United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ursula Guttstadt McKinney
August 31, 2010
RG-50.106.0184

PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

URSULA GUTTSTADT MCKINNEY
August 31, 2010

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

Ursala Guttstadt McKinney: Ursala Guttstadt McKinney. Now originally I had Ursala Kata Dora Guttstadt.

Q: That's the name that you were born with.

A: I was born with.

Q: In a sense, right after you were born.

A: Then when I came to the United States I dropped the Dora and changed the Kata to Katherine. And then I was Ursala Katherine Guttstadt. Then when I got married, I dropped more or less the Katherine and some of the documents I still have the Katherine. But otherwise I took my maiden name Guttstadt as my middle name.

Q: Where were you born and when were you born?

A: I was born in **Frankfurt an der Oder** on the 17th of November 1925.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family and their background. Your father's name?

A: My father's name was Richard, originally Richard Johann Guttstadt and my mother's name was Hannah Augusta **Zemler**. 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.

Q: Let's talk about your family background.

A: My father --

Q: Where was your father born?

A: My father was born in Berlin on the 19th October, 1879. And my mother was born on the 21st of April 1886 in **Utterboch** [ph]. That is south of Berlin.

Q: And let's talk about your father's family.

A: My father's father was a physician. He, my father was born in the old part of Berlin in **Alexandrine Strasse** 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 to, for the University of Berlin. He lectured on medical statistics and he wrote about medical statistics and he, 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 studied only Latin. My grandfather really came from East Prussia. And he had not any, very much money. He had one **lucaden** which was then the gold money in Germany and he went to Berlin and then you know he studied and did all this. And he was yeah he was very interested in statistics. He also worked together with **Wilhugh** [ph] was a very known physician in the **Charité** [ph] 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 this kind of thing.

Q: What was his name?

A: My grandfather, Albert Guttstadt**.** Albert Guttstadt. And in **Rastenbourg** [ph] 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 in 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 did not meet any of my father's parents. His mother was, what was her, her first name. **Guvala.** She came from

Silesia and they had a sugar factory. It's, let's see, this is Albert. Clara. My grandfather was born on the 25th of January 1840 in **Rastenbourg** and his father's name was Samuel Guttstadt and his mother was Henrietta Guttstadt nee **Rosenbach**. And I met lots of the **Rosenbachs**. It was a big family but they all vanished. Everything around vanished at the Holocaust.

Q: What religion were they?

A: All Jewish.

Q: They were all Jewish.

A: They were all Jewish.

Q: So your father was Jewish?

A: Yeah and see and my grandmother Clara Guttstadt and she was her maiden name was **Guhower**. 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.

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

A: My father. There were three children really. Kata Guttstadt and she died of diphtheria when she was 13. And then my father, Richard, and his brother Frederich. And my father Richard and

Frederich 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 **Singer** [ph] prize which was something which only was given out every five years. That is the prize for architects. And he got it for designing Winward station and the layout of the tracks. And my father's, and I couldn't find them, I looked for them yesterday. My father was with, studied at the technical university in Berlin. And his drawings are there, all his things. And then he worked for the railroad. And he designed tunnels for the railroad. There is a park between Berlin and Frankfurt where always the tracks are low and then the sights are high. And it always is, was sliding down. So my father designed how to prevent them. And my father was very, you know all his workers loved him, when they tried to, when they kicked him out. The workers strike and they said we want Guttstadt back but it didn't help him under Hitler's _____. (mumbling) .

Q: Was your father's family a religious family, an observant family?

A: I don't think so. I think all my family, as far as I know, I think that 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, it's a few surviving families. They are all now religious Jews.

Q: Tell me about your mother's family.

A: My mother was not Jewish. My mother's family is **Zemler**.

Q: What religion where they?

A: 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. You put you know the state took the tax. You could say I'm a member and they took the tax out. And but they were not religious. My mother only went to church if she liked the minister's sermons. You know there was one when she went to the Kaiser Wilhelm **gedeshne** [ph] in Berlin. And then one time there was somebody, the preacher, she thought she liked the 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.

Q: But you knew you were half Jewish, half Lutheran in a sense.

A: Yeah. 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 Rosalyn, 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 Hannah came in and she said there were the Ten Commandments. Only. 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 are different, but I didn't know why they said they were different you know. But **Frankfurt an der Oder** had a very small Jewish community. And they are now

on the bridge, you know where you have the bridge **Frankfurt an der Oder** is written on it. They don't have anybody and we knew them all. We knew all of them. But the ---

Q: Did you live in a mixed neighborhood in the sense of –

A: We all lived in mixed neighborhood. The whole Jewish community lived in a mixed neighborhood. There was no ghetto, no. Or there was no area where the – no, no. They all met the farm house and no.

Q: Can you describe yourself as a youngster. Were you an independent child or –

A: Yeah I was the second. My sister is older so I always was up to her age.

Q: And her name?

A: Her name is Brigitta. 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. It was separated the two seats. And there I was sitting. And all the teachers they all knew us. You know proper **Frankfurt an der Oder** only had 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, and 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. So yes, I always

was, when we went to school they, my parents both came with me and my sister was always very good in this. When my sister, my parents were there and then she went in her class. 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 called A, my parents looked around, Ursala was gone. There was no Ursala around. So they went to class A. There I was sitting. So yeah and then we went was ten, we went into the gymnasium in the high school. And I, no that comes later. But my mother wanted to come with me and I said don't dare to come with me. And she didn't. So I was, yes, I was very – and 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, this, at one time alone. And I said what's the matter with you. All my friends are sick. They have the flu. I said no, try the other ones. No, I can't do that. I can't push my way between. I said, why not. And so it hit me very hard, probably more than my sister. My sister also could do, and so the age you see. Now let me say 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 **abitorium** when you were 18. And then you could go to the university. But we went. My school and we were separate, the boys and the girls. So in my school there were 700 girls. And from the 700 girls in 1936, only ten percent 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 the Crystal Night they couldn't stay in school. But we half Jews could stay in. And my sister was lucky. She had in her class another half Jew. And after she did the **abitorium** I was the only one

so there were 699 kids in uniforms on Hitler's birthday. And so on I was private. It was awful. It was awful. I can feel how the blacks were feeling in these cases, you know.

Q: You did not wear a uniform because –

A: Oh no I couldn't get in the Hitler Youth. Oh that was the Hitler Youth.

Q: That was the Hitler Youth.

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

Q: 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 your Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Were you athletic?

A: Oh yeah, very.

Q: You were in good shape physically?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did you have any hobbies? Did you like to read or –

A: Oh yeah, I read extensively and 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 an der Oder with on each side on the arm, he had one of his daughters. And my father really taught us a lot. He was very great. When we went on vacation and so at first you know we could go on vacation. He gave us a map when we were eight and so and said now here we are and there you're going to be. Now you lead us. And so on. So when we missed something then we said, **Fati**, **Fati**. 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 you know he walked up the mountains this way instead of going this way. And so he was really in good shape too. And I was, yes I was very good in sports and the Hitler sport was a major subject. And one of my goals was to swim the channel between France and England. Sorry I didn't get to.

Q: Not yet. Well let's start talking about when things started changing. You were born in 25. When did you first hear about a man named Hitler?

A: Well one of the things is when I went to school, we still said good morning and then our teacher (phone ringing). Our teacher somewhere must have told us that we had to say Heil Hitler in the morning. But I have no recollection of that. The teacher in, you see in January of 33 she must, she is the one who told us that we had to say Heil Hitler. Now she was not a Nazi. There were lots of – so 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 on vacation, my father and my mother and we two

and this was when, in 34, when they killed so many of, Hitler killed so many you know of the Long Knives. And when they announced 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 you know we were small children.

Q: How did you know he was –

A: I don't know. I don't know but we both of them, we knew that **Fati** was in danger. I guess –

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

A: No we were really too young to talk this, to talk that over really. I don't know. It was just I guess somewhere I guess my parents must have talked about it or so on. And we maybe have overheard some or you know and, and I know that relatives of my father called on him all the time, and you know what to do. And so, so somewhere not many, we couldn't really put it in words, but some way we were aware of that the, my Jewish relatives were in danger.

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

A: Oh I saw him. I saw Hitler too. He, with Hindenburg. That was when Hindenburg was still alive. He came to Frankfurt an der Oder and we all, all school children went there, and there was a car, open car, and there was this old gentleman Hindenburg and Hitler. And –

Q: Did it mean anything to you?

A: To none of us. We all just we are supposed to look at this and we said ah, that's the rulers and we didn't care. We were too young basically. Yeah and didn't make any impression on us I think, but I did see him. Yeah.

Q: Do you remember when exactly that was?

A: Yeah, when Hindenburg died it must have been 34 too you know. So I was really you know

Q: You were very young

A: And so, so --

Q: At that point you still didn't feel in danger. You knew your father was but you yourself.

A: I didn't feel in danger.

Q: You didn't feel in danger.

A: No, no and this was also then in, 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.

Q: Do you remember your feelings? Were you upset?

A: Somewhere, somewhere I was upset because 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 it's, my classmates were not anywhere against me.

Q: That was going to be my next question. Did they start to treat you differently.

A: Mm, no.

Q: You didn't sense any friction?

A: No. 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 that treated me differently were the teachers. Because the teachers –

Q: Starting when? From the very beginning when Hitler came in.

A: No, no my teacher in elementary school was an old spinster, old lady and she was not a Nazi and she didn't treat my any way different. And my classmates at this point, it was it is a small

city. I mean it wasn't that obvious. And then in high school the teachers some way 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 were, would maybe say oh you are friendly to the Jews. But my classmates were not.

Q: How does a young person respond to that? Did you know that's why the teachers didn't give you –

A: Yeah sure

Q: So what –

A: Well there was really --

Q: Were you angry, were you sad, what were you?

A: Well at this point you know that was you just tried to, at this point you had the feeling that maybe you survive all that without any really bad, 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 and he didn't the family to show that and he never got undressed in front of his wife or anything because of that. So he, my father told us about these things. But these were mostly the communists, not really the Jews. And –

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

A: Well there wasn't, after school.

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

A: I went to ballet school. I don't know how many people went there. You know and I went swimming and so on and my best friend, she didn't go to anything that I know of.

Q: Had you heard of something called the Nuremburg laws?

A: Yeah, the Mendelson gazette. Yeah, sure.

Q: Again as a child –

A: The Mendelson, yeah we knew all about the Mendelson who did this with yeah and yeah we knew. By then I knew about it, yeah.

Q: Again do you remember what was going on inside your head when you learned about these laws?

A: Yeah, my father was stateless. You know he, that stripped him of his – and my father was really a civil servant. And then and so, in 36 they sent him a notice that he had a 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 and we knew that I don't know. We, we you see one of the things, in the beginning is we, we all had some way the feeling in Germany the number is the German Jews were in many ways very bad because they were very emancipated. They were held very German. And their religion was Jewish like somebody else's was Catholic or 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. They also you know. I don't know how to say this. The, you see none of my relatives spoke Yiddish.

Q: They were very assimilated?

A: Yeah that was below, you know Yiddish. No. no. I mean so that was a bad part and so 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 some way there was always the belief is that you know somewhere it will be ending before it gets really, really bad. You know. But –

Q: Did you know how you were considered having half –

A: Oh yeah sure. Yeah I was **mischling essen gratis** (German?). Yes, sure I knew about it yes. But I was now I had blond hair and blue eyes so people didn't realize that I had a cousin **Gerhard** Guttstadt who looked very Jewish. You know but they considered you know is the black, 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.

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

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

Q: And were you close to those cousins?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You didn't observe holidays or anything?

A: No but they were also half Jewish. He, he also married a non-Jew. And so they were half Jewish, but both of them were in the organization TOT, which was the labor camp for people they didn't put into concentration camps, but in a labor camp. And both of them were 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, no, they couldn't.

Q: Kristallnacht happened

A: In 38. And we saw the synagogue burning. And oh yes and we went down and –

Q: You're almost and you're 13 now?

A: Yeah and we went down and we you know we knew all the, now maybe not all, but we knew most of the Jews in Frankfurt an der Oder yes. We do, we did.

Q: As a 13 year old child, you saw this happening. Did you just stand there? What did you do?

A: Then my sister and I were lying awake at night and we waited that they 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, you know 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. And but they, the Gestapo came all the time and looked. And my father did all those things as you know he had one typewriter and he typed with two fingers. And he typed all the any, the underground and so on. And he had and we knew he had it hidden somewhere and we didn't know where he had it hidden. And then came the Gestapo and, you know and I always watched them. And somewhere I was not afraid of the Gestapo. I watched them and when they confiscated our typewriter and said to my mother, mommy they are stealing our typewriter.

Q: You said that in front of the Gestapo?

A: Yeah, had nothing to do with this story. But somehow I wasn't afraid of them. And but we knew that somewhere that we are doomed yeah.

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

A: Yeah my, my they 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. So I would always stay to my husband. And, and to my children whatever happened. So no she was very much you know she was very strong. And then we had a house in Frankfurt an der Oder which was in the name of my husband, or 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. That did not –

Q: They let you all stay.

A: Yes, my father just refused to move and somewhere didn't. But then in October 42 they took my father.

Q: So up to October 42 you stayed in the house. You were going to school. Things were –

A: In October of 42 they kicked me out. They took my father.

Q: When you say they took your father, was he at home and they came and arrested him. Did you see that?

A: Yes, mm hm. I was in school.

Q: You were in school when he was taken away.

A: Yeah but he was wait a moment. He was arrested in 41. He was arrested in 41. 42. Yeah, no I was in school still and I wasn't there but then the –

Q: Was your mother at home?

A: Yes.

Q: Did she work?

A: No.

Q: Ok so she was at home when they came to arrest him.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you come home

A: 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 they did and one of the guards there was very was a Roman Catholic and he went to the monsignor and said to the monsignor, go to my mother and tell that father 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 goodbye to my father.

Q: What did you, what was happening?

A: And my father took us both and my father never really cried but you know somewhere we, and we all knew that this was the end.

Q: You did know?

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you know that?

A: Well by then we knew about the concentration camps. I mean we, we –

Q: How did you know?

A: How did we know. I don't really know how we knew but we knew about the concentration camps. And we knew about the gas chambers, the crematoriums. And –

Q: Did you know what Mauthausen was at that point?

A: At this point it was very unusual that they took **Fati** to Mauthausen which is outside of Linz in Austria, 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 **Fati** 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 –

Q: Were there other men picked up, Jewish men picked up –

A: There was nobody left.

Q: By the time your father was arrested?

A: Yeah.

Q: The other men had been taken away?

A: The other, all the Jews were taken away before there were, after 38 there 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 and where they were assembled you see the Gestapo always send, usually to 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 we saw them and we knew where they go. And then we went to that school my sister and I. And people say well you shouldn't come and we said yes we do have to come. So we knew about that, and they went all to Russia in the ghetto. And so my father was the only Jew left in Frankfurt an der Oder. And my father was accompanied by policemen, regular police, German police.

Q: To what do you attribute the fact that your father was the only one left?

A: Because he had a Christian wife. I think.

Q: Though he himself was 100% Jewish.

A: Yeah.

Q: But the fact that he had the Christian wife?

A: Yeah, yeah. I think that was, so he was and 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.

Q: When you father was the only one left, did he become depressed or did he still keep –

A: Well 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 all was gone. And he aged. He looked like an old man.

Q: Once Hitler got into power?

A: So my father in, and my father tried to, to go out but you know it was very difficult because 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.

Q: Your father is taken away and it's your mother and you two girls.

A: And then there was my father, my mother out of the house. She left the house. The Gestapo said you have to go and mommy went.

Q: With you girls.

A: Which was two girls and then we rented, we rented some rooms. With other people.

Q: How did your mother support you all?

A: 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 the office then and put you know stuffed envelopes and all this kind of things. And then my mother's mother helped us financially.

Q: And you at that point were still in school or –

A: No I was kicked out in October of 42.

Q: You are almost 17 so what does that does that do to a 17 year old girl to be told that?

A: 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 an der Oder and we should go there to a factory.

Q: To work.

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

Q: That's very unusual. And what was your mother's role in that?

A: Well my mother stayed in Frankfurt an der Oder and the Gestapo called her in and said where are your girls. And mommy said they left me. I have no idea.

Q: Was it her idea for you girls to leave?

A: No, I think it was the consent of all of us that we don't go because, and that **Briesen** factory went to the Warsaw ghetto. So we, so then we were in Berlin, just the two of us, my sister and I.

Q: How did you get there?

A: By train.

Q: Did you have papers? ID papers?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah we had a **kin karte**, sure.

Q: Saying that you were a **mischling**?

A: No.

Q: No. anything there showing that you had Jewish –

A: No, no. That didn't say anything. But so then we went to Berlin and we stayed with friends and we stayed at a pension and I went to a Carmelite convent to help with children and my sister worked and so on. And a relative from 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.

Q: Did you live in the convent itself?

A: Partly I lived at 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 a 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 –

Q: But once your father was taken away, did you have any contact with him?

A: No, he was in Mauthausen.

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

A: No 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 had heart attacks and 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 Colvin.

Q: When was that, when did your mother get that letter?

A: In 42.

Q: Oh so it was soon after he left?

A: Yeah and so and then there –

Q: How did she present that to you girls?

A: Well she showed us the letter.

Q: Was she very emotional?

A: Well in some ways yes, in some ways not. In somewhere, we some way knew that **Fati** would not come back. In some ways. On the other hand is we didn't trust anything. So 45, we didn't dare to move anywhere far away from Frankfurt an der Oder because we thought maybe, maybe he comes back.

Q: There's always that hope.

A: And so but on the other hand is then my sister and I were running for our lives and then the bombs came.

Q: Did you go into shelters?

A: Yeah sure we sit in the basement in the shelters and so when the bombs came and you know 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. We 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 are somewhere dull to pain. You know there is so much that you just say you can't anymore. And in 45 there 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 soon. In April 45 the few people I knew, I still had contact to, I wrote farewell letters. And I said I am going to go. I am not going to run anymore. I just can't anymore and somewhere I never said yes again to life. I can you know that people get you know like when I moved out of my house, I said sure I can go. I can't get it's, it's very, very difficult. I try, also have trouble getting people too close to me you know. It's so on. But you know you it was, on the other hand you see where others are divided. You know when the bombs start falling and the high, the apartment houses in Berlin, they are burning and then the Germans were sitting in front with just a little bit belongings. You felt 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, and some of

the people you know like my best friend from high school. She, my mommy's mother lived in Frankfurt an der Oder and she went to Frankfurt, to my grandmother and she said where is Ursala 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 a very, if a bell rang somebody will take us. And but there she was. So some of the people you know never abandoned me or my sister. And 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. Was very small. And then after the war you know, nobody ever thought that we were in shock or anything. Nobody helped us anywhere.

Q: Your sister stayed through the end of the war?

A: 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 were really at this point when we knew it was the end, is that the British bombs. You know they had these block busters. And in the basement when the alarm was. And we were sitting with the Germans. Nobody accost us, really. They were, the block busters. 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 outside. And said you know these block busters, the people were blue then because everything burst. You know they were blue when they were hit, but there was sometimes a

vacuum. And so when I opened my fear was always that I sat in the vacuum and mommy and Gitta are dead. That was my greatest fear to the end of 45. Yeah, you know when –

Q: What do you mean people were blue?

A: Because all there the out there, everything burst and you leave the building. This is such a strong pressure from the pressure. The block busters were also from the British. And they hit you know the block buster means that is word blocks and so it was that was one of my fears you know. And in 45 then I knew that the Gestapo wouldn't get me anymore. Even where **govers** [ph] said to the end is there is a relief army and so on which you know. And in front of us we had the, for the tanks, when the tanks would go in the main streets, they would go against it, they'd both 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 the, in some ways you were numb but on the other hand is you were not afraid of anything really anymore. You know it was so bad that you thought what else. You know one way or another so who cares you know.

Q: Did you know what had happened to Hitler?

A: Well we heard that afterwards, yeah. Yeah, we heard that afterwards. We didn't even know Eva Braun existed.

Q: If what?

A: If Eva Braun existed. 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 didn't – but –

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

A: We knew that there are Jews in, 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.

Q: So sense, did not make –

A: So you tried not, if you, you some way we were aware there were, at the Jewish cemetery in **Weisen** 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 engage of them. And so you know you tried not to do anything like this because 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. You know so you tried not to find out anything about them. You knew somewhere. Well 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 had, that the Americans had landed because that's underground. Told me that. But you know –

Q: Tell me your connection what the Dutch underground. How did that happen?

A: The Dutch underground. You know Hitler had all these, they just took cars, you know pick-up trucks and drove to the 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 the convent in the evening. And they talked, they're talking.

Q: You yourself never actually worked for the underground organization?

A: No, no I didn't.

Q: Did you know if there were any Jewish children hiding in this compound?

A: There were some yes. Yes, we did have Jewish kids hid. We had there was one woman and she couldn't marry because Jews couldn't marry. And she converted to Catholicism but she was in Auschwitz, she survived. She survived, but her son before, her son was with her in this where she, where they call collect all the Jews before they ship them out. So somewhere she contacted the Catholic church and so the nuns and, they took me 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 the apartment and there was the 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 in the convent. And then there was another little girl where we don't know anything about the parents. And who they just left it on the front doors. One of the problems was, with that, was that the kids itself, and they went with it then. You know, there were very few children left in Berlin, because the schools were all closed. Because of the bombs. And so, so any school aged kid was you know I mean if they stayed in Berlin, they didn't have any school, they were all sent to the country. And so it was a little bit a problem of with older children. The smaller ones you know you could just keep and you just kept them from you know you had a nun from your own 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 influence. 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 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.

Q: This is while she was in –

A: In Auschwitz, yeah. And so on. And so I always thought that this really, you should never depend on it. People shouldn't be able to kid, because they hold this as a carrot. You know, if you go with us, we give you food and we do that and I said I'm never going to be dependent on any of that. And so on. But she survived it but she was not a Catholic after all but she collected her son.

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: No, I don't and I don't remember the little boy's name either you know and so on. And so but yeah we went in that sealed apartment and the Gestapo were there, two Gestapo men and yeah.. and we got the clothing out. And some of them also you know they went, they got people out who were, I don't know who was the father of that kid in any case. But the, 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 you know, 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 a hundred people there and there were only 98, two were missing. They took anybody around. And 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 in 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 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 you know to find ways of disappearing and some way managing of keeping on living. Because and as I said then, so much was destroyed. Papers were destroyed too.

(Tape 2 – RG-50.106.0184.02.03; duration: 58:32)

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ursala Guttstadt McKinney. This is track number two and we were talking about the end of the war. Mother coming back from Auschwitz. Any other memories of that particular time that you can talk about.

Ursala Guttstadt McKinney: Yeah so people came back you know. You never knew and you never trusted anyone but we got the death certificate from **Fati** and you see my father was a civil servant. He worked for the **Reichsbahn** which is the now **Bundesbahn** which would be the federal you know railroad system. And then when my father, when they kicked him out in 36, they gave him a special assignment. And then in 38 suddenly everything was over. And so they paid the pension for my father. Only we never got it. The Gestapo collected it. Because the German railroad, they thought we cannot, we have no reason not to give it, to send it. We have to have a disciplinary thing if he were murdered somebody or something you know. So they paid it and the Gestapo collected it.

Q: You had said you were hoping even in 45 that your father would come? Did you go looking for him?

A: No, we couldn't, no we didn't look for him but my mother walked, my mother walked to Frankfurt an der Oder. She didn't dare to take Brigitta and me with her because we, this was all

occupied by Russians. And she walked because there was no train or nothing. And she walked to Frankfurt an der Oder and looked if our house was still there.

Q: That's about what, 60 miles or something?

A: Unh hunh. And then she went to whatever government there were, the city of Frankfurt an der Oder and so they knew very well that she was there, that she was alive and she was there and they had her address. And my mother for a while administered the house.

Q: She stayed in it?

A: No, no, no she stayed in Berlin, because then after 45 my mother got us an apartment. But she was the one who collected the rent for a while and was responsible for it. But then she gave it up. It was too, you know too difficult with the east and so on. But the city of Frankfurt an der Oder, after you know this is called **Grumpuff** [ph] in German. It's a registry for all the properties and there was a first Richard Guttstadt. Then it was crossed out. Then it was Richard Israel Guttstadt. That was crossed out. Then there was a **short rise** (?) and then this was crossed out in 45 and it became property of the city of Frankfurt an der Oder. And the person who rented then our house was a physician from Silesia. And he had his practice on the first floor and lived on the second floor. And so it was in very good condition because as a physician he also got electrical repairs and all of that. So it was you know maintained very well. And then he died in the house. Somewhere in the 60s. And then a family came who rented it and they wanted to buy it. And they asked the city of Frankfurt an der Oder and said look it is Western property. You know

West German people who had escaped. They didn't know that it was Jewish property. They had escaped so and so we want to buy it. And the city of Frankfurt an der Oder said sorry. It's not for sale and it's not Western property. So that was our salvation. So my sister and I bought the house back. My sister got a lawyer. Through friends. And he only took 15%. Much less than the other outfits that. And –

Q: What year was that, that you got the house back?

A: After the wall fell. You know after the wall fell because and then he because then we had all the papers. My mother had always a little suitcase during the war where the papers of the house were in. The death certificate of my father and all that. And she carried that wherever she went. And then when my mother died in 81 I had had it. So we had all the papers and then the city you know had my father's name and everything. So and we sold it to the people who wanted to buy it. But we didn't have all these difficulties because you see the, and for god's sake Frankfurt was really destroyed too. But the registry was intact. You know because if this would all have been gone, then you know would have been very difficult but this was all there and you know you could trace it. And so my sister and I bought the house back and then we sold it. My sister wanted to move back in and I said no deal. And so on. So we didn't, but we got it back, yes, and we sold it to the people who had it. But, so my mother really when she went in 45 and she walked to Frankfurt an der Oder, she wanted to make sure that the house is still there and she wanted to make sure that they know where she is. So if **Fati** would come, he would find us.

Q: When did you finally realize that he was not going to come back?

A: Pretty soon. Pretty soon. Yeah.

Q: You stayed in Berlin with your sister and your mother? What did you do then? When the war was over.

A: Yes. When the war was over, I tried to get **abitorium** which was awful and I went to a school which was, we were all Jewish or half Jewish kids who wanted to finish high school. And any time there was exam, we all blanked out. It was awful. We just couldn't function. And nobody ever thought that we need any help. You know one person one time said to me you know you are like somebody who walks around the corridor and sees an open door and runs in, in this open door and says oh no I don't want to be here. And then she keeps on running. Next open door. And you know but it never occurred to them that I really, number one I didn't know what I wanted to do. I never know what. You know I mean it's what, ok, the war was over. They said ok, fine. It's over. Now you start your life again. What, how, how, how. You know so.

Q: Did you talk about your experiences with the other students? Did you all exchange –

A: No, nobody ever talked. We didn't talk.

Q: Stories –

A: No we didn't talk. They didn't talk.

Q: Cause you all know.

A: We all know. I mean sometimes one said something and you realized you know they were in hiding and, and so on. Most of them were kids who had been in hiding. And so on. But no, we just we just blanked out. My sister was a little bit more lucky. She had her **abitorium**, so she could go to the university. But I had, it was very difficult to get back to a normal life. And it kept on you know it's -- And you felt some way you know then you felt maybe more outcast than before. Because before you were so busy trying to survive all that that you couldn't even think about anything. And, and then suddenly life was supposed to be more normal again and as I said, my mother got us an apartment. And then but then you were in danger again you know because I couldn't, my sister registered with the IRO, the International Relief Organization and she came over with a coal boat. You know one of those boats which brought coal over and went back empty. But I was, she was then had a temporary visa for West Berlin, because in 48 they opened the Free University in West Berlin and my sister was in the, eastern Germany had only one university, Berlin, the **Humburt** [ph] University which was in East Berlin and so she could go to West Berlin. And she got a temporary visa. And just she registered and could get out. But I was in East Berlin and any time you registered with the IRO and were in East Berlin, the Russians would arrest you as a spy. So you couldn't do that. So --

Q: Let's go back a little bit. When you said the coal boat, the boat going from –

A: Oh there were the boats, after the war which came from America where had coal in and so on. They brought it to West Germany for the people. I guess it was part of the Marshall plan. And then they went empty back. They had the refugees on going back.

Q: I see, so she went –

A: She went at first to the Freer University, Free University in West Berlin. And she studied there. And then came, and her major was history. And there came a professor from United States who was a German Jewish immigrant originally but he was in the meantime an American citizen, and a professor of history. And he talked to my sister and he said, I get you a scholarship to –

Q: American college.

A: Yeah, so he did. So she went to Sweetbriar.

Q: So she was able to get out and she came to the United States.

A: And she had no sponsor. My sister had a sponsor the World churches were her sponsor. So IRO got her a sponsor which that was very impersonal.

Q: And this was in 48.

A: No that, my sister, no. That was for really, between 49 and 50 that the IRO.

Q: And you said goodbye

A: Oh yeah. I said goodbye to the, when my Jewish relatives went to the concentration camp. I went and said goodbye. We always knew I had all my aunts. I, when they had the papers. I know when they are going and I went there and I said goodbye and I always knew I wouldn't see them again.

Q: How do you say goodbye in a situation like that?

A: Well it was very, it was very difficult because one of my aunts said to me you know I am going to go to the concentration camp because I am Jewish. I don't know why I go there, because I don't believe in anything. I never go to the synagogue or anything. But I am Jewish. And I felt so bad for her. Because I thought if she would believe in it and during, in the camps the orthodox Jews were of the best because they had the faith to set against that horror. But people like her and they died off very fast because they had nothing to set against it. And I said to so many of them, I said goodbye. You always knew when they went. We had a young, one of my, one of the cousins and they had gotten (phone ringing) a baby, that. I can take it off the hook. There were they all knew that they go to concentration camp. But they couldn't, they-- and many of my relatives were really in Poland. You know Poland was partly German. Partly Austrian and partly Russian. And after the war Poland was united again. And my relatives lived in the German, many of them in the German part which was then Poland. After World War I, they could either opt for Poland or for Germany. And they opted for Germany. And then they

were shipped back. And but they some way we all knew that and they knew about, they didn't think that they're going to labor camp or anything like that. They all knew that at least, my relatives all knew that was the end. Yeah, and that young family you know who had that little boy **Berl**, and he was supposed to be born in the United States, except they didn't get in. So he went.

Q: You said that you had known even in 42 about the camps.

A: Sure.

Q: When did you learn the real extent of the camps?

A: Oh knew of this. I guess we knew about the camp. My father knew about the camp and he told us about it. And I had but I, the extent of the -- I guess we only learned really of, after the war, that you know how many – but we knew that they had chambers that they all, that they died and so on. And we knew that the, the people you know didn't, didn't have the chance to come back. Except very few. Some way there was a grapevines, you know and there were always some people who got news out of it. You know like this one train which went into you know in Auschwitz, when you know they at one time Sweden's Red Cross came in and they said we would, you know they put linen on the beds and everything you know to make it look good. And then they said there will be a train going to Switzerland the next morning. And hardly anybody went because they all, nobody believed it. But one of the Frankfurt an der Oder Jews did and it went. The Germans in some ways sometimes you had a chance. And that train went almost

empty. Because people were afraid. They said that's a trap. And but then these people talk. So you heard things and so you knew. I mean we didn't know how many camps were there. I mean the number of camps and this we didn't know. And we didn't know the extent of you know how many people really were, I mean we -- how many the capacity was of this. But you know there is a place where you know there were some certain places already within Germany where they tried out some of these things on the mentally retarded. And so then the medical professions somewhere heard about it and it went so on. So I think something to that extent, it was very difficult to keep it completely secret. I never quite understand how people can say they never knew about it. I mean didn't they see the cars coming in and didn't they smell all this and so on you know. The trouble is that Hitler got in power. Then the depression was and people were out of work. And he promised them work and he built a factory, he prepared for the war. He built the Autobahn and all this. And people had money, suddenly had money. And by the time they realized political wasn't everything that great, they were trapped. That's one reason I am somewhat afraid for this country here. How it goes, how Beck can get so many people to come to his things. But so it was a bad time. And then there were so many people who really didn't know any Jews. So when Hitler, when they talked about them, the -- some people believe anything which is written black and white. So it's very difficult and I mean there was a curfew after the 20th of July when they tried to kill Hitler, Stauffenberg and these people. There was a curfew. You know you could see there where before when the Jewish still before they were all more or less dispersed. There were signs on parks, no Jews allowed. And so also it was very obvious. And people can read. All the Germans could read. There were no people who couldn't read. But I guess many of them, and some of the people were very daring and nothing happened to them. We had a high school teacher who taught us math and physics and so on. And he was

one of these golden **Papi** members. You know people who joined before 33. They had a golden rim around, they are a party member. Party thing. And this was a real join. And they are enthusiastic about it. And then he sent in 38 or 39 or something around there, he sent his membership back. And he said that's not the party I joined. He always kept on teaching. Nothing happened to him, absolutely nothing. So some people, it was, they were always some, some people had a loop hole or something. They went through. The majority of my high school teachers were not party members. But I guess I didn't have enough teachers for them to kill them. It's, I mean they, when they kicked me out of school and I worked, I was walking the street in Frankfurt an der Oder, one of my former classmates which was really hundred, 300 percent Nazi. And so was her whole family. She stopped me in the street and she said I'm sorry that they kicked you out. I said oh. I guess for her I was just another classmate.

Q: What is it like to feel to be an outcast?

A: Feels awful. When I was standing I remember that one time when Hitler's birthday was, and everybody came in uniform, Hitler Youth uniform. Everybody. So being a member of the Hitler Youth didn't really mean that you were a Nazi. They were all members and I was there private. It's an awful feeling. I always thought you know I would feel like I'm the only black in a white school. And nobody harassed me or anything, but I came home and I said mommy next time I'm not going. So then I started. When anything like this was going on, I didn't go.

Q: Did you feel inferior? Or just angry?

A: I was afraid more than I was feeling inferior. I maybe a certain extent yes, because when I went to physical therapy school you know before I emigrated to the United States, I became, I went to the University of Frankfurt and became a physical therapist. And one of the things I said to myself, I want that the people need me. That they want me. Because before nobody needed me, nobody wanted me. I also went then back to the university, to American U and Catholic U and I got two masters degrees. And I was a straight A student and I got a summa cum laude and so on. And people say oh you were so ambitious. I said no. But I had to prove to myself I can do it.

Q: That you're not an outcast.

A: Yeah, that I can do it you know. So somewhere this all stuck to me all the time, yeah, yeah.

Q: Let's get back to just a little bit to the post war. Your sister left. You stayed with your mother. In Berlin.

A: Mm hm. I went illegally to West Germany.

Q: Illegally.

A: Oh yes, sure. I danced. I took, I went to ballet school in Berlin. That was my big love. I danced, I danced when I was in Frankfurt an der Oder and I was on the stage at the state theater and then they kicked me, they told me you couldn't come any more. You are half Jewish. That

was very hard. That was more difficult for me really than to be kicked out of school because I loved dancing. So then in 45, I went back to ballet school. And I wanted to become a professional dancer. And so I joined a group and we traveled and this was, you know at this point there was no wall. So you could go very easy from East Berlin to West Berlin and so on. And so then we went to West Germany. And every time I had to go to the police station and they put on that I was illegally there. And so but there was in Hamburg a woman who took pity on me and she was in this office where they give you housing. Because you know the cities were destroyed so first you had to wait until you got something. And so she said all right, she said keep in touch. Send me sometimes a postcard. So I sent her a postcard and one time I was in **Gerting** [ph] which isn't too far from Hamburg and I got a postcard, come to Hamburg as soon as you can. I said ok so I took the train and went to Hamburg and I only went and you were so trained in those things, you didn't say boo. And I only said hello. And she said oh I'm so glad you came because it's no good to walk around without identification card. I said mm hm, and then she gave me her phone and she knew very well you know that I had this, I had an East German card in my pocket. And in this foment that I lost my identification card, it was not written, whether it was east or west, so I got a West German card. And at least then I could register to immigrate. Because then I was legally in West Germany. I was always a little bit afraid then when I -- and one of my uncles in New York sponsored me. But I was a little bit afraid when I then registered that the Americans would find out that I'm not really legally in West Germany but they didn't or they didn't care. Whatever. But then you see I was legally in West Germany. And then my sister was already here. And she had switched from history to sociology. So she became a psychotherapist. And she said you know you always liked dancing and gymnastics. Why don't you become a physical therapist. That's very much needed in the

United States and it's really got restitution from the government. And so I did and then so I've been, that's the reason I didn't come until 56 because I went there first and got my degree. And then I worked one year because you know it takes some time before you get all the immigration going.

Q: And you were living with your mother?

A: No, no, no I was living Frankfurt. I was in west Germany. My mother was in Berlin. And she was still in East Berlin at first and then she got a card from the post office. Oh no she was already then over in West Berlin, without, she left the department, just locked it up and was gone. And then she got a card and it said that she and I should come to the post office. There is a letter which is registered. We should pick it up and we never went there because the East Germans were as bad as the Gestapo. And so we never went there. But then my mother was in West Berlin and she got herself an apartment there and then when the wall came then she went to Hannover because she was afraid that they would cut us, cut off from my sister and me.

Q: How did you come to the United States?

A: Well then I had the physical therapy degree

Q: And you worked for a year.

A: And I worked there. And then I registered here. You know I put in application and one of my, of the cousins of my father Uncle Hans, he sponsored me because my sister couldn't sponsor me because she was just in graduate school then. And so she didn't have enough money. So you had to put down $5000 in order to this. So Uncle Hans sponsored me and then I came over here. And then I stayed in Alexandria with my sister.

Q: Your mother stayed back in –

A: She stayed back in Frankfurt, in Germany. She got the pension restored for my father. My mother was very good. She got us a year restoration and she wrote all these letters and so on. She was very, very good in that and she got a lawyer to help her in all those things. And so on and so she, and she stayed then in Germany. She came over here all the time.

Q: To visit.

A: To visit but she didn't' want it. Number one the exchange rate at this point were one to four so her pension would have been very small. And she didn't want to be a burden and so then to the end really to the end, my mother died since 95 and she said I wished I would have made the decision to come because then you know we always traveled for and back you know in the fall. And I was there when she died. But she was, then she regretted it. But then she also was you see the trouble is this foreign language. One of my uncles, not the one who sponsored me but one of my other uncles, when he was in the Jewish home for the Aged in New York and he suddenly only spoke German and he was fluent in English. And my mother was afraid that she said if I get

sick I can't communicate. And we had a patient in, at GW where I worked as physical therapist who had a stroke and he, who can speak German. Who can speak German. So you know, I said ok so we all, he couldn't speak a word, other, except German. And then he recovered and he spoke fluent English. And then they all said ha, but then he couldn't. and that's, so mommy was very much aware of that and she said I didn't' want to be a burden and I don't want to lose the ability that I can communicate. She was very independent and in control. And so she didn't want to have this happen to her.

Q: How fluent were you in English when you came here?

A: I was better in English, English than American English. It's I took, I mean I had in high school English. I had, my first foreign language was French. And I had, was much better in French than in English and then the second was English and the third was Latin. But and then before I immigrated, I took English lessons again. And then I came here and I couldn't understand very well. Because English is so much easier you know the pronunciation is so much more distinct than American. You know. But I got a job. At first I got at the office of three surgeons, orthopedic surgeons and then I came to GW and so on. But you learn you know if you are always surrounded by it and you don't hear anything else but English it's you know you get, and then I also didn't make – I read books like Agatha Christie is good to read because there is so much dialogue in. And which is important. And one of the things you should never do, have a dictionary beside you. If you don't know a word look it up. Then the next time, look it up. You never get anywhere. Just say ok and just content, must be something like that because if you always start to do that you never get fluent.

Q: So you stayed with your sister and you worked at GW, George Washington Hospital?

A: Mm hm.

Q: And then?

A: Then I met my husband.

Q: Then you met your husband. Ok. And he was American.

A: Oh yes, yes. And he spoke uhh. I mean I could, by then I could understand that but all our friends, you know when they, anybody who came over, they all had trouble to understand him because you know he speaks like that. He was, my husband is from Altoona, Pennsylvania, so we also have, when we dated we were sitting at the railroad tracks watching the trains going by because his father worked for the Pennsylvania railroad and my father the German railroad. So when we came back we lived in an old house in Old Town Alexandria and then we also had another roommate which was a classmate from graduate school from my sister. And she, Jean, and she said oh you are lying. And my sister said uh, uh I don't think so.

Q: What year did you get married?

A: 58.

Q: And then you continued on working?

A: Oh yeah. I worked all the time. Yeah but then I went back. Physical therapy, I was a very good therapist and but the trouble with physical therapy is you are involved in the whole family. Psychological. And you work mentally with the patient and physical, which makes it very difficult. Like I had you know you, I had one patient. I worked also then for the Visiting Nurses. And so we went to the homes. And there was one lady and she lived near Dupont Circle and the house was you know several levels. And she was in the bedroom upstairs and they had put in an elevator you know on the stairs. And she was frightened to death and I said you can do it. I come after work and we do it. And you make sure that your husband and your son is there. And so on. So they were. And I said ok you can do it and so we had, you had to be and she was much taller than I am. And you had to be very strong to convince these people. I wasn't so sure if she can. But you can't let them know. So she did and she went down. And then she had a martini with her husband and her son and then we went up again. And so on. So she can do it. And then I flew down the stairs because I said oh I wasn't sure if we manage and so the husband said to me, yeah my wife told me that you don't walk down the stairs. You fly down. And so, so one time my mother was there. And John and my mother and I, we went to a party and everybody was there. And then they couldn't find me and I was sitting in one room. At this point I was the chief therapist of the Easter Seal treatment center in Rockville. And they couldn't find me. And then they found me in a room sitting on a sofa, sound asleep because you know as a chief therapist I always thought if anything is I told the other therapists ok you take it easy and I took an extra patient. And I was just plain exhausted. So my husband then talked to the librarian at this point

at National Bureau of Standards. You know it's not now National Institute of Standards and Technology. And he said you always loved books and so on. So I talked to her and then I took an exam with the civil service in translating German into English. And after that I could work as a translator. And it was the National Bureau of Standards. And after I was finished I thought gosh if I would be a few years younger, I would have flunked my own native tongue because it was in the old German script and I came home and I said John, they still have it in the old German script. I was -- and so on. So then I worked as a translator in the library at the National Bureau of Standards. And I realized that you don't get anywhere in a library except you have that master's degree, you can have ten PhDs or whatever. You have to have that master's degree in library science. So then I went to Catholic U and got the master's degree. And then I had to side paths because I didn't have enough, I had all these medical courses you know so I didn't have enough liberal arts courses so they sent me back to undergraduate school. So I went to undergraduate school and in order to get it faster, I said ok I take German literature and so I graduate, and art history because I had both of them back home so I said ok so I got this and then I went there. And then I worked as librarian yeah. And I worked at surgeon's (?) and NBS and then I worked for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, as the reference librarian. And I worked and then when I retired I worked there as a consultant. And I had all, all the foreign documents coming from Vienna you know International Atomic Energy Commission and all of these places, yeah. But so I worked until 2005. And when my husband collapsed, I said my gosh I wished I had my job back. It's the best thing you can have is a job. You have to function and if something is, also as physical therapist. You know like they said really when I was with the Easter Seal I had an old lady, then I thought was old. Was 80 or something. She had a hip operation and she walked with a cane. And she said the doctor told me I would be like new. And here I am

walking with a cane. I said now if I'm in your age and just have a cane, I think I would be very happy. And she says you have to quit talking. You have nothing of my experience. I said you really want to know. And I told her my past. And then she said oh, I think I am very happy to have a cane only. But you learn to smile and people don't expect that you have anything like this in your past. And so on. And at first I never really talked you know you didn't talk about any case. And but one thing, neither John nor I could have. We couldn't have children. I couldn't put any, I thought it was so awful that I would never expose any child to the world. Who knows if not something like this happens again. And John was drafted, was 18, and he was at the Battle of the Bulge. And he came back very badly wounded. He has Purple Heart and everything. He lives, he is buried in Arlington and we both made the decision we don't want children, because he thought it was so awful. And I thought and I always think how can all these people have children. I just, I just couldn't. I just couldn't. And I confronted my mother and one time when Hitler was on and I said you know only because you and **Fati** wanted to have children, I had to be born. And my mother told me that later and she said she was horrified. And so, but it was so awful for me you know it was so awful. And I was in school and I had classmates, and I had friends, but I always knew that somewhere that it will hit me. And I just couldn't see to have anybody putting into the world. But most people did. And I don't know how they could manage.

Q: Did your sister get married?

A: No my sister didn't, never got married. No, no she never got married. So I don't know. I just, you know when and mommy's family was you know they were all mommy's, my mother had one brother and they were very close. And when **Fati** died, he refused to see her. And it was

awful. So when he died, John and I were actually in Germany and I, it was awful for my mother really but I said I can't go to the funeral. I just can't pretend I'm sorry. So I didn't go.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about Germany now. Do you feel very German?

A: No.

Q: Do you feel American?

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. See I'm a docent for the National Gallery of Art and I give tours in English on weekends. I'm a docent. They drafted me to give tours in German because there are only four of us then. Foreign language docent. And one has ovarian cancer, and one had some kind of another interesting problems and so there are practically only two left and which we have two. So I give regularly tours in German. And somewhere each time I have to jump over my own shadow to give it in German.

Q: Psychologically?

A: Mm hm.

Q: Why? What are your thoughts about it?

A: I don't want to speak German.

Q: You don't want to speak the language?

A: That's right. I am always admire here in this building you know as I told you, German conversation, they are almost all German survivors, I mean Holocaust survivors. And they speak German and then I speak German and I always, one time next time I think I ask them because at first they said, I said ok I come one time and so that one time I'm going to come and that's all. And then I realized that they are all more or less Jewish. And so I have been going from time to time. But I don't know. They don't seem to have that problem. But I don't want to speak German. I also dream in English And I count in English. And when I go to Germany, I go in a store and count, one, two, three, four.

Q: Purposely or just naturally?

A: Naturally.

Q: Naturally. So you go back to Germany frequently.

A: I was alone. My mother lived and she was very old. I went over there quite often, yeah. I was there when she died and so on. When my mother died and you know, my mother lived in a senior citizen home and the people were all very nice to me. And I only read English books. And I said I don't want that they are nice to me. I don't want that they are nice to me. I just didn't. And my husband spent a year in, was sent from NBS to England and he was supposed to be one year in

England and half, and the other half, half a year in England and half a year in **Gerting** [ph]. And I told John Ok, I come visit to England and then I go home and you go to **Gerting**. And needless saying, he didn't go to **Gerting**. He extended his time in Germany. But I couldn't' live for half a year in Germany.

Q: He extended his time in England? You mean.

A: Yeah, he spent the whole year in England.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany? How would you explain that to somebody?

A: There, I don't understand. I mean I can now, I can go to Germany. I can talk to the Germans. I can't you know specially the younger generation when we come to Germany, my sister and I, all see, for example from my mother's family, the younger generation. They all come and want to see us. You know the aunts from the United States and so on. And they are all Aryans you know. They are all very nice to us and so on. And I can talk to them. I don't feel that I have to hold this all against them. They were not even alive then. I don't think they have to apologize what their parents did. You know. Who knows how they would have reacted, maybe differently, maybe not. I don't know but I can go to Germany now. In the beginning I couldn't. But now I can go to Germany and talk to the Germans and so on but I make sure I have only English books to read. And when my sister and I talk, when we go together, we talk English. Yeah. And we were one time we went to the **Leekonstans** [ph] and we were in a train. And there was a young lady and she finally asked us and she said but you, you know because you realize that when we

talk to her, we spoke German. And so on. And she said you always talk English to each other and we said yes. And I think I do more than my sister even. But then she is two years old, which makes slightly difference maybe. I don't know. But I sometimes you know how Germany recovered and so on you know. It's really remarkable. But I feel more East German than I feel West German. If you see. And it is very sad what's going on in East Germany.

Q: Do you feel Jewish at all?

A: Yeah because all my, most of my friends are Jewish. And I don't know how it happened. The people, most of, I said the majority of people here are Jewish. But the people I have dinner with, I skip dinner very often but the ones I have, they are all Jewish. And my best friends like **Renata Chernoff** and so on, they're all Jewish.

Q: Is there anything today that reminds you of the war times, sights or sounds or smells, you know bring a flashback?

A: When I see the war pictures, you know from Iraq or from Afghanistan and so on, yes. It's and it's the war is something awful in my eyes. It's awful. And you always hit the civilians. You know I mean in Berlin when they bombed. There is a whole part which is **Zementstadt**, [ph] **Zement.** The Americans never bombed **Zemenstadt** because they wanted to have all their patterns. They hit us. You know I always say why didn't they hit Auschwitz. I mean it was awful for the people but it's better to be over this. They never hit it. Why didn't they? They knew that Auschwitz existed. And you know this boat, when you go to the Holocaust museum.

You know they show you the know the boat which went to Cuba and they didn't let in and all the –

Q: The St. Louis?

A: And they didn't let them in. You know and they knew. I mean sure it's and my cousins and you know the ones who immigrated who made it out in 39 really over land and they came here and so on. And **Loni** and they are now all going to the synagogues and we go to the bat mitzvahs and all these things when it happens in their family. And they have Jewish weddings and everything certainly. But **Loni** said we never prayed for the Jews in Germany. I said you didn't. No we never did. And then I feel you can't get mad at some -- I feel that they wanted us in Germany. Yeah. And it was almost impossible to come out. But see, you know the people who went over the Himalayas, like the widow of **Mahler**, the composer and so on. All these, the top people. They got out. But the little ones, the Jews, they were stuck. So then you know it's, the Germans were awful but then the people who came back out of the concentration camps, many of them when they went back to Poland, the Poles killed them. So are they better? And the Ukrainian guards in the camps were worse than the German guards. But nobody sees anything about it. So sometimes you know it's – I think and the whole world looked on. And America didn't go in the war until much later. By then everything was rolling. And they knew about it.

Q: Do you think it could happen again?

A: Yes. Maybe a different way. Not with the gas chambers. One time my sister gave a party and for those people asked us. I was already married then John, yeah. And he said how do you feel. And I said no, sometimes I feel like this is a very beautiful dream. And one day I will wake up and that is all again like it was. And then I asked my sister and she said just the reverse. That was a bad dream and this is the reality. But yes, I think it can happen again. And when East German – the wall fell I had a terrible dream. I was standing on a mountain. And there was a railroad station and I was in obviously in West Germany. And the wall fell. And I went down to the railroad station and entered the train. And then the train went east and all the people in there were dead. So it still haunts me. So there are certain things when they happen, it just haunts me. I never will get over it. I never will get really over it. And even you know people say I do so much. Yes and I do supposedly a very good job in giving tours and so on. But I feel very much different than the other docents. I think about it. And one of the things is I feel different is you know they also, we had one of our docents you know there is a Jewish group and they immediately took her in. But they didn't take me in. I'm not really Jewish. And I'm not really there either so all my life I have been struggling somewhere between. I feel closer to the Jews but I am not really, I don't know. So John and I got married in the Unitarian church.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: Oh I met him in a camp. At Prince William forest. My sister had a friend and colleague who was a member of the 2030 club of the Unitarian church, 16th street. And they had to, Memorial Day they went to a camp at Prince William county, forest. And they had three camps – for men, for women and for families. So Laura said to my sister, don't you and Ursala want to come. We

said oh sure, why not. So we did. And then Brigitta and I rowed, was rowing a boat and there came a thunder shower and poured and the lake in the middle had the island. And everybody tried to get there. And there was a gentleman. It was John who also went there. He also had friends who, he had roommates who were members of the 2030 club and so he was in the men's camp. And then he asked me about cars, well Porsche and all these. At this point he had MG. And I didn't know, it was all much, I couldn't afford any of those things so I said fine. So then he asked me for a date which I didn't take. And then John had hay fever very badly so he came to GW for shots. And I was outside of the physical therapy department because we had inpatient and outpatient. And I waited for a patient. And there came a gentleman and he said oh you probably don't remember me. No. Then he said I now have a Porsche. Ah. That's this guy. And so you want to see it. Sure. Then I came home and I said to my sister and her roommate, and our roommate. If he asks me for a date again, I do it. I want to be in that Porsche. That's how it started.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: So we, I still had the Porsche when John died. I always said if the Porsche go, I go.

Q: How long ago did he die?

A: Only on the 15th of January 2009. He had heart attacks before and he collapsed on the platform of Dupont Circle. He went to GW for tests and everybody thought he was sailing along. He had a kind of leukemia and he had this heart condition and his kidneys didn't function

that well anymore. But everybody thought he was a _____ . And we went to Kramer's and we had lunch and he really made, we made plans. We said oh maybe we go back. We like to go to Virginia to the state park and then we went back to the railroad station and he collapsed. And they took him to GW but he was brain dead already. And they asked me then if they really vigorous wanted to revive him and I said if he has no brain function, no. And then he died in the night. And he was gone.

Q: You said buried in Arlington.

A: Yeah. So we were married for 50 years and five months. Yeah, it was a shock yeah, yeah. Very strange.

(Tape 3 – RG-50.106.0184.03.03; duration: 57:51)

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Ursala Guttstadt McKinney. This is track number three. OK so you were saying before that a few years ago you wouldn't have been willing to be interviewed or talk about your experiences. What do you think has changed in these last few years?

Ursala Guttstadt McKinney: Well in the beginning it was just too painful. I, one time, somebody asked me about things and about what happened and so on and afterwards when I went back to Burke, I had the telephone the wrong side around because I couldn't function anymore. It's and I would just break down and cry. And it was just too painful. And by now I think number one it is longer ago. And number two is I also think is that if my generation dies off, there is nobody really anymore who can talk about it. And so we should just overcome that and just do talk about it.

Q: It's important that you tell us what it was like.

A: Yeah, yeah. And so on but it's you know something that will haunt you for the rest of your life. And it's nothing which is easy to overcome anywhere. That's one reason is that I'm you know surprised that people could put children in the world. I couldn't. I thought that was too, too damaging. It was too bad. And you know and when politic -- people are not aware of it. And that is a danger in always that people say oh political, it isn't so bad yet. Maybe, maybe we still can take that and so on. And by the time they realize that they can't take it anymore very often

people are trapped. And then they really can't do anything anymore. But you know with Germany too, is talking about Germany when I worked, when I was studying physical therapy in Frankfurt at the University of Frankfurt am Main, we also had to go in to different hospitals and there was this psychiatric ward and where they had to, you know locked us in the therapists and we played ball with these men and so on. It was all the women's ward. And one time I came there and they were very excited and I said what, what's the matter. And I said, oh a Jew comes back from Germany. From United States. And I said so, yeah. We don't want a Jew. I said now he might be very nice. We don't want a Jew. I said no, how many Jews do you know? You know and I said oh, how can you say that you don't want him. And when he came, he was very nice. And you know people came back. They were not, not everybody made it and the German government gave them money. So he came back and he got insurance and they paid for him. And he was a very quiet, calm man. You know somewhere, somebody who was not very assertive and so on. Because, and he hadn't made it in the United States. So he was very depressed and had problems. And everybody loved him. And I said oh. But then they didn't want to hear any more what they once told me that they couldn't stand having one. But again, but then these people believed you know whatever the government tells them because they really didn't know better. And then you know sure the **schwarzes** [ph] didn't help either in anything either. So it's always difficult you know. I guess in the name of Jesus more people were killed than saved.

Q: If someone asked you today are you German what would you answer?

A: I said when people ask me where formerly I was from, I'm a German. I'm American. Yeah. Oh yeah. No, no I don't feel German and I don't want to be considered to be a German. So it's not good.

Q: When you give those tours you say the German speaking tours at the National Gallery, the tourists ask you. Do they ask you something about your knowledge of German or are you from Germany? Do they ask you or they don't ask you?

A: You know they ask me where I'm from. I say from Berlin.

Q: Oh, from Berlin.

A: And I don't Frankfurt an der Oder. They are more or less, well, Frankfurt an der Oder, they don't know in any case. But they don't, these are all younger people really. Then they don't ask me anything. No, they don't. Right after the wall fell I got lots, there came people over from East Germany, formerly East Germany. And one of the women one time said to me you know when people realize that we are German, it's like a curtain goes down. You know there are lots of Americans who are still very much anti-German. And you can see it in our whole collection. If you go to the German collection, it's awful. We have some Durers and so on but I don't find there are any good Durers and so on. So the people who collected at this point they also didn't want to collect German art.

Q: Do you remember the Eichmann trial?

A: Sure.

Q: What were some of your thoughts at that time?

A: One of the things is I guess for many people that is a relief. For me, neither my mother nor my sister nor I ever have tried to find the Gestapo people who hunted us. My father was killed. They ruined my life to a certain extent. Chasing down these people wouldn't do anything for me. I always thought if I would have to gotten these people on a trial, maybe somebody else did, I don't know. But if I would, it would be more horrifying for me to have sit through that trial than would have done me any good because the damage was done. And so the Eich—you know I mean he was a horrible guy and I guess justice was done. But it's the people. You can't undo anything with the revenge. When the people talk about 9/11 that was awful, but trying to now they say oh they should give us all so much money for this and so on. It doesn't bring you the loved ones back. I mean if you are left as a widow and have small children for god's sake sure, give them a pension. And give the kids that they can go to school and so on. But revenge kills yourself. And so I think from (phone ringing) for many people it's a relief, but for me, I don't know.

Q: Are you more comfortable being with people who survived the war than those who didn't even live through it?

A: In the beginning John and I, we saw every war movie. I saw every movie on the

concentration camps. We felt you know people who didn't go through that lived in a different world than we did. But by now it's you know the whole generation, the younger ones, they never experienced anything like this. It's, I mean I think I personally would never serve in the armed services. I would never shoot against anybody. But I would, it's certainly in some ways easier to be with people who have similar experience than I do. Than with people who don't have any idea what went on. But the majority of the people I meet you know they don't, they read it in books.

Q: Do you think you would have been a different person today if you hadn't gone through?

A: I'm sure I would.

Q: In what way?

A: Well one of the things is you know it's not so easy to immigrate. Even if you are glad to leave your country. Somewhere I feel like I started off on the first floor and I don't have a basement. And you know I never went to elementary school here. Things were very different when I arrived here in Alexandria. It was so different to anything I had experienced or ever seen in my life. It's not easy to live, to leave your country. In some ways you know if I would have stayed in Germany, no war, no Nazis, or nothing I would have had a very nice house, I would have gone to the university. I would have studied in Germany at this point. I could have become an engineer, even as a woman. I would have studied, I would have become a professional person. And then I would have traveled and I would have a good life. We had enough money to

so I could have had a good life. And it would have been much easier. So but I mean it's to immigrate is hard. To move into a different country and Americans are very nice. So long as you don't compete with them. When I went to AU I, one time I went to the English, you know I had to take English One. I was then, I didn't have to take English Two, but I went and talked to the English professor and she said well people like you become, she was not against me but she told me. She said people like you we can't discriminate against. We can't discriminate against the blacks. They are all up in arms. We can't discriminate, but people like you. You don't have anybody to fight for you. It's true. And Americans.

Q: Immigrants, she was talking about immigrants.

A: Yes, yeah. And you know and then in this case the Jewish community would helped the Jews but I was separate and so on. So Catholic University, I said ok. When we had, before the comprehensives I said I'm doomed and I went out and cried. And they said why you, you can't flunk. You have so good grades. And I said well one semester they flunk a nun because they can't see the forest because of the individual trees. The next semester they flunk an immigrant. In my class is no nun. So I am the victim. Never since the 70s.

Q: And what happened?

A: Well I didn't flunk. I, they couldn't flunk me. I had too good grades. You know I was too good a student. But so it keeps on going. I applied for a job as a physical therapist for the visiting nurses, and there was, they had to, interviewed me was a nurse who was a spinster who

was not married. And so on. So then when I came home, I said John that's a job I don't get. He said why not. And I said well one thing she told me. There you are. Our American boys go overseas and marry all these foreigners and then the American girls can't find husbands. So discrimination goes on and on and on.

Q: Have you been to Israel?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel and how you feel when you are there?

A: Oh yeah, I mean I love Israel you know. I mean for a while I really wanted to go there. In the meantime, it's another war I don't want to go. No. But yeah I would like, all -- you know when Israel became independent you know I was so amazed that I was so amazed that they finally made it and they have a home country. And so on. Now you know things are unfortunately so bad you know with all the fighting and all that. But you know that Israel, the Jews had to go somewhere and it was the most logical thing to go to Israel. And Israel was founded on Aryanism. And so on so you know it was I mean it was a wonderful, wonderful event when Israel became Israel. And oh yeah and I was there and I was you know was very, very happy you know.

Q: Do you know people who live there?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah oh yeah. I do know people who live in Israel. Yeah. Yeah. I also know people who live, immigrated to Israel and then came to the United States. We have had now somebody here who was born in Hamburg and then her parents and everybody went, immigrated to Israel. And she got married so oldest daughter got, was born there and then her husband, and they are all Jewish and now they were Israelis, and then they went to Venezuela. He got a job offer there and she came here now. She said Venezuela was awful, another dictatorship. You lost something.

Q: Before we finish I just wanted to ask you, I know what the word **mischling** means, but what does it mean to you, viscerally. Do you know what I mean , emotionally.

A: Well **mischling** is really in many ways you know you're a mixture between a Jew and a Christian. And it's mulattoes are you know, Obama is a **mischling**. Only he is between black and white. But –

Q: Do you consider it derogatory?

A: I don't feel it did derogative but it feels like you don't belong anywhere. The one camp says you're Jewish. The other camp say no you're a Christian. So you are in the middle. You don't belong anywhere. And so I, you know it's, these days you know there are so many mixed, marriages between black and white and so on and I always feel some way sorry for the kids. I always think I wonder how they feel. If they always feel like I do that you stand somewhere between them. You know. And my grandmother, mommy's mother, when she said, one time she

said to us oh you know you always protect your father. What about your mother? And our answer was but nobody attacks mommy but everybody attacks **Fati**.

Q: Wasn't her life in danger, being married to a Jew?

A: No, I don't think so. They tried to you know as I said, many of them they got divorced because it was – I don't think they would have anything to my mother. No, no.

Q: Even though she had been married?

A: Mm hm. They told her, her blood is –

Q: Her blood is ok.

A: I know that her blood is, is how do you say that

Q: Pure?

A: No it's not pure anymore.

Q: It's impure.

A: Yeah. You know but I don't think that mommy was really in danger. No, they would have taken my sister and me but not my mother. But me we are, you see Hitler in comparison to the Jewish law where you know your mother's religion is more important. And to Hitler it was more important what your father is. It was so my sister had one classmate in her class who was **mischling**, you know half Jewish. But her mother was Jewish. She was never taken. Her husband was the one. It was worse to have a Jewish father than to have a Jewish mother.

Q: You were what, a **mischling** to the first degree?

A: Yeah.

Q: And did you ever have any papers that said you were a **mischling**, nothing ever in writing.

A: Yeah they told me, yeah. I have to look for that. They told me when they kicked me out of school. That I couldn't –

Q: Verbally you mean

A: No, no, no. I got it in paper. Oh you got everything in paper from the Germans. Very demo, very bureaucratic. I mean like you got death certificate from my father. But see yeah and see, there was also, it always depended if you had four Jewish grandparents. You were Jewish. If you had two you were half Jewish. But now if I had two Jewish grandparents, if I marry another half Jew the, my kids would have four Jewish grandparents. They would be Jewish again.

Q: Actually from what I understand when you were growing up, you did not know other **mischlings**?

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: You did?

A: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, yeah. There was another, one of my classmates who was, her mother was Jewish and she was of Jewish religion but her father wasn't Jewish. And they but then she went to Berlin and so on. And then my cousins were like my sister and me you know. Albert and Gerhard and then my sister's friend, she was a **mischling**. Oh yeah there were lots of them around. And we knew other people in Frankfurt an der Oder, one where the mother finally broke down. The woman broke down and got divorced from her husband. And asked him for his deportment the next day and she was ok. And but her daughter went with the children's transport to England. So she wasn't even in the country anymore. You know I don't know how she reacted towards that. And then we had you know my father had, I mean I knew quite a lot of **mischling** yeah, quite a lot.

Q: When you see that word written in 2010, do you have any kind of reaction to it?

A: **Mischling**.

Q: Suppose you picked up something and it had that word on the page.

A: Well then I would say that's me. At this point no, I think –

Q: Has it lost its negative connotation?

A: To be a **mischling** didn't really bother me so much. What bothered me more is the reaction of the two parties that they always thought that I am neither nor. That I was otherwise you know that I was a **mischling**. That didn't, you know my father. I loved my father, loved my mother. That was all very nice and it didn't bother me. But that each camp really -- so I don't belong there, you don't belong there. But then you don't belong there either. You belong there. So you didn't belong anywhere.

Q: Did your mother's family fully accept your father?

A: No.

Q: Because of the religious?

A: Yeah, yeah. My grandparents, my mommy's parents did.

Q: Did accept.

A: Mm hm.

Q: But other –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Relatives did not.

A: Not really, no, no.

Q: Was that very upsetting to your mother?

A: Yeah. But it wasn't really that, I mean they didn't vocalize it really that much. We lived in Frankfurt. They lived in **Erfurt**. And I think if mommy's parents would have been against mommy, that would have been very hard. But **Omi** always was very supportive for us and she helped us financially and everything and, and so, and my father you see went to my grandfather and asked you know for the hand of mommy and said. Well they knew each other as children. There was a playground in Berlin and my parents, both parents went, were members of it and the Guttstadts were on the board and so on. So my mother played with my father when they were kids. And so on. Then they lost contact and there was another family. The **Karls** who were also Jewish and they kept in contact with both sides. So they thought that my father and my mother should meet again. And so they invited them together so they really got them together again, but they knew each other as kids. They played on the same playground and so on. And then my

mother was very good in tennis. And my father I don't think played tennis. But my father could run and do all these things and my mother tells us about it. The Uncle Fritz, as a, and **Fati** were brothers, took her in the middle and run so she and she never got her feet on the ground. And so on. So then, the family knew each other.

Q: How do you feel about having the United States Holocaust Museum being built in the United States?

A: Well I'm a founding member. I, I have very mixed feelings about the Holocaust Museum because you know I can go there. I went there with my, right after the opening. My sister and I went there when it opened. You know we lit a candle for my father and so on. But then the second time around, we went with our two cousins. They are really once removed. They are from New York. And we all went and then we saw all the pictures. And that was funny because then **Loni** and Heather all were in Berlin and say oh yeah that's the synagogue I went to. That's the school I went to. So it was you know, and then I wasn't upset at all. And one of my cousins was in, I pushed her in the wheelchair and so on. And then I went Sean (?) certainly too. But one time I went, I had visitors. My classmate who finally came to us. Her two daughters came over here. And I took them to the Holocaust Museum. And then I spoke German and then I couldn't. I said I, you go and I sit down and I cried.

Q: You speaking German to them.

A: And I couldn't. I can go through with Americans. I got with John's family, some of John's family came and said they say can't you go with us. I said ok. I can do that, but when I get to German, then it's out. Then I can't. Germans I can't go. Then I can't. Well, it's ok. I think there are too many by now. You know the trouble is too is when you give anything to it you know. My sister is a member of the Beck Institute and you know we looked up some of the, where some of our relatives ended up who went to **Theresienstadt** and out because **Theresienstadt** didn't have any gas chambers. And they all went to other places. The way how the people died in Mauthausen is awful.

Q: Did you purposely want to learn that because your father was there?

A: I promised my mother never to go to Mauthausen so I will never go there. But yeah, yeah I wanted you know so it's yeah. And yeah there is **Eistadt** [ph], you know the quote, this is in English. I mean they wrote it in German. He wrote about all the different ways how they died in the camps too. Not everybody died you know in the gas chambers. There are other ways to kill people too. So I don't 100% know how my father died. But I have a pretty good idea. But so it's, but people – and that people could you know many of these SS people who were at camps they went home to their family. They were good family fathers. They had dogs and kids and then they turned around and did that. It's a same as what some of our soldiers did in Iraq right. And what did we do to the some of the people. How to torture people. And then they go home and are good to many people and it's hard to believe.

Q: You said before you still feel that the world has really not learned a lesson? Or has it?

A: Well for most people by now I am afraid that the Holocaust is some way history. And for most people, probably, I mean you can't, I haven't tried it, but any time you would talk to any German about it then they would immediately tell you how bad it was during the war with ration cards and bombs falling on your head and all that and people tell you how bad it was to shut you up. They also had told in the 50s a joke. The Volkswagen. How many people go in a Volkswagen, four Germans and one Jew. The Jew is in the ashtray. One of my classmates in physical therapy school told me that. But then we were too from East Germany. They didn't trust us either. They thought that we were spies. So depends to whom you speak. And if you don't say anything, that's it. And it was awful. You know after the war. The rats were that big. And the people were lying in the streets. They ate on them you know. I mean there was, you walked along the streets and there was a pipe coming up and people were living under earth because it was all destroyed. I mean it was horrible. You know. We went, you know you just stepped over dead bodies. You know. We went, mommy, my sister and I that was before the war was over. You know Potsdam was like Dresden, declared an open city but nevertheless the Americans bombed it and so we went by train. We went in and then we had to, last we had to walk. And there were all these bodies lying there and I faint. I'm not very good in seeing blood. But nevertheless there was life, there was hens (?), there was something there and you just kept on going. I have to go there. It was just meant. And sure it was awful. It had nothing to do with the Holocaust. It was the war. And it was awful. And these were people, not soldiers. They were just civilians. You know they had **train** (German word?) which was one of the suburban trains; so that's awful yeah. So war, I don't believe in war. I always tell people it is sanctified murder. I don't like it. And you know I can understand, when these guys and they're all trigger happy

you know. I mean either you or me. It's better you and not me. Human beings want to survive. I mean the people who survived in the concentration camps had a very strong will to survive. And so religious, the orthodox Jews had the **plaff** [ph]. And the communists. The murderers were the best because they didn't care what happened. You know they helped. The ones who caved in were the elite. The university professors, the doctors and all these people. They couldn't cope with that. They were also the ones who informed. You know if they saw anybody, a Jew or anybody anywhere they were informing. They were frightened to death for their own life. The laborites and the communists and so on. They were much more helpful. When I was very depressed there. I went to the northern part of Berlin where all the laborers work and so on and I felt much more secure there. Than when I was in the more fancy places in Berlin. But that's human nature is something very strange. Very strange.

Q: Did you and your sister talk about those years?

A: Sometimes, yes. Sometimes yes.

Q: Has she been willing to talk about it?

A: Yeah, yeah and our memories are somewhere different. You know we said something lately and she said oh I don't remember that at all. And sometimes she says something and I said I don't remember that at all. And so on. So like I said I, I can't remember when my elementary school teacher told us we had to say Heil Hitler. I had no idea. It didn't make any impression of me. And so certain things and two years difference, I guess is the difference. And one time

Renata Chernoff and Frieda Blumenthal who is dead by now who was older than both of us and I, we went to an exhibit together. And then Renata said to us that Amos wanted to go to I think it was Berlin to a conference. And, and she was considering to go or not and I said don't and Frieda said sure, why not. But then she could remember Germany before Hitler. I couldn't really. That was typical for Renata just looked at us both. You know. She could still remember when things were different. So it's always it makes a big difference yeah.

Q: For you, you were eight years old when Hitler came into power.

A: No I wasn't really eight yet.

Q: Seven, you're right. So for you it always meant Germany always meant tension and stress.

A: Yeah and we were surrounded. Our house was here and there was another house here and that was where the SS was. So they could watch us and then right over there was a house and there was a Lutheran pastor living but you know there were two branches. One was the **Deutsche** Christian, the German Christians who were Nazis. And the other one was the Confessing Church which were not ___ and teachable (?) and confess. But this guy was a Deutsche Christ so there he was and there was the SS and there was the Guttstadts house. But when I was, and my teacher was very nice. I wrote to my teacher. The last thing I sent was my wedding announcement which came back said she had died. But she was very nice and she was very good to me. But and in the beginning I you know I really acted. I had somebody across from us was some, somebody living who was very poor. It was a very old house and it was a poor house.

And, and they you know we had to pay to go to gymnasium. Not very much but we had to pay. And also to the middle school. So she was a good student and she had to go, keep on going to the elementary school because her parents couldn't afford it. So I went to the teacher and I said you have to see that she gets a fellowship. And she did get one. But this was 36. By then you know things were already difficult. And so but I didn't hesitate then to, to do that. I didn't feel like I couldn't do that. And she did get her fellowship. I was very happy about that.

Q: When you would see the flag with the swastika or the men in their boots and their uniforms as a child, was that frightening also?

A: We really in many ways we didn't -- the swastika you saw. You saw, my mother was always upset because Hitler had birthday on the 20th of April, and she on the 21st and on the 21st they hadn't taken down these flags which was awful. And so I mean but the SS is, marching in boots and so on, we didn't really see these so much. I saw military people but in many ways I saw and under Hitler in many ways and this is under a dictatorship. I mean there was a curfew. You weren't supposed to be out after 11:00 but in many ways it was much safer than on the other, other condition. Less murder and any of those things of you know between the general public. And you saw less police than you see when you go downtown in Washington. And so on. So I you know and I heard Hitler talk.

Q: When you would hear him talk, on the radio?

A: Oh sure, yeah or on television.

Q: On television?

A: Mm hm. Yeah we heard him. I mean we had to listen to him. We had to know what was going on.

Q: Who had an early television?

A: Where did we see the television. Maybe I didn't see the, no I think I only heard him on the radio. And the television I saw the stuff after the war and they rerun it.

Q: Maybe in a newsreel in the movie theater?

A: Yeah, yeah we had always the newsreels. We had the newsreels

Q: And when you would hear him?

A: We, I thought he was an idiot.

Q: You did?

A: I thought he was an idiot. And then they had a power struggle one time. I remember that, pretty much to the end of the war too. They had a power struggle. He wanted to kill Goebbels

and Goebbels said ok, if you kill me I will talk. So three days later Goebbels was in power again. But it's -- but he was, people were it was like to the, like when Beck talked. People were hysterical when they saw him. And then they had this idiotic saying, if your Fuhrer would know that wouldn't happen. Come on.

Q: Well if the Fuhrer would know all the terrible things that happened he wouldn't permit that.

A: Yeah. But the people were hysterical when they saw him you know. So and, and the young people you know Berlin, we had the werewolf in Berlin. You don't know the werewolf. We had through the end of, you see the five story apartment houses and the whole block because of the bombs, all the attics were connected so the wall was broken down. In the basement also they had only one wall which you could really hit and connect so you could get out if your house was kicked (?). So the young guys, the 16 year old ones and so on were fanatic Nazis. And they were running around in these attics and shooting and then the Russians went in and said if you don't get them down then you all have to go out. And one time they did. They had their tanks set up in tank row [ph] and then they went down in the basements and put the women in front. And then they told the werewolf ok now these are your mothers. Stop shooting. But they didn't. So there went the women down again. Some of the German young people were very fanatic. And the Germans had these flame throwers so they throw the whole, so they shot into the first floor and then the houses started to burn from the lower part up and then the Russians went down and said your house is burning. You better come up. So I mean we had the Red Armies which were supposed to be better than the others. They did lots of bad things but nevertheless. Nevertheless I know only one girl who was raped. I only knew one girl who was raped. But in the country was

a different matter. But we were on the border so where we lived then, behind us was what we called the Stalin order which is automatic cannons –whew, whew – and so on. They were right behind us. And then you know before us, they never got further there. Just the next part they never got until Berlin capitulated on the second of April. So we were under fire every day. And the Russians came with the little **punji** [ph] wagons, you know the ones they had from Siberia and so on. That's all they had. Otherwise, everything was made in the USA. The uniforms and everything was made in USA when they marched into Berlin. And we were frightened to death of them. Another thing is the worse than the Gestapo and all this and then you had the Russians we were afraid of.

Q: And the American army?

A: No they never came there either. They came afterwards. You see they stopped at the Elbe. At the time they came the war was over. The Russians conquered Berlin. Yeah. That was the capital.

Q: What did America mean to you at that point?

A: Well, at this point. I mean I was glad when the Americans came. I was more, would have been more glad if I would have been in the American zone. And not in the Russian zone in Berlin. But you know we –

Q: I meant the country itself. What did the --

A: Oh I loved them. My father was here with the **Singer** [ph] prize, you know the architectural prize he won. He came to the United States and studied the railroads here. And he came back and we had the suitcase, the attic full of stuff from America. So my father always said when you grow older you know we are going to America. Not to immigrate, but to visit and so on. So my sister and I grew up with the love to America. But we always thought that is a wonderful dream. We will never make it. So when the Americans actually came you know yeah but on the other hand it's before I went to physical therapy school, I had to make a practical in a hospital. So I was, I thought I go to children's hospital. It's better to take a visitor (?) from the children and not from the adults. So I went to children's hospital and that was bombed out so we were in the country. And then that was in the American zone. And then they had maneuvers. And then the Americans had these huge tanks. And there had, I'm saying houses. The tanks were as big as the houses were high. And then on top there were these black soldiers. And I remember I had to cross the street. I had night shift and I had to go in the, cross the street to where I, where I was staying you know and I was afraid of them. I was frightened to death of them. They looked awfully frightening. I knew they would, I didn't know. They were soldiers and so all soldiers are bad. Occupation army is no good. For civilians. And the Americans had the plus. You know the Russians had no choice. They had to rape women. The Americans said hi baby, I have chocolate. They found enough girls to go with them. The British and the French were different. But the Americans you know. But then you know in Frankfurt am Main in the main streets you know the Americans young soldiers, they flew out of the bars drunk. I mean it's an occupation army is no good. And you try not to get involved with occupation armies. Even I didn't try to get involved with them.

Q: When you came to the United States, how did you get here?

A: By boat.

Q: Which boat?

A: United States, it was called the United States.

Q: Oh it was called the United States.

A: Yeah, there were two. America and United States. Both American boats.

Q: Is there anything else you wanted to add, you would like to say or like to add?

A: Anything you can think of.

Q: It's wonderful that you did this interview. As you said you couldn't always have done it.

A: No, no. Yeah. But you know it's a long time ago but you know at least I will never really get attached to anything. And when my husband, I miss my husband very much because when he died, they all said don't do anything the first year and I emptied the house and I sold it. And I, I told John before. I said I like that house but I can walk out. It doesn't mean anything to me.

When my sister and I for a long, long time when we talk about our house and my sister has a townhouse. But when we talk about our houses. Our house in Frankfurt an der Oder, even now. I will never talk about our house here or anything. Our house is the house in Frankfurt an der Oder and we're still attached to that. And to be, to have to leave that, that was very dramatic. And accordingly is anything else you know and if people say you can't afford that. You have to move in a one room apartment. Ok, I get rid of all that. And so you know people, some people they say oh you know we admire you. I don't think, they don't realize that it isn't, it's nothing to be admired. It's just you know doesn't mean. And also it's you know people heavily complain here about the food, including me. I hate it. But on the other hand it's, it's not so if I don't go down. I don't eat. It's not that important to me. You know. Yeah but that I was a good student and a straight A student and all that. That was important because I had to show myself that I can do it too. Because Hitler always told us you know no you are no good. You can't do anything. You know. So and in the beginning when I became a docent in the first, in the beginning when I had to give tours you know. Miss **Schats** [ph] was standing there and so the tour I always said oh please lord let nobody come. You know because I basically think I was frightened to death. And I went for an interview, I usually was there half an hour too early and walked the street to get my courage up. To go in for an interview and this, this stays all with you. So there are lots of things that and as I said, after the war nobody ever thought about that we were in shock, that we need somewhere help or anything. It's just ok it's over. Now start again.

Q: Did you ever turn to professional help or you just –

A: No.

Q: No, you just coped on your own.

A: Yeah but then you know I thought how can I talk to any American psychiatrist. They haven't experienced it. I don't have anything in common with them. You know or even a Jewish psychiatrist. I would only have, can talk to somebody who went through the same. And then this person might not want to talk to me. Because it would be too difficult. You know. So it's, no I never did and I think, considering all, I think I did very well.

Q: Do you and your sister still get reparations? Do you or did you get reparations? Like you said your mother did but –

A: No we got, the –

Q: Do you and your sister currently?

A: No, no, no we don't. No. We got money. Yeah my mother established that she got the pension back from my father. And then you know we got the house back and you know we divided the money for us. And, in the beginning yes, on this one you see that's the one reason is although the state said loan because I took the money to go to the university in Germany. And so on. And paid my trip over here. To come over here and everything and so on but no we don't get anything from the – we both get something similar to the social security for Germany. But this is because I worked there. And they recognize our education. They recognize my sister's university

time and that. And the time she worked during the Nazi time for this lawyer. And the daughter of this lawyer she went to a lawyer in Germany and gave the, said that you know yes my sister worked there and all that so she established that. And, and I went you know and I get – so we both get it but we say it's very small and with the exchange rate it doesn't amount to much. But we both get a small amount from the social security in Germany. **Understaten** [ph] but that is really all. No we don't get the government, no, no. and I can't but I know some people who have applied for German citizenship, Jewish people.

Q: Because.

A: Because they think they're old, because they never officially wanted to give it up. But one was the daughter of a, of two immigrants. So I don't know how she feels about it. I will never do that. I would never try to get German citizenship.

Q: Why not?

A: I don't want to have any German passport. No. No. As I said and it's still somewhat difficult for me to go to Germany. It's, I mean I'm ok when I'm with people I know and so on but when I'm in the train, I sit there and read an English book like I can see words in _____ and so on and it's and I definitely don't want my German citizenship back, no. I mean if I would consider to go back to Germany, I would get better health insurance. But I don't think I want to do that.

Q: Are truly an American.

A: Yeah, yeah. I can criticize the Americans when I'm here. But when I'm in Germany I can't criticize them. I don't, I don't. But it's remarkable you know when you think what the Germans did after the war and they are hardworking and but then I think half of the American population is German. You know lots of them. For a while there was a question which language they would take. English or German and I'm still I'm in all this, so you know and my husband was very American. He was very much. I remember when we went over to England and we passed the Statue of Liberty, he had to get up and he had to see that. Meant a lot to him. And so on, no he. And you know we went to the World War II memorial opening and everything yeah. Mm hm.

Q: That's a good note to end on . The Statue of Liberty. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ursala Guttstadt McKinney.

(end)