

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Volunteer Collection Interview

**Ursula Guttstadt McKinney**  
RG-50.106\*0184

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Interviewer - Gail Schwartz

**Disc # 1 -** Ursula Guttstadt McKinney was born in Frankfurt an der Oder, Germany on November 17, 1925. Her grandfather, Albert Guttstadt, a physician, was a well known expert in medical statistics and hygiene whose books are in the Library of Congress. Her father, Richard Guttstadt, was born in Berlin, and worked as an engineer for the railroads designing tracks. He was Jewish but not observant. Her mother, Hannah Zember, was Lutheran, also not religious. Her sister Brigitta was 2 years older. The Frankfurt Jewish community was small and Ursula lived in a mixed neighborhood. In 1936 she was supposed to go to a middle school of 700 girls. There was a 10% quota for Jewish and half Jewish students and it was already filled. Then a family moved away and she was allowed to enroll. In 1938 the Jewish students were expelled but she was allowed to stay as the one half-Jewish student out of 700. On Hitler's birthday she was the only one not allowed to wear a Hitler Youth uniform. She was upset because she didn't want to be different from her Hitler Youth classmates. In 1934 she and her sister felt somehow that her father was in danger after the Night of the Long Knives. She saw Hitler in a car with Hindenburg but it didn't mean anything to her in 1934. The teachers were afraid to give her good grades as it would appear that they were being "good to the Jews." She took ballet and swimming lessons while the other children were at Hitler Youth meetings. Her father lost his citizenship and she was considered a "mischling." She had blonde hair and blue eyes. Her dark haired cousin was beaten. She had 2 half-Jewish male cousins who were sent to a labor camp. They are still broken men. She saw a burning synagogue on Kristallnacht after which she would lie awake at night worried that her father would be arrested. He had a typewriter which was used by the underground. In October 1942 her father was taken to the police station prison and then transported to Mauthausen. Ursula and her mother and sister were able to say good-bye to him because of a friendly Catholic policeman. Her father, who had tried to get out of Germany because he knew he was doomed had been allowed to stay in Frankfurt until then because of his Christian wife, whereas the other Jewish men were taken away after 1938. Soon after her father had left, her mother got a letter from Mauthausen saying that her husband died trying to escape. Ursula hoped that maybe it wasn't true. The Third Reich took over the ownership of her house so Ursula and Brigitta and their mother lived in rented rooms and her mother worked in an office. Ursula was expelled from school in October 1942 and she was told that she should work in a factory. The three quickly went to Berlin, lived in a pension where Ursula worked with children in a convent and her sister worked in a lawyer's office. She remembers bombs falling in Berlin and the Russian cannons. By then she was dulled to pain. She has never said 'yes' again to life and has trouble having people get close to her. She felt sorry for the suffering Germans. Because of the bombs, the Gestapo and the Russians, the percentage of being able to survive was very small. Towards the end of the war she feared the British "blockbuster" bombs. She didn't try to find Jews in hiding in Berlin as she didn't want to endanger them. Though she did not work for the underground they would come to the convent. There was a Jewish boy and a Jewish girl hidden in the convent. Schools were closed because of the bombing.

**Disc # 2 -** Ursula's father had worked for the Reichsbahn and the Gestapo collected his pension after he was forced out of his job. Her mother stayed in Berlin after the war and collected rent from a physician from their old house, but then stopped in the 1960s as it was too difficult to deal with East Germany. After the Berlin Wall fell she and her sister sold the house. Ursula had gone back to school to get her high school degree and her sister went to the university. It was difficult to get back to a normal life as no one helped them and no one talked about the past. Ursula went to West Berlin and registered with the IRO. She majored in history at the Free University in West Berlin. An American professor got her a scholarship to Sweetbrier College and she came to America in 1949 sponsored by the World Council of Churches. She learned the full extent of what Hitler had done only after the war.

Earlier in Germany there had been a curfew after the von Stauffenberg attempt to assassinate Hitler. Her high school teacher withdrew his membership in the Nazi Party. A majority of the teachers were also

not members. Ursula felt awful to be an outcast. She wanted to feel needed. She had danced in Frankfurt but was later expelled, so when she lived in West Germany she joined a ballet company. When she was in Hamburg a woman got her a West German identity card. She then registered to emigrate and was sponsored by an uncle in the US. Her sister went to New York and became a psychotherapist. With money from restitution Ursula went to Physical Therapy school. Her mother had moved to Hanover after the Wall was built. Ursula lived in Alexandria, Virginia and worked in a surgeon's office and then at George Washington University Hospital. She met her husband, an American, and married in 1958. She worked as a translator for the National Bureau of Standards and then got a Master's Degree in Library Science at Catholic University in Washington, DC. She then worked as a translator for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission until 2005.

People did not know about her past. She did not want to have children because she did not want to bring them into a world that is too awful. Her husband, who had been wounded in the Battle of the Bulge agreed with her. She does not feel German. As a docent at the National Gallery of Art she has been asked to give tours in German but she does not want to speak the language. She dreams and counts in English, only reads books in English and speaks English to her sister. She goes to Germany to visit relatives. She does not hold younger Germans responsible. Most of her friends are Jewish. When she sees pictures of Iraq and Afghanistan it brings back memories of the war. She feels Auschwitz should have been bombed and that the Ukrainian guards were worse than the Germans. Her Jewish cousins who were not religious before, now are. The Holocaust could happen again. The war still hounds her. She will never get over it. She feels very different than the other docents. She feels she is not really Jewish and that she is straddling between her parents' religions, though she feels closer to Judaism. She got married in a Unitarian ceremony. Her husband died in January 2009 after 50 years of marriage.

**Disc #3** - In the beginning it was too painful to talk about her experiences. She now feels her generation should talk about it. When she was a physical therapist in Frankfurt am Main and German Jews returned, she saw that people were upset a Jew was coming back. She was formerly German, but is now an American. She doesn't feel or want to be German. She never tried to find the Gestapo who took her father away. Chasing down others was not for her. Revenge kills yourself. At first she would watch war movies and concentration camp films. She finds it easier to be with people who had similar experiences to her. She has been to Israel many times and has friends there.

She says that "mischling" is a mixture, like a mulatto. President Obama is a mischling. It is not derogatory, but one feels that you don't belong anywhere and are in the middle. She feels sorry for children of mixed marriages. It is worse to have a Jewish father than a Jewish mother because then you are considered neither. She loved her mother and father. Her mother's family didn't accept her father except for her grandparents.

She is a founding member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. She lit a candle for her father there. She can go through the exhibit with Americans but not with Germans. She promised her mother to never go to Mauthausen. For most people the Holocaust is history. Germans talk about how hard the war was, with ration cards and bombs. There was a joke in the 1950s in Germany. "How many people can fit into a Volkswagen?" "Four Germans and one Jew - the Jew is in the ashtray." When the war was over she stepped over dead bodies, went to Dresden and saw more bodies. She doesn't believe in war - it is "sanctified murder." She cannot remember Germany before Hitler. When she heard him on the radio she thought he was an idiot. She and her sister grew up with a love of America. She has never talked to psychiatrists as they never experienced what she did. She gets small payments from German Social Security because she and her sister had both worked in Germany. She would never apply for German citizenship and she does not want a German passport.