

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Edith Langer. This is track number two. When you were here in the United States and people asked you about where you came from or did many people ask you and did they discuss about Hitler or about the Nazis or about the Jews? Did people bring those topics up when you came to United States?

Yeah.

And how did you respond?

I told him how it really was. Many people did not know that Hitler went after small families-- like after families like me. And they said Hitler couldn't be that bad. But I told them then, and then the history books were only saying that he killed many Jews and put them in concentration camps. And I knew that. But then I told them my story. And I have told to many people my story.

They all say, ah, but horrible. Because I told it in churches, my story. I told it to youth groups. I went all over telling the story of Hitler really was. And it wasn't-- I still think in my heart it wasn't Hitler's doing, it was the Nazi's doing. You know?

What do you mean it wasn't Hitler's doing?

Hitler did not kill anybody in my book. But he gave the orders to kill.

He didn't do the actual physical killing--

No.

--is what you're saying. He gave the orders to do it.

Yeah. He gave the orders because the Nazis had the orders to kill people who said something bad about Hitler or-- I have heard people saying that Hitler is no good. Next day they found them dead, you know. And that doesn't work. So I told the stories to churches, Methodist church in Newark, I spoke many times there. I had a youth group there. I was a choir director for a long time. And I told them where I was coming from.

Did you meet many Jewish people, after the war, in the United States? Did you have Jewish customers or Jewish friends?

To be honest with you, I hated Jews.

Oh, because--

Because they were causing us, my dad, to be killed. If we wouldn't had hidden them, he would still live. So I had to get over that. I've went to counseling for it. And the counselor has straightened me out. There would have been another family who would get them. So but whatever happened happened.

The counseling was done in the United States?

No, in Germany.

In Germany.

In Germany.

That's interesting.

Because at the beginning, I didn't want no-- I didn't even wanted to talk to a Jewish person. And then I came around. Now, they're one of me.

Did any of the Jews who had left Hamm come back to Hamm after the war?

I don't know.

You don't know.

Our house was gone.

Yeah.

We had to live. We moved to Heessen.

Is that--

Heessen is a small town next to Hamm. H-E-E-S-S-E-N, Heessen.

OK.

And we live there in an apartment. We had to buy furniture again because we didn't have anything. And I worked in a factory for a while. That's where I lost my finger.

Oh.

And to get some money together, I took a man's job.

What kind of factory was it?

Umbrellas they made.

Umbrellas.

Umbrellas and blinds.

Yeah.

As far as your sister is concerned, the one who was in the classroom, which sister was that? What was her name?

Mariana.

Mariana. Did you talk about what happened-- again, after the war-- did she talk about, again, what she-- her thoughts and her feelings did she let them known to you?

She never said anything afterwards.

Afterwards.

I got her over here to States.

She came to the United States?

She came over to the United States.

Do you feel she felt guilty for years or?

I think she did.

Yeah.

I think she did. But she became a nurse, a cancer nurse in the cancer hospital. And she's dead now. Because she was five years older than I am. And--

So that was not something you never talked about after.

No.

Have you been back to Germany?

Once.

When was that?

10 years ago.

And what are your thoughts about Germany?

Germany I did not recognize. I didn't recognize the city Hamm. Hamm was totally bombed out. And they build everything, rebuilt. And I was told-- I don't know whether it's true or not-- but I was told that the army or the navy-- the navy, the army-- all the soldiers, their money built city up.

The German army and the German navy?

No. The American.

Americans built the city back?

Yeah. I don't know whether it was true or not. But Hamm was totally new. You didn't know the streets anymore. I had to find out which street I'm in.

Do you consider yourself German or American or German American?

American.

You consider yourself American. When did you become a citizen?

'61.

What was that like?

It was good. It was proud. I learned more about the history as the kids in school. You had to learn it. And I had a good time. I was still in business, being a baker.

So your thoughts-- do you feel German in any way?

Not really any more. I've been here 50 years.

Do you keep up with what's going on there?

Yeah, I do. One of my sisters write to me, and that's how I keep up.

Yeah. Do you have any feelings about how they're handling the history lessons to the young people in Germany in the schools, whether they're teaching it correctly, or they're doing enough, or not enough?

I don't think it's done enough. Like my own story has never been told in Germany. And the people should have known that. And I think the SS should have been accountable for what they did. They had all the number on their shoulder, so that should catch them all.

You're talking about the members of the Nazi party--

Yeah.

--should have all been held accountable for what they did. But they were--

When they killed my father nobody got the guy.

Yeah.

You know, he was going free. Today you killed somebody you get arrested for it.

Do you know if, when that happened, it was recorded in the town--

No, it wasn't

--files in the city--

It wasn't

--that your house was burned down, and your father was killed?

It wasn't.

No records?

No records.

So the soldiers just did that on their own do you think?

Yeah, I think so. I didn't know they--

The local Nazis who were assigned to your town--

I didn't know whether they got the [? staff for it ?] or whatever. I don't know. But they did that on their own. They were really brain washed. They were only 18, 19-year-old kids.

Were these soldiers from the town or from other places?

No, they were from the town.

Oh, they were. So you recognize-- people recognized who they were.

We didn't know them because they were 19 years old. I never saw them.

But they were local Hamm--

Yeah.

--the men.

They were local there. But they should have all been either killed or do something.

How often do you think about that time in your life and what happened?

I never forget it. I never forget it. But I--

Do you think about it every day?

Almost, yeah.

Do you find that you're thinking about it more since you've gotten older?

Yeah. Because you're seeing the end of your life is almost here, you know. And what did you do with your life, you know. I lived an exciting life really, when you look at it. From youth on-- I didn't have a youth.

Right. You did lose your youth. Do you think it's something you could have gotten back or not? You did lose it, you're right.

I went one time to California, Lake Tahoe, and I've been to a surviving course. You had to survive one week in the mountains. And that is how I found myself really. Because I had to rappel from one mountain to another. And I have to do-- I was the captain of a group doing it. And to me it was fun. But then we had to-- at night, we had sessions was EST, called E-S-T, EST. I took the whole course there.

And the first course, we had nuns in there. And you couldn't swear, sworn. You couldn't say F you. And I hit the trainer once. He made me so mad. He went on a-- he went and said well, to get angry picture a dog brushing your teeth with-- brushing his teeth with your toothbrush. OK. What would you do? And he said say this, don't let me ever, ever catch you with my brush brushing your teeth. And we had to say it, we're angry.

And I thought that was stupid. I really thought that was stupid. There was 300 people in the room. I sit down. I wouldn't do it. And then after they were all finished, he said, hey you come up here. I went up on the podium. And he pushed me. I said, don't push me. You don't know how will act. So he pushed me again. And I lifted my hand and I slapped him in the face. He said, I can't do anything with you, sit down. And everybody was clapping because they all hated that guy.

What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial-- when Eichmann was tried in Israel? Do you remember that-- when he had his trial?

I was hoping they would catch more. I was still so young when it was.

Yeah.

But my thing was I hope that guy got killed too, who shot my father. That was my hope. And but I didn't know where he was so I couldn't turn them in. But I would have liked to.

I'm sorry. When you see historical photographs of the war and Hitler and Nazi soldiers and victims, does that trigger things in your--

I watch them.

--mind and your memory? Do you do [INAUDIBLE]?

I watch them.

You do. Why?

Channel 22 has a lot of them.

Why do you watch them?

I want to see what really happened. Because I never really knew the truth. And this is all film that's all made up, but I'd like to see it.

When you say film is all made up, I meant the historical documentaries. I didn't mean the fictional.

No, those I didn't see. But the films I watch.

Have you heard other people making antisemitic remarks?

Not really.

No. You've never-- I was just asking in case you had, if you had ever come to the defense--

No. When I had the business, a bakery, we had Jewish people in town. But they all had businesses.

You're talking about customers, Jewish customers.

Yeah. They all had businesses. And I defend Jewish people very much so. Because we had one guy, he had a hardware store. He was Jewish. And he came in my store. And whenever you wanted something-- you wanted a special nail or a special thing-- he would get it for you. He would go out of his way and get it for you. And that's what I tell people. Go to a Jewish place. They will get what you want. And that's really my story. I go to a Jewish place any time.

Are you very religious? Have you--

Yeah.

--kept up your mother's commitment?

Yeah. I belong 18 years to a Methodist Church in Newark.

Not Lutheran.

No. I've went to Methodist. And I was a choir director there. I was a youth leader there.

Do you think because of what you went through it has made you more religious do you think? Or did it have anything to do with your being so committed?

Not really. I believe in God. And God is everywhere.

Even though your father was killed in front of you, you still--

Yeah. He didn't kill. The Nazis killed him.

Do you think there could be a rise of Nazism in Germany in today's world? There are the skinheads that you read about.

There was a rise here in the States even. That's how I marched. I marched from Philadelphia to New York with Quakers against Nazis.

Against American Nazi party?

Yeah. Because we didn't want them to rise up.

What are your gut feelings when you read about that or see American Nazi party people?

That should not come back up. I would do anything to not to let them live. Because they were doing no good.

Do you feel Germany has recovered from that part of her history?

I think so, right now. Germany's got bigger. They got their own army back. They weren't allowed to have their own army. And they were afraid of them, really. But they take him back.

Are you proud to have come from Germany?

Yeah. I tell everybody I'm German.

And what are people-- what are non-Jew reactions and Jewish reactions? Is there a difference?

Yeah. I got one Jew here, Ernie, he loves me-- visit together every meal now and talk.

Do you find that when you meet new people, you tell them the story of what you went through--

No.

--as a child? You don't?

No. I normally don't like to talk about it.

Because it's too painful?

It's painful, yeah. I don't-- I tell people my dad got killed by the Nazis. But that's it. That's how far I go. I told the story in here because you were coming, and they wanted to know why you coming.

You mean other residents wanted to know

Yeah. What were their reactions?

It's too bad that happened.

Yeah.

You know.

Yeah.

And you have a story you should write a book. That's what they say. I never did.

Have you been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

No. I never been in Washington.

Oh, you've never been in Washington. Do you have any desire to go to the Museum?

Yeah. But how do I get there?

But otherwise you would go?

Yeah. If there would be a bus going from here I would go.

Well, is there anything to add that you would like to say--

No.

--that we haven't talked about your life and--

Not really.

--what you've been through? And do you have any advice to give others?

You got my whole life story.

Do you have any advice to give others about coping?

Don't let ever the Nazis get a hold again. That's my advice.

Yeah.

Do anything to keep them down.

Do you think most of the Germans were against the Nazis do you feel?

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Once they knew the truth-- after the war the truth came out-- then they all hated. They hated to be Germans. I hated to be German. And I think here's a girl named Gabby, she hates to be German.

She was born in Germany?

Yeah. She hated you to come here.

Because?

I told some negative about Germany.

Oh, and she didn't want that recorded.

Yeah. She didn't want that. She's off today. That's a good thing.

Was she alive during the war? Does she have memories of the war or is she too young?

She's younger than I am.



Yeah.

She might be not--

Yeah.

But she only had bits and pieces. She never heard-- I never told her the whole story because she's German. And after the war it was said that all Germans killed the Jews. That's everybody. And that's not so. I never killed anybody. And Gabby didn't kill anybody. So most of the Germans did not kill the Jews. There were a few soldiers who killed. But you can't get everybody in one kettle, that they all killed the Jews.

Did you hear of any other situations where Jews were being sheltered like your father sheltered those four?

No.

As far as you know he was the only one.

That was kept a total secret.

A secret, right.

When you had Jewish people, you were quiet about it.

You were quiet. Now you said your mother was quite religious. Was your dad just as religious as she was?

No.

So how do you attribute his bravery and his concern to what he did?

Stupidity.

Stupidity? Because?

Why did you had to say shoot me? That wasn't brave in my eyes. That was plain stupidity.

But what I was asking was before that one, what do you attribute the fact that he went to these people and offered them the basement?

Kindness. He must have known that the Jewish people got killed somehow.

But do you consider that a brave act on his part, that he sheltered them?

That was brave, yeah.

Very brave.

That was brave. But the way he confessed it and said shoot me, he should have kept his stupid mouth shut. Then he would still be living. I don't know if he would still be living, he's older.

Do you think those Nazi soldiers would have let him alone if he hadn't said anything? Even though they knew the Jews were in his basement.

They weren't ready to-- he was not ready to kill. Because he dropped his gun--

Yes, right, right.

--by my mom. So he probably--

He probably wouldn't have done anything at that point.

--would have done anything-- to put him on a truck, get him farm labor or something. But he did it. And there's nothing we can do about.

Were their other neighbors watching when this happened?

No, it was three o'clock in the morning. There was nobody out. We wore only nightgowns, they put us in nightgowns on the truck.

That's how you went to the farm in a nightgown.

I had to wear boys clothes because that's all they had.

Did they ever talk to you about what has happened, about what your father did?

No, they never said anything.

Did they know? Did they know?

I don't know whether they knew.

What were their names? Do you remember the name of--

[? Woltmeier. ?]

OK. Well, as I said before, anything else before we close?

No.

No other messages. Well, that is quite a story. And we thank you for doing this. Thank you very much.

Well I can help some people.

I'm sure. It's an important story. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Edith Langer.

[LAUGHS]