

**U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Volunteer Collection Interview**

**Edith Langer  
RG-50.106\*0187**

**February 27, 2011  
Interviewer - Gail Schwartz**

**Disc # 1** - Edith Langer was born on October 4, 1932 in Hamm, Germany. Her parents were Anna and Johann Paar. They lived on a small farm 1/4 mile from the railroad station. Her father worked at home as a shoemaker, while raising pigs and chickens. Edith had three sisters and one brother. Her mother was a very observant Lutheran. There was no evidence of anti-Semitism in the town and the family had contact with nearby Jews. At the time, Edith felt Hitler did good things - built the Autobahn and opened a camp for the youth which she attended. She raised her hand in the 'Heil Hitler' salute in school as did the Jewish students. There were 30 children in her one room school of which 10 were Jewish. She did not know anything about Kristallnacht. When Hitler came to dedicate an airport, Edith, as a member of her scout group, was chosen to give Hitler flowers which she felt was an honor. Hitler hugged and kissed her on the podium and said "Nice meeting you." Her parents said she should not have done it. When students started moving out of class she did not know why. Then, in the summer of 1941, her father offered two of his Jewish customers, a lawyer and a dentist and their families, a place to hide in the basement of the farm house. Johann thought the war would not last long. The children's food stamps were used for the hidden families and Edith and her siblings were told not to go into the basement. Her mother felt as a Christian she should save people. Her 14 year old sister, Marianna went to a different school. Two Nazi soldiers brought in a Jewish child and nailed his tongue onto a table. The soldiers said this would happen to anyone who was hiding Jews or who knew of hidden Jews. They asked the students to raise their hand if they had heard of any hidden Jews and Marianna raised hers and said there were people in her basement. That night, three Germans came to the farmhouse, lined up the hidden Jews on one side of the driveway and the family on the other. The Jews were shot by machine guns, and Edith's family was told not to get out of line or they would be shot. Her mother said "Jesus, help me" and the soldier dropped his gun. Her father said "Shoot me" and the soldiers did. The house was then burned down. A truck pulled up and the children were put into it and each taken to a different farm. She lived there for four years, milking five cows before going to school in the morning and driving a tractor to plow the fields. It was difficult in the beginning as a 9 year old but she got used to the hard life and feels that she learned a strong work ethic. Edith had no contact with her mother or her siblings from 1941-1945. When the war ended, her mother went to the burgermeister's office and found out where her children were living. Her brother had run away to the American army during the war and was never heard from again.

Before she went away, Edith already was afraid of German soldiers because of their guns and pistols. She didn't see any mistreatment but she did see Jewish people dead in the street and would climb over them to go to school. Her parents said "This is none of your business. Keep your mouth shut." Her minister was shot in the church in front of her for telling the children not to leave the church when German soldiers were outside. She was in a youth group for two years and taught to march and shoot guns. Before he was shot, her father's main business was making boots for the army.

She worked hard on the farm and was too tired to learn after doing her chores. The farmer and his wife never talked about Jews and no soldiers ever came to the farm. There were Russian prisoners on the farm and she gave them apples and bread and they made rings for the children out of pennies.

Her sister did not know the Jewish child whose tongue had been nailed to the desk but remembers that it took pliers to get the nail out. Her sister felt awful about raising her hand, saying "I'm sorry - I was afraid."

After the war, Edith left school at 14 and went to cooking school for two years and then had three years of baking training. She worked for 50 cents a week. She read about concentration camps after the war, not knowing about them before. Edith wrote to a German young man in the United States whose name she got from the newspaper. She got a working visa and he paid for her passage in 1956. She lived with a Quaker minister in Philadelphia and took care of his house and his children for her room and board. She learned English. She met her husband Siegfried, a baker. They had two children and bought a bakery. She got divorced in 1971 and moved to Maryland and worked in an Ellicott City bakery. She

opened her own bakery in Baltimore.

**Disc # 2** - Edith says that many people did not know that Hitler went after small German families as well. She says that early on, she hated Jews because she felt that they caused her father to be killed, but changed her mind after she went to counseling in Germany. After the war she and her family went to Hessen, near Hamm, where she worked in an umbrella factory. There, she lost a finger operating the machinery. Her sister Marianna never talked after the war about what had happened. She came to the United States and became a cancer nurse. Edith does feel that her sister felt guilty. Edith went to Hamm 10 years ago and found it to be rebuilt after the bombing. She was proud to become an American citizen in 1961 and does not feel German anymore.

She feels that the SS should have been held accountable for killing her father. There are no records of her house being burnt down. She feels it was 18-19 year old soldiers who had done the killing that night. She has never forgotten what happened - she thinks about it every day. During the Eichmann trial, she kept thinking of the man who shot her father and hoping that he and many more would be tried.

She had been active in a Methodist church for 18 years as a choir director and a youth leader. She marched from Philadelphia to New York with a Quaker group protesting against the American Nazi Party. When she speaks of her childhood she just says her father was killed by the Nazis as it is too painful to give any more details. She had many Jewish customers at her bakery and now defends the Jewish people. Most Germans were against the Nazis. She hated to be German after the war when she found out what had happened. She didn't know if any other Jews were sheltered in her town. She feels that it was stupid for her father to say "Shoot me" to the soldiers. It was 3 AM and no neighbors were watching. (30 minutes)