

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ursula Guttstadt McKinney, conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 31, 2010 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is track number one. Please tell me your full name.

Ursula Guttstadt McKinney. Now, originally I had Ursula Käthe Dora Guttstadt.

That's the name that you were born with.

I was born with.

In a sense. Right after you were born.

Then when I came to the United States, I dropped the "Dora" and changed the Käthe to Katherine.

Oh, OK.

And then I was Ursula Katherine Guttstadt. Then when I got married, I dropped more or less the Katherine. In some of the documents, I still have the "Katherine." But otherwise, I took my maiden name, Guttstadt, as my middle name.

OK. And where were you born, and when were you born?

I was born in Frankfurt Oder on the 17th of November, 1925.

OK, let's talk a little bit about your family and their background. Your father's name?

My father's name was Richard-- originally Richard Johann Guttstadt. And my mother's name was Hannah Augusta Semmler. I'm not sure if she had another middle name. And my parents got married very late. My father was 42. My mother was 36. So my sister and I were really wanted, which helped us during the Nazi time.

Yeah.

Let's talk about your family background.

My father--

Where was your father born?

My father was born in Berlin on the 19th October 1879. And my mother was born on the 21st of April, 1886 in Jüterbog. That is south of Berlin.

OK. And let's talk about your father's family.

My father's father was a physician. My father was born in the old part of Berlin, in Alexandrinenstrasse, which is really the middle core. And his father, who was a physician, he was very interested, really, in the hygiene, too. For he was working really later on for the University of Berlin. He lectured on medical statistics. And he wrote about medical statistics. And even under Hitler, his books were in the so-called Gift-- poison-- closet. And students who studied this could use his papers. And almost all his things are in the Library of Congress.

And he wrote his dissertation in Latin. You know, the doctors then still wrote in Latin. My grandfather really came from Ost-- from Ost-- from East Prussia. And he had not any-- very much money. He had one Dukaten, which was then the gold money in Germany. And he went to Berlin, and then he studied and did all this. And he was-- yeah, he was very interested in statistics. He also worked together with Virchow, who was a very known physician in the Charité in Berlin, which is an old hospital.

And he wrote about-- they had cholera then in Berlin. So my grandfather really wrote about that to fight the cholera is one thing, but you really have to fight the hygiene conditions, the way how the people live and the water. The water condition. And just fighting the disease wouldn't be any really help very much. So he wrote a lot about these kind of things.

What was his name, your grandfather?

My father-- grandfather, Albert Guttstadt. Albert Guttstadt. And in Rastenburg in East Prussia they were very proud of him. The original, Hitler removed all that, but in the city hall there was a picture of my grandfather, and one of the streets were named after him. And so-- but I never met him. My grandfather died before I ever-- before my parents ever got married. I didn't meet any of my father's parents.

His mother was-- what was her last name? Hoo, hoo, hoo. [? Grubauer. ?] She came from Silesia. And they had a sugar factory. Yes, oops. Let's see. This is Albert. I see-- Klara, yeah. My grandfather was born on the 25th of January, 1840 in Rastenburg. And his father's name was Samuel Guttstadt. And his mother was Henrietta Guttstadt, nee Rosenbach. And I met lots of the Rosenbachs. This was a big family, but they all vanished. Every single one vanished in the Holocaust.

What religion were they?

All Jewish.

They were all Jewish.

They were all Jewish.

So your father was Jewish.

Yeah. And she-- and my grandmother, Klara Guttstadt, and she was-- her maiden name was [? Grubauer. ?] She was born in Silesia on the 10th of September, 1850. And she died in Berlin. And so did my grandfather. They both died in Berlin.

Tell me a little bit more about your father and his work.

My father, there were three children, really. Klara Guttstadt. And she died of diphtheria when she was 13. And then my father, Richard, and his father Frederich, Friedrich. And my father, Richard, and Friedrich both started to study law. And then my father didn't particularly care for it. So then he switched, and he studied engineering and architecture.

And he won the Schinkelpreis, which was something which only was given out every five years. That is the prize for architects. And he got it for designing a railroad station and the layout of the tracks. And my father's-- and I couldn't find them. I looked for them yesterday. My father studied at the Technical University in Berlin. And yeah, his drawings are there of his things.

And then he worked for the railroad. And he designed tunnels for the railroad. There is a path between Berlin and Frankfurt. They always-- the tracks are low, and the sights are high. And it always was sliding down. So my father designed how to prevent that.

And my father was very-- all his workers loved him. When they tried to-- when they kicked him out, the workers striked. And they said, we want Guttstadt back. But it didn't help under Hitler, certainly.

Was your father's family a religious family an observant family?

I don't think so. I think all my family, as far as I know, I think they had maybe a bat mitzvah. They went-- but I don't

think they even ate kosher or anything. It was not a very religious family. That's one thing Hitler did, all my few surviving families, they're all now religious Jews.

Now, tell me about your mother's family.

Now, my mother was not Jewish. My mother's family is Semmler. And--

What religion were they?

Lutheran.

Lutheran.

Yeah. In Germany, in general, you had three, you know, which the state supported. They took the tax out. Either Jewish, Catholic, or Lutheran. The state took the tax. You could say I'm a member, and they took the tax out. But they were not religious either.

My mother only went to church if she liked the minister's sermons. You know, there was one, she went to the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedachtniskirche in Berlin. And then one time there was somebody, the preacher, she thought she liked his sermons. So then she went. But not out of any other conviction.

And we didn't grow up-- my sister and I didn't grow up religious. And so you know--

But you knew you were half-Jewish, half-Lutheran in a sense?

Naja, I knew that only in the beginning, I didn't. No, I had no idea. I remember that when I was in elementary school, we had religious-- we went in-- my first year, we had religious education in school. And usually the regular teacher gave the Lutheran. And I had a girlfriend, one of my classmates was Lutheran, was Catholic. And she always wanted to leave. And I said, you can't do that. I'm not going home alone. You have to stay.

And then there were two people, two of mine, and they were Jewish. And then [? Hela ?] came in and she said-- there were the Ten Commandments on. And she said, oh, you have the same Ten Commandments as we do. And I said, yes, why not? So I was really not aware of the difference. I thought, you know, that was somewhere people said they're different, but I didn't know why they said they were different.

But Frankfurt Oder had a very small Jewish community. And they are now on the bridge. You know where you have the bridge? Frankfurt Oder is written on this. They don't have anybody. And we knew them all. We knew all of them. But the--

So did you live in a mixed neighborhood, in a sense?

We all lived in mixed neighborhoods.

OK.

The whole Jewish community lived in a mixed neighborhood. There was no ghetto. No. Or there was no area--

Where it was mostly Jewish.

No, no. We're all in with the reform house. No.

Can you describe yourself as a youngster? Were you an independent child? Or?

Yeah, I was the second. My sister is older. So I always was up to her age.

And her name?

Her name is Brigitte. And so my sister went to school, for example. She was two classes above me. And so I was-- we had seats. And in the middle there was a raised part which separated the two seats. And there I was sitting. And all the teachers, they all knew us. You know, Frankfurt Oder had only 60,000 residents. So they knew.

So I was sitting there. So one day I appeared, and I was only four. And I appeared at the principal. And I said-- he said, what do you want? And I said, I want to go to school. And he said, when were you born? And I told him. And he said, you can't go to school. You are too young.

So I went home crying, supposedly crying terrible. And it took my mother two hours to find out why I was crying.

[CHUCKLING]

So yes, I always was. When we went to school, my parents both came with me. And my sister was always very good in this. When my sister went to school, my parents were there. And then she went in her class. Naja, when I-- I knew the school. So when I came, my parents came with me. And then they called our names and said class A or B or C.

So when they're called A, my parents looked around. Ursula was gone. There was no Ursula around. So they went to class A, and there I was sitting. So yeah, and then we went with 10-- we went into the Gymnasium, in the high school. And I owned-- naja, that comes later.

But my parents-- my mother wanted to come visit me. And I said, don't dare to come with me. And she didn't. So I was-- Yes, I was very-- so it hit me in some ways maybe harder than my sister, to be an outcast in the end. Because I also had my whole class were my friends. My sister had a few friends, and she was standing in the courtyard one time alone.

And I said, what's the matter with you? All my friends are sick. They have the flu. I said, no, join the other ones. No, I can't do that. I can't push my way between. I said, why not?

[CHUCKLING]

And so on. So it hit me very hard, probably more than my sister. My sister also could do-- in '38, you see-- now let me backtrack. In '36, I was supposed to go to the Gymnasium. We went four years to elementary school. And then you could stay in elementary school, or you could go in something which we called middle school, where you were until you were 16. And then you could go to the Gymnasium, and you got your Abiturium when you were 18. And then you could go to the university.

But we went-- my school, and we will separate, the boys and the girls. So in my school, there were 700 girls. And from the 700 girls in 1936, only 10% could be either Jewish or half-Jewish. So the quota was filled. And so that would have meant that I couldn't go to the high school. And then one family moved to Berlin, so I could get in.

And then in '38, the Jewish kids were kicked out, and you know, after Crystal Night, they couldn't stay in school. But we half-Jews could stay in. And my sister still-- and my sister was lucky. She had in her class another half-Jew. And after she did the Abiturium, I was the only one.

And so there were 699 kids in uniforms on Hitler's birthday and so on. And I was private. It was awful. It was awful. I can feel how the Blacks were feeling in those places, you know?

You did not wear a uniform?

Oh, no. I couldn't get into the Hitler Youth. Oh, that was the Hitler Youth.

That was the Hitler Youth uniform?

No, we didn't wear any uniforms in school. No, we didn't. No, no, no. And then in '42, they kicked me out.

Right. We'll get to that in a minute. Let's back up a little bit. So you were a young child, and you went to school, and you had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Were you athletic?

Oh, yeah, very.

You were in good shape physically?

Oh, yes.

Did you have any hobbies? Did you like to read or?

Oh, naja, I read. I read extensively. My sister and I, we both read a lot. My father used to say, how much you get paid for reading an hour? I read a lot, and I was-- I swam a lot. I bicycled. My father-- we were really the children of my father in many ways. My father took us both bicycling. And my father was known in Frankfurt Oder with on each side and arm, he had one of his daughters.

And my father really taught us a lot. He was very great. When we went on vacation, at first, you know, we could go on vacation, he gave us a map when we were 8 and so, and said now here we are, and there we want to be. Now you lead us. And so on. So when we missed something, then we said Vati, Vati! He said, but you are leading us.

And then he showed us. OK, that's where you went wrong. So let's go back and then go where we were. My father was very good. He swam very well. And even he walked up some mountains this way, instead of going this way.

[CHUCKLING]

And so he was really in good shape, too. And I was-- yes, I was very good in sports. And under Hitler, sport was a major subject. And one of my goals was to swim the channel between France and England.

[LAUGHTER]

But I didn't get to that.

Not yet, not yet.

No.

But let's start talking about when things started changing. You were born in '25. When did you first hear about a man named Hitler? Do you remember?

Naja, one of the things is when I went to school, we still said good morning. And then our teacher--

[PHONE RINGING]

That-- forget it. Our teacher somewhere must have told us that we had to say "Heil Hitler" in the morning. But I have no recollection of that.

[PHONE RINGING]

The teacher in-- you see, in January '33, she must-- she must-- is the one who told us that we had to say "Heil Hitler." Now, she was not a Nazi. There were lots of-- so she-- but I have no recollection of that, when she ever didn't make any impression of me. The first thing, really, we were in Silesia in vacation. My father, my mother, and we two. And this

was when-- in '34, when they killed so many of-- Hitler killed so many of the Long Knives.

And when they announced it over the radio, my sister and I somewhere knew my father was in danger, and we went right and left of him, like we could protect him. But we were very small children.

How did you know he was threatened?

I don't know. I don't know. But we-- both of him, we knew that Vati was in danger. I guess--

Do you remember talking this over with him or with your mother?

No, we were really too young to talk--

Yeah, you were very young.

--to talk that over, really. I don't know. It was just, I guess, somewhere I guess my parents must have talked about it. Also we maybe have overheard some-- and I know that relatives of my father called on him all the time, and you know, what to do. And so somewhere not maybe we couldn't really put it in words, but somewhere we were aware of that the-- my Jewish relatives were in danger.

Do you remember, when you were young, hearing Hitler give speeches over the radio?

Oh, I saw him. I saw Hitler, too. With Hindenburg. That was when Hindenburg was still alive. He came to Frankfurt Oder, and we all-- all schoolchildren went there. And there was a car, open car. And there was this old gentleman Hindenburg and Hitler. And--

But did it mean anything to you?

To none of us. We're all just supposed to look at this. And we said, ah, that's the rulers, and we didn't care. We were too young.

Yeah.

Yeah. And didn't make any impression on us, I think. But I did see him, yeah.

Do you remember when exactly that was?

Naja, when did Hindenburg die? That must have been '34, too, you know? So I was really, you know?

Yeah. Yeah, you were very young.

And so on. So--

So at that point, you still didn't feel in danger. You knew your father was, but you yourself--

I didn't feel in danger.

You didn't feel in danger.

No, no. And this was also-- then in--

Then what happened?

In '35, I think, is when-- before, you know, people the school gave out the forms for being-- for joining the Hitler Youth.

And I certainly didn't get it. Because my teacher knew that I was half-Jewish. And then I came home, and I talked to-- told it Mommy. And then Mommy told me why I didn't get it.

And do you-- do you remember your feelings?

Yeah, I thought--

Were you upset?

Somewhere I was upset, because I didn't-- I didn't like to be different than the other ones. And I was the only one in my class, so you know, I was the only one who was somewhat different. But on the other hand, is my classmates were not anywhere against me.

Well, that was going to be my next question. Did they start to treat you differently?

No.

You didn't sense any--

No, my classmates-- my classmates didn't treat me differently. My classmates didn't treat me differently after the Crystal Night either. Not in high school. The ones who treated me differently were the teachers. Because the teacher--

Starting when? In the very beginning when Hitler came in?

No, no. They didn't. My teacher in elementary school was an old spinster, old lady. And she was not a Nazi. And she didn't treat me any way different. And my classmates at this point, it was just small city. I mean, it wasn't that obvious. And then in high school, the teachers somewhere were afraid. I always was a very good student. And I loved to study.

And then my teachers were afraid to give me good grades. Because then they would maybe say, oh, you are friendly to the Jews. But my classmates were not.

And how does a young person respond to that? Did you know that's why the teachers didn't give you--

Yeah, sure.

So what--

Now, that was--

Were you angry? Were you sad? What were you?

Naja, are at this point, you know, that was-- you just try to-- at this point, you had the feeling that maybe you survive all that without any real bad harm and so on. But my father then already started to talk about people who came back, not necessarily Jews, really more communists who came back from camps. And he told us about a man who came back and had a beard. And because his jaws were all broken. He didn't want his family to saw that. And he never got undressed in front of his wife or anything because of that. So my father told us about these things. But these were mostly the communists, not really the Jews. And--

What did you do while the other students were going to Hitler Youth meetings?

Well, that was in the after school.

No, I'm saying while they were busy going to meetings, what did you do?

I went to ballet school.

[LAUGHTER]

I don't know how many people went there, really.

Oh, I see.

No, and I went swimming and so on. And my best friend, she didn't go to anything that I know of.

Oh, OK. Had you heard of something called the Nuremberg Laws?

Yeah, the Mendelssohnengesetze. Yeah, sure.

And again as a child--

The Mendelssohn. Yeah, we knew all about the Mendel-- Mendelssohn who did this with-- yeah. And yeah, we knew. Then-- by then I knew about it, yeah.

OK, and again, do you remember what was going on inside your head when you learned about these laws?

Naja, my father was stateless, you know? They stripped him of his-- and my father was really a civil servant. And then in '36, they sent him a notice that he had this special position, because you couldn't expect that Aryans would work with a Jew. So he had a special assignment. And we knew about that, certainly.

And we knew that-- I don't know. you see, one of these things in the beginning is, we all had somewhere the feeling in Germany, number one is, the German Jews were in many ways very bad, because they were very emancipated. They felt very German. And their religion was Jewish, like somebody else's was Catholic and so on.

So many of them thought they couldn't believe that the Germans would go along with it. So many of them really didn't expect that it would get that bad and the Germans would go along with it. There also, you know-- I don't know how to say this. You see, none of my relatives spoke Yiddish.

They were assimilated.

Yeah, that was below the-- you know, Yiddish?

Right, right.

Yiddish? No.

[CHUCKLING]

You know?

Right.

I mean, so that was the bad part. And the Jews got citizenship in Prussia before they got it anywhere else. The citizen paper of my great-great-grandfather is at the Beck Institute. My cousin gave it to the Beck Institute. So somewhere there was always the belief is that somewhere it will be ending before it gets really, really bad. You know? But--

And did you know how you were considered, having half--

Oh, yeah. Sure, yeah. I was a Mischling ersten Grades.



[CHUCKLING]

Sure, I know about it. Yeah. Yeah. But I was-- no, I had blond hair and blue eyes. So people didn't realize that. I have a cousin, Gerhard Guttstadt, who looked very Jewish. You know, what they considered. He's [? big, ?] dark hair, and everything. They beat him up merciless. Nobody beat me up. But if they had dared, I would have beaten back. And I would have won.

Speaking about your cousin, did you have large extended family?

No, my father had one brother, who had two sons. Albert-- Albert and Gerhard Guttstadt.

And were you close to those cousins?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

But you didn't observe holidays or anything?

No, but there were also half-Jewish.

Oh, OK.

He also married a non-Jew. And so they were half-Jewish. But both of them were in the Organisation Todt. You know, which was the labor camp for people they didn't put into concentration camp, but in a labor camp. And both of them were broken, broken men afterwards. And they admired my sister and me that we had the guts to immigrate. And neither one of them immigrated. They just didn't have the-- they couldn't.

So all right. So it's Kristallnacht, you said happened. in fall of '38.

In '38. Yeah, and we saw the synagogue burning.

You did.

And-- oh, yes. And we went down.

You're almost-- you're 13 now.

Yeah, and we went down. And you know, I mean, we knew all of the-- now maybe not all, but we knew most of the Jews in Frankfurt Oder. Yes, we did.

And again, as a 13-year-old child, you said you saw this happening.

Yeah.

Do you just stand there? What do you--

Then my sister and-- my sister and I were lying awake at night. And we waited that would take my father. We were very much aware that they arrested all the Jews then. And they didn't take my father at this point. And then they had the children's-- the children went to, with the Quakers, to England. And my sister and I wanted badly to go to England. And my mother couldn't say goodbye to us, so we stayed.

But from then on, we were lying awake hours and so on, and talking to each other and waiting that something might happen. Because they didn't hit our house, and they didn't do anything to us at this point.

At that point.

But the Gestapo came all the time and looked. And my father did all those things. You know, he had one typewriter, and he typed with two fingers. And he typed all the underground and so on. And he had-- we knew he had it hidden somewhere, and we didn't know where he had it hidden. And then came the Gestapo and so on.

Yeah. And I always watched them. Some way I was not afraid of the Gestapo. I watched them. And when they confiscated our typewriter, I said to my mother, mommy, they are stealing our typewriter.

You said that in front of the Gestapo?

Yeah. They didn't do anything to me. But some way I wasn't afraid of them. But we knew that somewhere that we are doomed, Yeah

What was your mother's reaction at that point? Do you remember her being very fearful? Or was she a very strong woman?

Naja, my father-- there were then people who told my mother, why don't you get a divorce, and then you are safe? And my mother said, I would never do that. Said, I would always stay to my husband and to my children, whatever happens. So no, she was very much-- you know, she was very strong. And then we had a house in Frankfurt Oder, which was in the name of my husband-- of my father.

And at first it was Richard Guttstadt. And then it was Richard Israel Guttstadt. And then it was crossed out in the registry, and there was the Third Reich was the owner. And my father stayed there. They did not kick--

They let you all stay.

Naja, my father just refused to move somewhere. He didn't. But then in October '42, they took my father.

So up to October '42, you stayed in that house. You were going to school. Things were--

In October '42, they kicked me out. They took my father.

When you say they took your father, was he at home and they came and arrested him?

Yeah.

Did you see that?

I was in school.

You were in school when he was taken away.

Yeah. But he was wait a moment. He was arrested in '41. He was arrested in '41. What did he do? Yeah, no. I was in school still, and I wasn't there. But then the--

Was your mother at home?

Yeah.

Did she work, or was she--

No.

OK, so she was at home when they came to arrest him.

Yeah, yeah.

And then you come home--

And then there was-- they took him to the police prison. The police station had a small prison. And they took my father there and said that-- and one of the guards there was very-- was a Roman Catholic. And he went to the Monsignor and said the Monsignor should go to my mother and tell that Vati is there, and they are going to transport him to Mauthausen.

And that she-- when he is on duty then and there, Mommy should come. And she did. And then another time, my sister and I went. We said--

You said goodbye.

We said goodbye to my father.

What did you think was happening?

And my father took us both, and my father never really cried, but some way we-- we all knew that this was the end.

You did know.

Yeah.

How did you know that?

Naja, by then we knew about the concentration camps.

OK.

I mean, we--

How did you know?

How did we know? I don't really know how we knew, but we knew about the concentration camps. And we knew about the death chambers, the crematoriums. And--

Did you know what Mauthausen was at that point?

Naja, at this point it was very unusual that they took Vati to Mauthausen, which is outside of Linz, in Austria.

Right.

Because, you know, usually all of these people went to Auschwitz or to any of the-- Birkenau or any of the Eastern ones. And so that they took Vati to Mauthausen was somewhat unusual. There were more the Austrian Jews and the Dutch Jews, and you know, but not really the German Jews. But we knew that we would--

Were there other men picked up that-- Jewish men picked up that same time?

There was nobody left.

By the time your father was arrested.

Yeah.

The other men had been taken away.

The other-- all the Jews were taken away before they were-- after '38, they were all-- you know, my sister and I went into the city of Frankfurt, and there they were with their luggage and so on. And they went to one of the schools, where they were assembled. You see, the Gestapo always sent, usually through the Judenrat, the papers, where the people knew what to take, and what they couldn't take, and where to go, and what time and so on.

So we saw them, and we knew where they go. And then we went to that school, my sister and I. And people say, you shouldn't come. And we said, yes, we do have to come. So we knew about that. And they went all to Warsaw and the ghetto. And so my father was the only Jew left in Frankfurt Oder.

And my father was accompanied by policemen, regular police, German police.

Again, what do you attribute the fact that your father was the only one left?

Because he had a Christian wife.

Oh.

I think.

Though he himself was 100% Jewish.

Yeah.

But the fact that he had the Christian wife--

Yeah, yeah. I think that was the-- so he was-- he was the only one left. There was nobody else there. There was another Jewish man, but his wife divorced him and he was taken before.

When your father was the only one left, did he become depressed, or did he still keep hoping?

Naja, when you see my pictures of my father, '32, my father had blue eyes, but he had very sparkling eyes. And then '33, he had sparkle almost gone, and he aged. He looked like an old man.

Once Hitler got into power.

So my father-- and my father tried to go out. But you know, it was very difficult. He was-- you know, the Americans didn't let anybody in. And his relatives, you know, tried to get him out, but he couldn't get in. So my father more or less knew that he was doomed.

So now your father's taken away, and it's your mother and you two girls.

And then they got my father out of the house-- my mother out of the house. She left the house. The Gestapo said you have to go. And Mommy went.

With you girls.

With us two girls. And then we rented-- we rented some rooms with other people.

Uh-huh. And how do you support-- How did your mother support you all?

Naja, then my mother worked. You see, my mother had really studied music and never really worked. So then she-- there was a lawyer and-- a tax lawyer. My mother worked in an office then and put-- stuffed envelopes and all those kind of things. And then my mother's mother helped us financially.

OK. And you, at that point, were still in school? Or you--

No, I was kicked out in October '42.

OK.

Yeah.

And again, you're almost 17. So what does that do to a 17-year-old girl, to be told that?

[SIGHS]

Naja, my sister and I left in '42. We got the papers in '42. To go to-- you know, that we should go. We should go to a factory in Briesen, which was between a city between Berlin and Frankfurt Oder. And we should go there to a factory.

Oh, OK, to work. Yeah.

And so my sister and I decided we are not going to go. And so we took a train to Berlin at night.

OK, now that's very unusual. And what was your mother's role in that?

Naja, my mother stayed in Frankfurt Oder. And the Gestapo called her in and said, where are your girls? And Mommy said, they left me. I have no idea.

Now, was it her idea for you girls to leave? What?

I think it was the consent of all of us, that we don't go. Because that-- and that Briesen factory went to the Warsaw Ghetto. So we-- yes, so then we were in Berlin, just the two of us, my sister and I.

How did you get there?

By train.

You had papers? Did you have papers, ID papers?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had a Kennkarte. Yeah, sure. Yeah.

Saying that you were a Mischling?

No.

No. Anything there showing that you had Jewish parentage?

No, no. It didn't say anything.

OK.

So then we went to Berlin, and we stayed with friends, and we stayed in a pension. And I went to a Carmelite convent to help with the children, and my sister worked, and so on. And a relative on my mother's side, who was a religious nut,

but-- a Christian religious nut, but he was not a Nazi. And he hired her, and she worked in his office. He was a tax lawyer. And she worked there. And I helped the nuns with the children.

Did you live in the convent itself?

Partly I lived in the convent. But then my mother came to Berlin, and we lived in, again, in furnished rooms. And then the bombs started to fall. And in some ways, the bombs were a little bit mixed. Because you see, you always had to register in Germany at the police station when you moved. All the Germans had to do that. And so then so many of them were destroyed. So it was a little bit easier to evade them. And--

Once your father was taken away, did you have any contact with him?

No. He was in Mauthausen.

Right, that's what I'm just saying. Once he said goodbye, there was no more contact.

No, we got-- we got-- my mother got a letter from Mauthausen that my father was killed while he tried to escape. All the concentration camps had certain deaths. In one they had heart attacks. In one they had something else. In Mauthausen, they all tried to escape. It's all in-- did you ever read *The SS State* by Kogon?

No. So when was that? When did your mother get that letter?

In '42.

Oh, so it was soon after he left? I see.

Yeah. And so-- and then--

How did she present that to you girls? Was that--

Well, she told us the letter.

Was she very emotional? Was she--

Yeah. In some ways yes. In some ways not. And somewhere-- we somewhere knew that Vati would not come back. In some ways. On the other hand, is we didn't trust anything.

Right.

So '45, we didn't dare to move anywhere far away from Frankfurt Oder, because we thought maybe, maybe he comes back.

There's always that hope, yeah.

And so on. But on the other hand, is then my sister and I were running for our life.

Yes.

And then the bombs came.

Did you go into shelters?

Yeah, sure. We sit in the basement in the shelters. And so then the bombs came. And you know, an the rations, and then, you know, we heard the Russian cannons from around Christmas '44. And they didn't march into Berlin until April '45.

You heard all the time the cannons. So in some ways, you know, we all moved somewhere like dolls. You know, you pull a leg and you move. You pull the other one and you move. And you just keep-- you're somewhere dull to pain.

You know, there is so much that you just say, you can't anymore. And in '45, really Hitler tried to kill all the half-Jews and all the Jews and all the people in the concentration camp, so that nobody could say anything against him and so on.

So in April '45, the few people I knew, I still had contact to, I wrote farewell letters. And I said, I'm going to go. I'm not going to run anymore. I just can't anymore. And so on. And somewhere, I never said yes again to life. You know, I can't-- people get-- like when I moved out of my house, I said, sure, I can go.

I can't get-- it's very, very difficult. I try-- I also have trouble getting people too close to me. You know, and so on. But you know, it was just-- on the other hand, you were also so divided. You know, when the bombs were falling, and the apartment houses in Berlin were burning, and then the Germans were sitting in front with just a little bit belongings. You feel sorry for them. They were human beings.

So you were so divided. On the one hand, is I hope that more bombs are falling and more get destroyed, because then I may be surviving. On the other hand, is you know, you felt sorry. And in some of the people, you know, like my best friend from high school-- my Mommy's mother lived in Frankfurt Oder. And she went to Frankfurt-- to my grandmother, and she said, where Ursula? And my grandmother said, I can't tell you. And she kept on pestering her.

So finally my grandmother broke down and told her. She gave her my address. And then she rang the bell, and we usually didn't open. Because Mommy always was afraid if the bell rang somebody will take us. And there she was. So some of the people, you know, never abandoned me or my sister.

But it was-- but you were somewhere-- you thought that either the bombs get you, or the Russians get you, or the Gestapo gets you, or somewhere. The percentage of survivors was very small. It was very small. And then after the war, nobody ever thought that we were in shock or anything. Nobody helped us anywhere.

Your sister stayed through the end of the war? She stayed.

Oh, yeah. We stayed all the time. Yeah, we were together. My sister wanted to run away from the Russians. And we were beating each other. And I said, you are crazy to go on the highway. We are going to stay. And so I won. We did stay.

My biggest fear then, well, really at this point, when we knew it was the end, is that the British bombs, you know, they had these blockbusters. And in the basement, when the alarm was-- and we were sitting with the Germans, nobody opposed us, really-- it's a blockbuster, but we were sitting. You know, my mother, and my sister, and I, we were all sitting together.

I think my sister sat in the middle, and Mommy and I on the outside. And these blockbuster, the people were blew then. You know, because it's just everything burst. You know, so they were blew when they were hit. But there was sometimes a vacuum. And so my fear was always that I sit in the vacuum and Mommy and Gitte are dead. That was my greatest fear, too, till the end of '45. Yeah, you know, I mean--

What do you mean, people were blew?

Because all their outer-- everything burst, when you-- this is such a strong pressure, from the pressure.

Oh.

The blockbusters were awful from the British. And they hit, you know, the blockbuster means they hit whole blocks. And that-- and so it was-- that was one of my fears. You know. And '45, naja, then I knew that the Gestapo wouldn't get me anymore. Even the government said to the end it's a relief army and so on.

And in front of us, we had the-- for the tanks, when the tanks would go on the main streets, they would go against it, they would blow up. Except the Russian tanks were very small, and they went through all the side streets and never hit any of these things.

And it's-- I don't know. You know, you were-- in some ways, you were-- you were numb. But on the other hand, you were not afraid of anything, really, anymore. You know, it was so bad that you thought, you know, what else? You know, one way or another. So who cares? You know?

Did you know what had happened to Hitler at that time?

No, we heard that afterwards. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we heard that afterwards. We didn't even know Eva Braun existed.

If what?

That Eva Braun existed.

Oh, Eva Braun, yeah.

We didn't even know that she existed. Hitler was such a purist. He was a vegetarian. And he didn't have girlfriends. And he did have.

[CHUCKLING]

But--

When you were in Berlin, did you meet any other Jews in hiding? Or did you come across any that you knew of?

We knew that there are Jews. We tried not to find any of them. Because you see, any time you tried to get in contact with any of them, you endangered them.

So you, in a sense, did not meet any.

So you tried not. If you somewhere were where there were-- at the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee, there were Jews hidden in these old-fashioned mausoleums. And the gardeners, who were Aryans, they gave them food and everything. But if you tried to any way to do anything, you were afraid to endanger them. And so, you know, you tried not to do anything like this. Because you-- you know, you hoped that nobody would find them. And if you found them, somebody else might find them. Or you were also afraid that somebody might follow you, and you would lead them to something.

So at this point, we did not really try to find anybody in hiding. Because you endangered the Jews, but you endangered also the people who hid them.

Right, right.

You know? So you tried not to find out anything about them. You knew somewhere-- you know, the trouble is, there was always a grapevine, so you heard about things. I had contact with some Dutch underground people. And so I knew about D-Day before anybody ever admitted that the English-- that the Americans had landed because the Dutch Underground told me that. But you know--

Tell me your connection with the Dutch Underground. How did that happen?

Naja, the Dutch Underground, you know, Hitler had all these-- they just took cars, you know, pickup trucks, and drove to factories and took all the young men in and shipped them to Germany for to manage the factories and so on. And the Carmelite nuns, you know, where I helped them with the kids, until the kids were all really sent out of Berlin, these Dutch underground kids, they were Catholic. So they came to that convent. And in the evening, and they talked. And



they told me.

You yourself never actually worked for an underground organization?

No. no, I didn't.

Do you know if there were any Jewish children hiding in this convent?

There were some. Yes. Yes, we did have Jewish kids hid. We had-- there was one woman, and she-- you know, she couldn't marry because, you know, Jews couldn't marry-- marry. And she converted to Catholicism, but she was in Auschwitz. She survived. She survived. But her son before she-- her son was with her in this-- where they all collect all the Jews before they shipped them out.

So somewhere she contacted the Catholic Church. And so the nuns-- they took me with them. With them, because they couldn't go alone as just the nuns. And I looked so nice and Aryan, you know, with blond hair and everything. So we went to her-- to the apartment. And there was a Gestapo, and it was sealed.

And so the Gestapo unsealed it, and the nuns took out the children's clothes. And then the little boy stayed, stayed in the convent. And then there was another little girl, where we don't know anything about the parents. And who they just left her on the front doors.

One of the problems with that was that the kids itself, and they went with it then, there were very few children left in Berlin because the schools were all closed. Because of the bombs. And so the-- so any school age kid was-- I mean, if they stayed in Berlin, they didn't have any school. They were all sent in the country and so on.

So it was a little bit of problem with older children. The smaller ones, you know, you could just-- you can just keep and you just fed them from-- you had enough from your own cards, you know? You know, and so on.

But the mother of the little boy came back. She survived Auschwitz. And she talked. And this is one thing, too, is that I made a big-- those things made big impressions on me, too, is because they put her into a hole and they said, now, if you submit to us-- you know-- and you know, they wanted to rape her and so on-- we give you food. And she said, I'm not hungry. And she always resisted this all.

This is while she was in Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz, yeah. And so on. And so I always thought that it's really you should never depend on it. People shouldn't be able to kid because they're hold this as a coward, you know? If you go with us, we give you food if you do that. And I said, I'm never going to get dependent on any of that. And so on.

But yes, she survived it. But she was not a Catholic afterwards. But she collected her son.

Did she?

Yeah.

Do you remember her name or?

No, I don't. And I don't remember the little boy's name either.

[CHUCKLING]

You know? And so on. And so but, yeah, we went in that sealed apartment. And the Gestapo was there, two Gestapo men. And yeah. And we got the clothing out.

Yeah.

And some of them also, they went-- they got people out who were-- I don't know who was the father of that kid, in any case. But they-- you know, sometimes people went to these assemblies and got people out they knew. And so on. And the bad part of this was, you know, sometimes people went to the assembly and then they were hijacking, you know, some of the people, getting them away and hiding them behind rows of other people and so on.

But the Germans never called names. They only count numbers. So if there had to be 100 people there, and there were only 98, two were missing, they took anybody around, regardless who it was. And that was another bad thing about going and hiding. You know, that you always-- if you could go in hiding before you ended up on any of the lists, that was fine. But if you were on one of the lists, and then you didn't go, you know you endangered somebody else.

But my sister and I didn't think about that either. In Briesen, I guess, I don't know if somebody else had to go for us or not. I don't know. But they took anybody. The number had to be correct. It was-- On the other hand, is I think technology was not as advanced. So it was a little bit easier to find loopholes, to find ways of disappearing, and some way of managing of keeping on living. Because-- and as I said, then when so much was destroyed, papers were destroyed, too.

Yeah.