years we went back to **California** again. So.

Q: And then you stayed how long in **California**?

A: Then we stayed -- then we stayed 15 years in **California**. **Jerry** had had whatever was bothering his sinuses had taken care of and **California** was all right, but I never really wanted it to be my home, I was deathly scared of earthquakes, and we'd been in two of them. We'd been in the -- the **Tehachapi** earthquake, I think,

in 1952 and then in the **San Fernando** earthquake. And they're very, very -- they're very, very frightening, not only the earthquakes but the aftershocks afterwards. And -- and my family used to go to bed early and I'd be sitting in our living room. All of a sudden the whole place would heave, just silently heave. And after -- after my youngest son **Colin** was 10 years old, I went to work, and --

Q: We-Were the earthquakes more frightening than the bombing raids in **Scotland**?

A: Yes. I think so. Partly because I-I was so young then and it was kind of exciting, you know, you hear the sirens and I think we were too young to realize what really cou-could happen. An-And -- and -- and my parents must have agonized. But the earthquake, I mean, with the -- with the bombings, you heard the sirens. You knew that something was going to happen and terrible things did happen, but with an earthquake, all of a sudden, your whole world is turned -- turned upside down. On one of them my husband was sitting at the dining room table very early one morning and the -- and the -- the chandelier light above his head -- he was sitting at the dining room table, just -- just shattered. And all of the doors in our apartment flew open, and -- and it went on from there, and it was the uncertainty, I mean and when -- when we lived there all these years, I had four boys and the last earthquake, the **San Fernando** one, I had two boys at college, at **UCLA Northridge**. I was working in downtown **L.A.** and **Jerry** was in the **San Fernando Valley** and it -- it

kept on going through my mind, if it's a bad earthquake and the freeways are buckled, we're all in different parts of -- how we going to get together? The place I worked with at that time was a department store and -- and they had an elevator for the employees, and the walls of the elevator were so buckled that the elevator couldn't work. It was a very, very fr -- it's very frightening.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I think it's not knowing that -- that the ground under you is -- is going to move.

Q: When did you come to **Washington**?

A: Came here in December 1954 -- I'm sorry, came here i-in -- in December 1994.

Q: And I'd like to now talk to you about your work at the museum, why you decided, or when did you decide to start volunteering at the museum?

A: Well, I'm the perennial volunteer. I've -- ever since World War II, I volunteered in some way or another all my life. I -- I volunteered for the Red Cross in **Denver** for about 15 years. I have thousands of hours there. I was head of Red Cross motor service. That's another story, but -- but I volunteered when we went to **Tucson, Arizona,** I volunteered in **Saint Mary's** Hospital for nine years. So I've always volunteered, but when we came t -- when we came here, I thought, my goodness, the **United States** Memorial -- Holocaust Memorial Museum is here, could I possibly? And I thought I couldn't, because there was the transportation. And we

went down, we saw the museum, we were totally overwhelmed, my husband and my son and I. And I called them and said, is there any way I could come? And I talked to **Genya Marken**. And she said well, we have a training class in October but, she said, if you want to come now, I'm in the photo archives. So I went into -- I went in -- had an interview with her and she said -- she knew that I wasn't a survivor, she knew that I hadn't had anything drastic happen to me during the -- the war, yet she said, why do you want to do this? And I said, because my parents were so involved and through them I was -- I became involved and I said, I'd love to think that I'm continuing to do what my parents were doing. And she said, well you know, you can't just come for a couple of hours. Evidently she had some volunteers that came in once a week for a couple of hours. She said, you'd have to come and make a real investment in this. And I said, sure I will. And so I started, and because my husband volunteered at a school and needed to be there by eight, he would drive me to the **Metro** station and I would get to the museum at seven o'clock in the morning. And I had -- I had a special permission from the guards to go in there, and it was completely deserted, apart from the guards. And I would go up to the fifth floor, everything was quiet and everything was partly dark and I'd walk across the glass bridge and go into the photo archives, and the first thing I do is put on everybody's computers. I knew all of their passwords so that they **[indecipherable]**

them. And then I would -- I worked to **Sharon Muller** and -- and -- and **Teresa Pollik --** but at that -- **Pollin,** but that time was mainly **Sharon Muller**, and she was -- she was good to work with because she was very, very precise. Extremely precise, I mean, and -- and she was never too busy to answer my questions. I mean, there were always people coming through at photo archives, asking for things, all the **[indecipherable]** come in, and I could go over and say, **Sharon,** could I possibly ask you this and she would stop everything and tell me what to do. I mean, I'm -- I felt that -- how I say, that I knew -- that I felt very confident what I did because she taught me how to do it. And I -- I worked there for six years. They called me their unpaid staff. I would go as -- I worked there four days a week, six hours a day. I'd leave there at one o'clock and **Jerry** would meet me. And I did so much. I think one of the things that I'm very, very proud of is that I did -- I processed the **Auschwitz** collection. That's a collection of 2400 photographs that were found in a suitcase, and this lady -- I can't remember her -- her second name, but she found them. Anyway, they had it in -- in **Israel** and we asked them if we could have this collection and there was a lot of negotiating going on with **Sharon Muller** and **Teresa Pollin** and th-this lady **Ann**, I can't remember her second name. Anyway, she came and she said that if we made copies for her that we -- that we could have -- we could make copies for ourselves also. So we got the negatives and

I remember **Sharon** and **Teresa** talking themselves one day and saying, do you think **Hilda** would like to do it? So they asked me and I said yeah. I ha -- I think so. So I did this whole thing. I had the contact prints, I had negatives, I did -- put this whole thing together. There were 2400 photographs, I put them by category, by this, and everything else. And I got so involved with it. They were ma -- they were mainly from people who had lived in a place called **Bedzin** in **Poland** and it was near the -- near a mountain resort. And it was the saddest thing because here were these pictures of these -- these photographs and there are people who -- who are leading happy lives before the Holocaust. There were pe -- there were weddings, there were -- there were picnics, there were family outings and there were a lot of -- lot of photographs of school -- school groups, a-and they were -- they were the Jewish -- what do they call them? Gymnasiums?

Q: Gymnasium.

A: Gymnasiums, and -- and -- I got to the point that I would -- I would be able to pick out the people from the various families and -- and be able to put names to them and -- and put them on the computer. And we got this whole thing together and we had them blown up and they're now -- and they're now in this album that I have here, and this -- a -- it's a wonderful album. But **Auschwitz**, the collection, is

really, really very special to me. And I also did -- I processed the **Anne Frank** thing there. I did the **Hannah Szenes.** I did --

Q: Wh-What exactly did you do?

A: I got the photographs together, I put captions on them, I put them on the computer, I wrote things about them, and can't remember this other man, this wonderful man who led the children out and was -- and was killed. I mean, th-there was so many things that I did --

Q: **Janusz Korczak**?

A: Yes, exactly, thank you. And that really touched my heart, you know? And -- and I did the **Einsatzgruppen**. I did the concentration camps. But with all of the things that **[indecipherable]** the concentration camps and seeing the stacks of bodies, they didn't affect me as much as working with the pictures, the photographs of people that were happy before the Holocaust, thinking they don't know what's -- what's ahead of them. They're -- there are nursery groups with children, in their nurse -- I mean, not knowing what's ahead of them. That just br -- i-it really broke my heart. And -- and can't thi -- I mean, I -- I have a whole collection of what I did there. And I did important -- important Jewish people throughout the world and -- and -- and important non-Jewish people throughout the world and I used to go into

the library and spend hours reading up biographies and things of these people. So I mean, I did a lot of -- a lot of work there.

Q: So you were the one to catalog it, to label it, to put them in groups?

A: **[indecipherable]** yes, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean --

Q: And put it -- put the information on the computer.

A: Right, right, yeah. And then, after six years, and my husband died very suddenly and I had surgery and I left and then after that, I talked to **Teresa Pollin** and she said, would you like to work with me? And I said, yes I'd love to. And -- so I started working at home and that's when I started doing -- I did this history of this little girl who came on the t -- on the -- on the **Kindertransport** and who was heartbroken at leaving her parents. And then I -- I recently finished recording the names of 14 and a half thousand Polish children that were in the **Lódz** ghetto for an exhibit that is going to be opened th-this coming fall, I understand, about the **Lódz** ghetto. **Teresa Pollin's** working on it and she asked me to do these in a hurry, and I did and what she did -- well, what she does is when she goes to **Israel**, she tries to get hold of anybody that might have any connection with these people and by having the names with her then she can do it.

Interview with Hilda Seftor
June 12, 2006

Q: So you entered all these 14,000 names --

A: 14 and a half thousand names.

Q: -- on -- o-on the computer?

A: I'll show you. Ye-Yes, I -- I entered 14 and a half thousand names, they were Polish names. And they in themselves were heartbreaking because some of them had the ages on them and some of them were little children. Now I'm transcribing survivor's histories and each one of them is different and each one of them is a story in itself.

Q: You're transcribing from interviews?

A: Transcribing from -- from the material that the museum sends me. They send me rough drafts, and I transcribe them onto the computer and then -- and then email them back to the museum. I think I'm on my 40th just now.

Q: And what is your feeling when you walk into the museum building?

A: I love being there. It is -- it is the hardest thing for me and the saddest thing that I can't go down as often as I used to. I get this feeling of awe going in there. I never go in there without this feeling of just absolute awe that this -- this building is there and that is -- and there's so much that is going on there, and there's so much that -- that is recorded there. I mean, I if I could, I would be down there every day.

Q: Is there a particular part of the museum, a particular exhibit that you -- that affects you the most deeply?

A: I don't think so. I think I've only been through the -- the permanent exhibition perhaps about three times. I can't do it more than that, but there -- the exhi -- the exhibits that always hurt me the most, really get to my heart, are the ones of families -- families loading the transports, families being taken off to the camps. These wonderful people who are sometimes beautifully dressed, sometimes not, but they've got no idea of what's in front of them. This -- this is so hard for me.

Q: Does it bring back memories of the children that you met in -- at **Whittingehame** and the other boys, the -- **Agon** and **Max**? I mean, does it stimulate your memories when you go there?

A: Oh yes, of course it does. I mean, I see children in these photographs, they look so much like the children that were at **Whittingehame**, so -- so much like **Max** and **Agon**.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Do you have a lot of contact with the other volunteers at the museum?

A: No, I think that what I -- the work that I've been doing has always been kind of something that I've done by myself and I really have no contact with the other volunteers at all. In fact, I don't think I don't think I know any of them. I have -- I

have gone to the appreciation nights in the past, but I don't go any more and I don't go to the dinners, and I'm perfectly happy not to. I think I'm just happy to do what I've done, you know, and I know the other volunteers are a community in themselves and they know each other and that's fine. One of the things I do, and I try to do every year, is I go down on Holocaust Remembrance dray -- day, and I read names. And I've done this every year.

Q: Mm-hm. N-Names of the victims?

A: Yeah. Yeah, the names of the victims and sometimes they're very, very hard to read, they -- you know, Polish or Czechoslovak. This year I went down and they gave me a choice and I chose names that were from **Norway,** and they were easier to read. But I mean, each one of them is a heartbreak, I mean. You -- you read these names and you see families, you see whole groups of names and you see ages from the grandfather to the little children just months old, and it has to tear out your heart to know that they all -- they all perished.

Q: Did you ever go back to visit in **Scotland**?

A: I've been back to **Scotland** three, perhaps four times. We wouldn't leave our children when they were growing up. The first time my husband and I went back to visit was in 1973 on our 25th anniversary. And my husband and I went back, I think twice after that. And then I went back ba -- by myself about nine years ago to visit

my cousin, who has a fa -- who had a farm outside **Edinburgh**. And then the last time I went to visit was with my son, two years after that. And I don't think I'll go back again.

Q: Do you feel Scottish?

A: Yes, I do feel Scottish, yes I do. I mean, I -- I guess -- when I go over there people say that I talk with an American accent. Here they say I talk with a Scottish accent. But there's something very, very Scottish about me, and I love to hear the bagpipes. I get so homesick. And a -- a funny story that I will tell you is that a friend of mine told me that she had a friend who plays the bagpipes in the American Air Force Bagpipe Band, of all things. And she said, he would like to meet you. So she brought him here one evening, with his bagpipes. Now this is a -- this is a townhouse association and -- and -- and there are neighbors on the side. He brought out his bagpipes and started to play. Now, you know how loud they are. My -- my son at the time was the president of the homeowner's association. I could see him literally getting paler by the minute. But it was great. I mean, I mean I can have tears in my eyes when I hear the bagpipes. It brings back so much to me. I absolutely love it.

Q: Is there anything else you'd want to add before we end? Any thoughts that you have, whether the world has learned from the Holocaust or anything that you care to add?

A: I don't know. I honestly don't know. I was left with a feeling of antagonism bu -- towards anything German. I didn't want to know German people or anything like this, but in the last few years I -- I have two very good friends who are German. One very, very dear friend who is in **Coburg**, **Germany**, and I realized that there are good people everywhere, and that -- and one can't judge people by their nationality, by their race or anything else. I mean, I feel that -- that what is going on now i-in the world is deeply upsetting. You know, you see anti-Semitism everywhere, you see racism everywhere, and I don't think that -- I don't think it will ever be any -- any better, and that's what really bothers me.

Q: Well, it's wonderful that you continued to work and to document these people's history. That's wonder -- wonderful that you do that.

A: Well, you know, we're all getting so much older, the survivors and myself, we're getting very much older and it's so good to know that anything that we can say now might live on and that people can perhaps listen to it and hear what it was like during these year, and -- and for me myself, my -- my prime reason for doing this is so that people would get to know what my parents did, how much they cared, how

much they agonized over what was happening in **Europe** and how much they wanted to help and how much they did help in a very, very quiet way, but they -- they gave everything that they could and I think that this should be remembered.

Q: Yeah.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Interview with Hilda Seftor
June 12, 2006

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Hilda Seftor**. This is tape number three, side **A.** You had mentioned something previously about a **menorah**. Can you tell me about that?

A: Yes, at **Whittingehame**, my parents loved being there and they were very, very surprised when they were invited to go out one special evening and they -- because they didn't usually get an invitation, we went out and that was fine and they -- the staff said no **[indecipherable]** come out tonight, could you possibly come, and we said okay. So we came out and -- and -- and I'm not sure how many of this -- of the children were there, if they were all there or not, I don't remember that, but one of them got up and made a speech and said that they had worked on something very special as a gift for my parents and they were going to present it to them. And the brought out this absolutely beautiful **menorah** that they had carved by themselves and written in Hebrew on it. It was about three foot across, and -- and made of beautiful wood, and they said that they would like us to have it and -- in appreciation for all that we had done for them. Well, we took -- my par -- my father was a very quiet man who wa -- had a very soft heart and when he's touched and the tears came to his eyes, and he said something appropriate, I'm not sure what he

said. But we took it home and we used it every year and it was on our -- on our sideboard at home every year that I remember. Then I was the first of the family to leave the country and when I left my mother was still alive, and there was the **menorah**. And then after that my sister left and the last person to leave was my brother. And we didn't know, evidently he brought everything he could. And he is no longer alive, but his wife lives in **San Francisco** -- very, very fond of her. And about three months ago she called me and said she was cleaning up her garage and she said that she found this wooden thing in the corner, would I know what it was and would I be interested in it? And she expl -- she described it and I said, oh my God, **Pat,** I said that's the **menorah**. And I said, don't -- don't get rid of it. I said, would you consider giving it to the museum? And she said, well, she said, I don't see why not. She says, I'll ask my two children. One of them is in **Edinburgh** just now, one of them was with her. So she asked her two children, **Mandy** and **David** and they said -- they didn't know much about the museum, but they s -- and I said, you know what, I'm going to send you some information. So I sent them all the pamphlets, all the documents I had. And she said, yes, of course we'll give it to the museum. And she said, if it's all right with you, I'll donate it with **David** and **Mandy's** names. So the **U.S.** -- the museum's -- a conservatory group came out to her very early one morning, they packed it up, they brought it back here and it is

now in the museum. And -- and it really does my heart good to know that it's there and that something that was given to my parents will always be there for them.

Q: That's wonderful. W-When did your mother pass away?

A: My mother passed away in April sum -- 1951, six weeks after I arrived in this country. She had a stroke and died the same day. And I -- broke my heart and -- and -- and we had just come over here and I was arranging to take my son**, Lawrence**, who was two years old back there. And -- and then -- and we went through all of the things about getting permits and things and then I suddenly realized, they can't hold a funeral, she's already gone, what's the point of going back? So I didn't go back for over 20 years. But she was a lovely person, and as I say, she -- she was so upset when we left, and you know, perhaps it was best that it happened that way because had she lived she would have been -- you know.

Q: You had mentioned a little bit before about your feelings about **Germany**. I w-wanted to know what your feelings about being Jewish were. I mean, here you all helped to take care of these children. Do you think -- during the war years -- do you think that m-made an impression on your Jewishness? Did it make you feel more Jewish or did it not have any effect on that aspect of your life?

A: Oh, I think it definitely made me more aware of who I was an-and -- and -- and of being Jewish. We ourselves didn't encounter any -- any animosity or any anti-

Semitism, but coming over here I realized that there were -- that there was more anti-Semitism over in **Great Britain** than I'd realized, and that people were not so -- so willing to wear a **Mogen David**, or wear some -- something to show that they were Jewish. And I found it -- it's a much more open society here when I came over here. So while we had -- we had absolutely no -- no sort of contact with anything that made us feel that w-we were unwelcome or anything, I know that there was that there. And we were very, very -- I mean, we were very, very proud of being Jewish, and as I say, we were the only Jewish children, the five of us, in our school, and -- and we felt kind of important because of it. You know, I mean, there was -- there was no feeling of bias or anything else. But it did happen.

Q: What forms did it take?

A: Oh, I -- I think it -- it was -- it was covert. I think that the kind of people that my parents were also, I think people would hesitate to -- to do anything to them because they were such kind people and they were always helping other people. I mean, I talk about refugees -- the refugees, I talk about the **Kindertransport**, I talk about **Whittingehame**, but there were so many other people that they helped in every way they could, I mean, they were just kind, kind people that -- that just were always out for other people. And I think that being a sort of a fairly small town, in a way, that people were aware of it. **Edinburgh** is a much bigger and more of a cosmopolitan

town than it is -- than it was when I lived there. There was no trans-**Atlantic** flights, there were no tourists there. It was a very, very quiet city. It was all -- it was almost a sleepy city, not like it is now. And - and my father knew the mayor, and in fact the house that we had, and actually we leased it during the war, it was bought after we left by the **[indecipherable]** of **Edinburgh**. So I mean, he sort of knew people and he -- and he felt very comfortable with them, and so I don't -- so if there was any anti-Semitism, we didn't see it. But I -- I think sometimes that while it's not always the case, that it's the kind of person you are also. That may be wrong, but --

Q: Have you shared this story about what your parents did during the war, with other people? Do you -- does it something that comes easily to you and that you share with a lot of other people?

A: Yes, I do, particularly now. Particularly now as I'm getting older and -- and that the survivors don't have that much longer, obviously. But I am so, so anxious that people do hear about my parents, do know that they did something good, and -- and -- and helped other people that I do go out of my way, I go out of my way that you -- in ways that I would not have thought years ago. I am a member of -- of a club on the internet, a lovely club, I've been a member now for about five, six years, and it started off as a book club and I'm the only Jewish person and I bring out all the time about being Jewish, about the Jewish holidays, and in particular about this -- about

Whittingehame, about the **Kindertransport**. They are now so interested in it. And they will -- they will tell their children and they will tell their friends and this is how I feel that people get to know. I mean, I -- it's not myself I want to talk about, it's the fact that I had so -- such wonderful -- such a wonderful example, you know, and -- my own children. It's funny because my oldest son always used to say to me -- he resented the fact that we came over here and that he's got no family over here, because he knew that my mother was one of eight children, and that we had a very, very big family group in **Edinburgh**. And I said, but this is what happens. And I said, after the war, everybody kind of separated anyway. But he said to me, what was it like for you growing up? And I sat down and wrote him 10 pages. And he said to me, it's like a fairy tale. And I said, this is how it was, it was a different world. And I want -- and I wanted to sh -- and -- and my -- and I said to him do me a favor and copy to send it to your other brothers. I want them to know and I want them to tell their children. And ma -- basically about being Jewish and living in a Jewish household, and -- and -- and being members of an -- of a community, about sort of going to the shul, going to services every Saturday morning.

[indecipherable] Shabbat afterwards and just -- it's not what they do, but I want them to know about it, so --

Q: Have you stayed as observant when you came to the **United States** and now?

A: No, we haven't. We -- we are now members of Reform, a-and that's fine, I mean, my husband **Jerry** was never as observant and we just sa -- sort of gradually sort of grew away from it. And that was fine, you know, but it's there in me, you know? I mean, wa -- wonderful memories of the sheer ec -- the excitement about changing the dishes at -- at **Pesach**, and ho -- and what fun it was to eat out of different dishes, you know, this sort of thing and -- and it's always -- my mother used to buy great big cases of matzoh and she used to give a packet to each of her Christian friends. She always did that. And I do it now. I'm a volunteer at **Inova Fairfax** Hospital. Made very good friends there and at **Pesach [indecipherable]** several friends, I've taken matzoh into them. You know? And it's good. I think it's good. I hope it's good.

Q: Were you able to get matzoh during the war and did you bring it to **Whittingehame**?

A: We obviously got -- **[phone ringing]** -- **Colin's** got a phone down there -- we obviously got matzoh during the war, and actually yes, we got it in **Whittingehame.** In fact, in one of the photographs that I have and the -- and the museum have, there is pile -- the -- there's a whole pile of boxes of matzoh for them. So in some way they got it, yeah. **[phone answering machine]** Sorry, I'm sorry. **[tape break]**

Q: Have you been to **Israel**?

A: No, no. We had hoped to go at one time, but raising four young boys, this was never possible, so unfortunately no, we didn't go.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. When events like the **Eichmann** trial came, did that stir up more memories of the war time in -- in **Scotland** for you?

A: Oh yes, i -- obviously it did, I mean, we followed very, very closely and couldn't understand how people could be so evil. I -- I saw quite recently -- I'm not sure if you've seen this movie, "**A Judgment at Nuremberg**"?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But it was shown again and I've -- I put it on tape because just -- I mean, it's fiction, but even -- even watching this brings back that whole era so vividly. And -- yes.

Q: And again, your thoughts about **Germany** you said have changed over the years?

A: Yes, they have changed and this is a funny thing is that my husband ha-had never been terribly involved with things that I've been interested in, as in going to the Holocaust Museum. I mean, he supported me, but this was my thing. But -- and his parents did take a refu -- one of the 35 children and I hate to say this, but I th -- I have a feeling that my mother-in-law treated this little girl more of a domestic. But

anyway, the thing was this, that we went to -- we went to **Europe** in the 1980's, and we went through **France,** and **Belgium** and -- and the **Netherlands** and got to **Luxembourg,** and then we drove to the German border. And it's a beautiful area, a- and we could see -- and we could see a castle in the distance, and I said, let's go over. He said, I can't. And I said, come on **Jerry,** it's just another border, let's go. He said, I'm sorry **Hilda**, I just can't. A-And he wouldn't go. So I mean, he had much deeper feelings than he'd ever, ever, you know. But yes, my feelings about sort of, **Germany**, have changed. I don't know -- I have mixed feelings about it because in one of **Leon Yuris's** books, he tries to explain this make-up of a German, the physiology and all **[indecipherable]** and I believed him -- him completely, but as I say, I've been in contact with couple of people recently, and one in particular, and they are lovely people. And I feel that you can't label everybody the way I once did. And I have a friend whose mother was German and she's no longer alive. Every time I saw her, she'd be apologizing. And I -- and she I think lived in somewhere like **Essen** or something that was terribly badly bombed and they went out sort of looking for pot -- sort of scraping for potatoes, they were so hungry. She was telling me all this **[indecipherable]** she says, you know? And I say, look, you can't go back and -- and -- everybody had problems. But I think it made me realize that -- I mean I-- myself, I could never understand -- I could never

understand how the German people could not see what was going on. How they couldn't see that the -- their neighbors were all disappearing. I mean, this could never be explained to me. But it's a new generation and I think that the German schools, that they're bending over backwards to teach the children. And I -- they say at one time the Japanese were taking this whole thing out of their -- out of the history books, it just didn't happen. But the Germans are bending over backwards to make sure that they understand what -- what went on. And of course they still have their -- their anti-Semites, and th -- and their -- their Nazis with their -- with their armbands on, but listen, we all have them. I mean, look what's happening here. So I think that hopefully -- hopefully this will never happen again and I feel that this new German generation is different. I can only hope so.

Q: Do you feel it could happen again?

A: In this country? No I don't think so. But as I read the paper every morning, and I got to the point of saying, I hon -- honestly hesitate to read the paper in the morning. I -- I really despair of what's going on throughout the world. I think that -- that the lesson has not been learned, with the brutality that -- that we see everywhere, in **Darfur,** the **Congo,** everywhere. I mean, it's just incredible what's happening. So whether it could happen again, not in this country, but I honestly don't know.

Q: Do you have friends who are survivors?

A: No, I don't. No, I don't.

Q: Do you -- do you speak to any of the survivors who work at the museum? Have you had contact with them?

A: No. No, I don't. As I say, I don't speak to anybody at the museum except the people that I work with. I never have done.

Q: Mm-hm. Did -- do you -- how often did you talk about th -- what your parents did, how often did you talk about that with your children?

A: Not very often. I think that when you have -- when you have girls, girls want to know how you've -- growing up. So girls want to know about your past **[indecipherable]** boys don't. I me -- I found this out, you know, they're busy doing their own thing, everything else. And that's why, when my son asked me, and I realized, I sat down and wrote. I've written, I think, two things for them. One of them, what it was like so -- during the war, during the six years for me, and they each have it and I've -- I have another one about sort of growing up, what it was like with this bigger -- this large family that we had. Cause my -- my parents' house, it was always an open house, and it -- at the weekends nobody was invited, but everybody dropped in. This is something I've never been able to understand in this country why friendships are almost nonexistent here whereas, you think, oh

well I'll -- I'll go visit somebody some evening and you'll -- and you'll drop in, it'll be great, I'll put the coffeepot on, I'll put out a cup of tea. You don't do that here. I've been in -- in this country over 50 years and I've never seen the friendship that I see -- that I used to see in **Scotland**. I went back there about 10 years ago to my cousin's farm, and I could see it there. I could see that it hasn't changed. But here is different. So I mean it -- it's just different.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. When you were growing up, would you've -- you'd de -- identif -- would you have identified yourself as Scottish or Jewish or both, or --

A: Definitely both, definitely both. I mean, I wouldn't say I was Jewish first, I wouldn't say I was Scottish first, I say I was -- I was a Scottish Jew, definitely.

Q: Well, is there anything else --

A: No, not really.

Q: -- that we can talk about?

A: No.

Q: I'm trying to think of what else that you may --

A: I think that's -- that's about it. I think -- I think that's about my whole life's story.

Q: Well, it's important that you got your parent's stories and what a wonderful -- acts that they did during the war. That's very important that that's now going to be in the archives so people will know about them.

A: I am -- I am so grateful and so thrilled that this is going to be, and my one regret always has been that they both died so early, they both died when they were 59, and I think so often of what else could they have done, had they lived to be as old as I am.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Well, you've given them a great gift by putting this down for posterity. So thank you very much for doing the interview. This concludes the interview of **Hilda Seftor.**

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview