

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Marianne Roberts**  
**April 11, 2012**  
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## PREFACE

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## **MARIANNE ROBERTS**

### **April 11, 2012**

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer collection interview with Marianne Roberts conducted by Gail Schwartz in Washington, DC on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Marianne Roberts: Marianne Roberts, Marianne is spelled M-A-R-I-A-N-N-E.

Q: And what is your maiden name?

A: Cohn. C-O-H-N, a good Irish name.

Q: Right. And where were you born?

A: In **Ludwigshafen am Rhine** in Germany.

Q: And when were you born?

A: 1920, June the 30<sup>th</sup>. I think I remember that.

Q: And let's now talk a little bit about your family. How long had they been in Germany? Do you know?

A: They were born in Germany, my parents, yes.

Q: Your parents' names.

A: Ida Solomon. Do I need to spell anything? Ok. Ida Solomon and my father's name was Marcus Cohn, C-O-H-N. God bless you.

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Q: And do you have or did you have any siblings?

A: Yes, one sister, L-O-T-T-I-E, Lottie, but unfortunately she passed away a number of years ago.

Q: Was she older or younger than –

A: She was three and a half years older than I. Yes.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father was an entrepreneur. He built homes and he built movie houses and he ran this one movie house in particular which was very, very successful and was so elegant, even though Ludwigshafen was an industrial city because of the IG Farben that was housed there. However, my father was able to create businesses and homes and then the movie house was the important thing of course, yeah.

Q: Did your mother work also?

A: No she was always helping my father you know. They always worked together.

Q: So she worked with your father? His business?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a Jewish neighborhood or a mixed neighborhood?

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A: No, it was not a Jewish neighborhood. It was, in Ludwigshafen am Rhine, there was the IG Farben which is a chemical factory that made bombs during the war you know. And after the war I was able to come and inspect it and they were very bad kind of a firm. But they were industrial and everybody in Germany adored them, you know.

Q: So you lived in a Jewish neighborhood or –

A: No, no.

Q: A mixed neighborhood.

A: No, it was, it just a mixed neighborhood. There were on our street there were two other Jewish families, by the way. And we always went to synagogue together. But there were not an overabundance of Jewish people there.

Q: What about extended family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins? Where there any –

A: I had never met my grandparents. I did meet some distant cousins.

Q: So they didn't live in the town with you?

A: Yes, they did. They did and they always relied very much financially particularly upon my parents, helping them, yeah. But we were very closely knit.

Q: So you did see them?

A: Yes, yes, by all means.

Q: You mentioned about going to the synagogue. How religious was your family, were your parents?

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A: Well let's put it this way. My, there was a German Jewish synagogue which was very formal. And then there was a synagogue that originated in **Mashuwen** [ph], in Poland. And so my father visited both but he particularly visited the Polish and Russian temples because, to please relatives and possibly even my mother, because her family had, well she, her family died at a very young age actually so.

Q: But did your grandparents come from other countries or they also were born in Germany?

A: They were born in Germany.

Q: Your grandparents.

A: The grandparents but I have never met them. One time only I had the pleasure of meeting a grandfather, my mother's father, yeah.

Q: And then you were born in 1920 so you started school.

A: Yes.

Q: And were your friends Jewish or non-Jewish or both when you were young.

A: When I was young there was always rampant anti-Semitism and the children, the other children would come and stick their finger into my chest and say you killed Jesus Christ. So under those circumstances, I didn't have a chance you know. You killed Jesus Christ so I personally did that you know. So.

Q: So you went to a public school with Jewish children and non-Jewish children.

A: They went, I went to public school where I was the only Jewish child in the whole school. Yeah and eventually when Hitler came to power both my sister and I were thrown out of school

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because we were Jewish. So when Hitler, Adolf Hitler came to power I'm sure you've heard of him, all the fun was gone and the teachers, there was a professor particularly. He always came to visit my parents and he was so nice to me. Well, in order to exist in his position, these people had to abide with Hitler's ruling and to make believe that they were friendly to Hitler. So the relationship didn't any longer last the way it should have.

Q: Let's stay a little bit in the time up to Hitler first, up to 1933. How would you describe yourself at that time. Were you an independent child or very attached to your parents?

A: Well my sister was far more independent than I. she was three and a half years older. She liked the boys and I was more or less clinging to my mother's skirts. But –

Q: Did you have any interests? Were you interested in sports or music or reading?

A: Music, particularly and also we got a grand piano and we took piano lessons. But unfortunately, being I was the younger one, I followed my sister's suggestions and she wanted no part of piano lessons and she said this is not for me. I've had it and I was a little girl. I said yeah for me too yeah. And to this day I am the saddest person in the world there.

Q: You can still do it.

A: Well. I am just a little bit older than the average student you know, yeah. You know I'm an old lady. The other day someone said Marianne how old are you? I said 61. Then I took two steps and I turned around and said no, no, no. Not 61, 91. There's some little bit of difference between the two.

Q: So it sounds like your family was quite upper class. You had music lessons.

A: They certainly were, yes, yes.

Q: Did your mother have household help?

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A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: Non Jewish household help.

A: Non-Jewish household help, yes. The Jewish girls didn't want to become – yeah.

Q: But and the relationship between the non-Jewish help and your family was good.

A: Oh yes, excellent, excellent.

Q: No problems. And did you do sports? Any sports?

A: My sister more so than I and I was quite young you see. This is many a moon ago.

Q: And how religious? You said your father did go to – did you go to Hebrew school? Did you –

A: Yes, we called it religious school but it's like Hebrew school yes.

Q: Did your family celebrate Passover or –

A: Yes, we did. They were not Orthodox by any means. However, we did celebrate all the Jewish holidays, yes.

Q: Do you have any special memories of the Seder, the Passover Seder. This is again before Hitler, when you were younger. Any special memories?

A: I really don't know.

Q: Family coming over or anything like that?

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A: Special. Ok I'm trying to remember but I really cannot. I was quite young.

Joanie: You always liked making challah.

A: Oh yes. I was helping my mother making challah, yeah that's true. Oh, I'm sorry. You see how important you are.

Q: Ok let's move ahead now to 1933. What is your first memory of Hitler or do you know when you first heard about him?

A: I heard that he was speaking in a big park and I went like a good little girl to the big park and this guy was making a speech. He was not making a speech. He was screaming like an idiot. He was screaming. And I lost my taste for him immediately. And then when I found out what he was going to do to us, to the Jewish people, it was good by Charlie. Ach.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: At home, German.

Q: Did you speak Yiddish at all?

A: No. The German Jews don't speak Yiddish.

Q: Then and as you said before the teacher in school once Hitler came into power, changed his relationship with you.

A: This professor who taught us German. I mean it was in Germany. The German language like here a professor teaches us English you know. So that's how he was teaching us German, even though he -- we lived in Germany and he was a German professor but there was no slang involved. My father would have not allowed slang anyway. He was a believer in the language as it's supposed to be you know.

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Q: I think, and your father fought in World War I?

A: In fact not only World War I, the Second World War he was shot in the lungs. In the First World War, thank you, Joanie. He was shot in the lungs and therefore he spent many a moon in Switzerland in a sanatorium you know. Yeah that –

Q: When Hitler first came into power and people realized what he was going to do, did your parents talk this over with you and your sister? Or just your sister?

A: My father died the day Hitler came into power. And I must tell you that things changed overnight. There was a projectionist. We had two projectionists in our movie. So they were upstairs on the roof in a, in a projection room. And the day Hitler came to power, whereas before my father was no longer here. So my mother always ran the movies and whatever and the businesses and so the younger projectionist came down. He sat down in our kitchen. And he was so fresh to my mother for the first time because the Hitler gave him the power to do this to this Jewish woman you see. You were dirt if you were Jewish you know.

Q: Did your father die suddenly or had he been ill?

A: No. He had been ill. He, due to the First World War, he contacted tuberculosis from being shot in the lungs. Yeah so he was sick for a long time and we always came to visit him in Switzerland in the high up.

Q: In the Alps?

A: Yeah and then he spent time at home too but such is life.

Q: So your mother took an active role in the business.

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A: Oh yes she did. She had to, yeah.

Q: So now Hitler is in power and you're still in school. You're 13 years old.

A: Until the first thing was he threw all the Jewish kids out of school. So my sister and I were without schools.

Q: So do you remember what your feelings were? What is it like to a child to be thrown out of school?

A: I mean to say we felt like, in a sense like dirt and certainly felt no love for Hitler because –

Q: You said you were the only Jewish children in the school.

A: In, yes. That's true yeah but there may have been other schools where they also had Jewish children.

Q: Did you go -- so then what happened, how did you get your education from that point on?

A: Well –

Q: It was just your mother.

A: My mother and also the Jewish, there was a Jewish professor with a very high level title and the **Hestudium Har Wetzler** [ph] so from him we got most of our education.

Q: So you had like a private education with this professor. It was you and your sister. Were there other Jewish children in the town who joined you?

A: Just a handful, very few.

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Q: And where did you meet? In your house?

A: We met, no, no. We met in the synagogue until the Nazis came and got ahold of the rabbi and threw him onto the floor in the street and lit a fire under him. And so things became very bad after that you know. You've heard of the tenth of November.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah so we witnessed that when –

Q: We'll get to that. I just want to do the early part of Hitler's ascent into office. So school was closed and you studied with this private professor. And what about when you walked out on the street and you saw friends, non-Jewish, former –

A: There comes a point very early on when those people who would have said hello Marianne would have been thrown into jail and no one was allowed to contact us and in fact we were having problem even getting food. There was a little boy who was somehow able to get food to us and then we stayed for a while with Russian Jewish people because my sister kind of was engaged to the son. And –

Joanie: Tell the story of going to eat cake in the little café and you had to leave your table because you were Jewish and other people needed to sit down.

A: I don't remember that.

Q: So it was your mother and you and your sister and a few other Jewish children. Did you live near this theater? Was your house near –

A: Yes, because my father built the whole thing, the house and other houses and he was a –

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Q: So you lived in the same area where the theater was.

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did you live in a private home or an apartment?

A: It was actually a both a private, it was a private area too but it was yeah. And when the Nazis came there were some other Jewish people living there in that area and they came and they had hidden their monies in the rain pipe. Drain pipe. Rain pipe. And so the Nazis came and they somehow knew where to find all the money. This man did have a good deal of money so I hear. And they took the parents away and left the little kiddies, three of them, maybe starting three years old, let them just sit there. So then my sister and I ran upstairs and we took the children. And then the regular police in town came and took them and I don't know whatever happened to them. Yeah.

Q: What was the name of the street you lived on?

A: Prince **Reventen strasse**, Prince Reventen street. Prince Regent, you know.

Q: Do you know the number?

A: **Fininfetsish**, 45. Amazing.

Q: What is it like for a 13, 14, 15 year old girl to see Nazi soldiers in uniforms marching down the street? What does it feel like?

A: Believe me, it ain't funny, believe me. What is it like for a girl this age being scared to death and many times the Nazis in the office of the, the office of the mayor would my older sister call in and question her and she came back and she said it was awful you know. But –

Q: What did they question her about?

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A: Ah, who knows. They made some kind of an excuse, or they made up some story. I don't know what. They, they just made up a story and they tried to blame the Jews on things that never occurred you know. And –

Q: And also so look at a flag, the red, white and black flag with the swastika on it. How did you, did you have any physical feelings?

A: For the flag?

Q: Yeah, was that a frightening sight also?

A: It was very despicable. That was very despicable and at the same time when we were hiding in cellars. You know when, we could only take so much of all this nonsense and eventually we had to hide in cellars and a little boy occasionally brought us food. And then we also after a while lived with my sister's fiancé who were Jews from Russia. And they hadn't been touched yet. But the Nazis would come in 12:00 midnight and knock on the door and wake us up.

Q: This is when you were still in your apartment, your house?

A: No, no longer. No we had to stay with –

Q: Do you remember when you left your apartment, your house? Your father had died. You were with your mother.

A: I can tell you when we left. You've heard of the Holocaust haven't you?

Q: Yes.

A: So one fine day when a boy from, a Russian boy, a Polish, Russian Polish boy and his parents

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had been killed by the Nazis. And so this boy went to Paris and his mission was to kill a visiting German attaché. **Vom Rath** was the guy's name.

Q: Yes, of course.

A: And so that, that's what happened. He killed him and so then Hitler, in the next second got on the phone, on the radio and he said the Jews are going to pay for this and they're going to destroy all the Jewish homes. That was the tenth of November, my dear, that is unforgettable.

Q: But what I was talking about was between 1933 and 1938. Before Kristallnacht. I wanted to –

A: Between 33 and 38.

Q: Any other memories that you have of that time. You just stayed in your own home and was getting schooled by this professor.

A: No our home was destroyed the tenth of November.

Q: So you were in your home up til the tenth of November.

A: Up until then. But then we went to Russian Jews who was, my sister was engaged to their son.

Joanie: Mom, can I explain to Gail.

A: Any time, go ahead.

Joanie: Ok so in 1933 your father died and you were 12. In 1936 your mother died. You were 16. You were still living in the apartment next to the movies until your mother died. And then you and your sister Lottie lived in the apartment by yourselves.

A: That's true.

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Joanie: From 36 when your mother died until Kristallnacht. And on Kristallnacht they destroyed the apartment so you went into hiding.

A: Yes, that's what I, God bless her.

Q: Ok, so you were, had your mother been ill or did she die suddenly?

A: She contracted an illness. She had pancreatic cancer yeah. Now what would I do without you? And that's how she died, yeah. That was, we were fortunate there was still one Jewish hospital left in town so that's where she went, yeah.

Q: So you and your sister stayed in the apartment from 1936 on til Kristallnacht. How did you get food during that time?

A: Well in the beginning we were still able to go into the store but I remember distinctly I was in the store and I was at the head of the line in the grocery store. And I wanted something and the guy said the Jews go on the back of the line and he had known us forever and ever. Such a miserable thing here.

Q: Did you have to wear anything showing that you were Jewish?

A: No that was in Poland mostly yeah.

Q: You didn't wear anything. Did your sister work at all during that time, from 36 to 38?

A: Did my sister work? I don't think so, no, no. she didn't work.

Q: You had enough money to keep you going?

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A: Well there was a sum set aside because we were without parents. I don't know whether my parents decreed this or what. And so but the Germans eventually said we have to -- girls you have to give us all of your money because we have to send it to Berlin. They probably pocketed it you know.

Q: Now let's get to November 38.

A: You know it's not exactly easy thinking back of those horrible things.

Joanie: do you need to take a break?

A: No, if I do I'll tell you.

Q: Now it's November 1938 and the destruction starts in your home. Were you home at the time when your house was damaged in November 38?

A: This was 5:00 in the morning because as I've said before this Jewish boy who killed the German attaché in Paris because the German Nazis had killed the boy's parents in Poland. So he took revenge and he killed this yeah, diplomat thank you. And so --

Q: So then they took revenge and you were home. It was 5:00 in the morning and what happened?

A: It was five, so what happened was that the moment that boy killed this guy in Paris, Hitler got on the phone and he said the Jews are going to pay for this. And so that same night and the next morning that is called Kristallnacht. My sister and I, it was 5:00 in the morning. We were sleeping alone, we were home. We had nobody. And there was a knock on the door and I started to argue with my sister. She was older. She always wanted me to do things and I said no, Lottie, this time you open the door. By the time we finished arguing they broke down the door with hammers and axes. And they attacked this, what is this piano called.

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Joanie: Steinway.

A: Steinway, this great Steinway. Ah. With hammers and axes and my sister had gone to open the door so she went down into the basement and I was sitting up in bed in my nightgown. I saw these, maybe 40, 50 guys with hammers and axes starting to chop not looking for anything. So I said to myself, Marianne, in fact I said Marianna which was my German name. I said now or never. So in my nightgown I dashed through them and ran into the basement where my sister was waiting for me. And so we were down there without food, without drink for several days until we wound up going to Lottie's fiancé's home, the Russian Jews.

And yeah so we were down in the basement for several days, nothing to eat, nothing to drink and never knowing when they might discover us. Somehow they never followed us down, down into the basement. They didn't. They were so eager, they were so full of anxiety to kill you know.

And –

Q: So then you got to your sister's fiancé's family in town.

A: And I think they were Russian Jews so –

Q: And how long did you –

A: We stayed there for a while until they came and took all the men the Russian and Polish men Jewish to concentration camps.

Joanie: It was several months that you were in hiding.

Q: In their house. When you first came out on the street after you left your basement to go to this other house, and you saw all this destruction. You saw this destruction, what –

A: We were scared to death and we tried not to be seen in the street at all until such time excuse me, until such time that we had to go to, to Frankfurt to pick up our visas to come to the United States. That was a very lengthy painful thing because when my mother was still alive, we needed

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relatives and friends in America to send us visas that would permit us to come to the States. So when this finally arrived we at night, my sister and I went through the streets, to the train, railroad station yeah. And when I came into the train my cousin in Holland was somehow I don't know now how he found out about it. We may have asked someone to contact him. I don't know.

Q: This is early 1939.

Joanie: Can I explain the sequence here.

A: Go ahead, you don't have to ask me.

Joanie: Ok so you stayed in the basement for a few days. And then you had the courage to run out to Lottie's fiancé's parents' house. And you hid in that house for several months, never went out and you had a little boy who came and delivered food. And then you somehow found out that the work that your mother had done to get you passage to America came through.

A: Yes, the work that my mother had done.

Joanie: Tell her about the Palestine cruise.

A: Yeah she also, she had contacted people and relatives and friends in the States to give us visas but while they were still working on all of this. It took three years anyhow. It was not an easy feat so my mother -- they didn't want the Jews to leave Germany. Because they wanted to have all our belongings you see. And so my mother said girls, my sister and me, we're going to tell them that we are going on a cruise to what was then Palestine which is now Israel. And we're going to tell them we're just going on a cruise to visit this exhibit you know. And sure enough the day we wanted to leave the Nazis came, that they're big shots you know. We're here, **Frankone** [ph – German?]. We're here. You're going to -- want to leave us. My mother said oh no we're just going to see this exhibit there in Palestine. They went like this. They said then

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passport, **bitte**. The passport . So without the passport you're a dead duck yeah. So that's what happened.

Joanie: But when she realized things were getting so bad with Hitler, since you couldn't escape to Palestine, she knew that earlier some of your distant cousins had gone to America. And she wrote to them to start the process of getting visas.

A: So what would I do without you for God's sakes.

Joanie: And this is in 1935 she started this process.

A: Because when I come back to all of this, I'm like a bundle of nerves. That's why my brain isn't working yet. But that's what happened.

Joanie: So somehow when you were in hiding in 1938 you heard that the visas were granted.

A: Yes, I don't know how. Gave us the news.

Joanie: And that's when you and Lottie had the chutzpah to leave this hiding and get on a train to go to the consulate.

A: We went in the middle of the night. We then to get the train and then I, when we went to the train to get our visas, my cousin who lived in Holland somehow he had been told so he was waiting in the compartment. The first thing I did was I, there was another man sitting there.

Joanie: That story came a little bit later ok so it was when you were actually on the train –

A: On the train yes.

Joanie: To England. You had gotten your visas already.

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Q: So then you came back?

Joanie: Came back and you came back to Ludwigshafen with your visas.

A: Just a minute. I'm very confused here. All I know is this -- that my cousin from Holland came to meet us in the train. And I went in and I whispered into his ear. I said Oscar can I now talk and say anything I want and there was another man in the compartment who said can you imagine the teachers, thank you. Oh. Excuse me. He said can you imagine what she just asked me, whether she now can talk and say everything she wants you know. So we came to Holland but unfortunately the same thing had happened to Holland eventually. They took him and his wife to the camp yeah.

Q: So you got your visas, you came back to Ludwigshafen and then soon after went to England.

A: Went to England yeah and my sister wanted to remain in England with friends.

Q: What about her fiancé?

A: That eventually was dissolved. So supposedly she -- the main reason in the beginning for her wanting to remain in London was because of the fiancé but it never materialized. I didn't like him anyhow so --

Q: When you took the voyage across to England were there other Jewish refugees?

A: No, no, no. We were on, no just my sister and I and when we came to Amsterdam in Holland we had no money and we needed to continue our journey. So there was a fabulous friend of my parents, my father's and he was Dr. Siegel and he was the head of a quinine factory in Amsterdam. And we called him and he came and gave us money.

Q: Gave you money to go, for passage --

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A: To continue on, sure. We had no money. The Nazis took everything away.

Q: What did you take with you when you left Germany? What did you take with you?

A: I'm glad you asked that. They sent in a Nazi with big black boots. Ah. And also there was a cardboard box there. I don't know how it – who did that and also a plain German man and the Nazi had a list of what we were allowed to take with us. So what they wanted us to take was strictly the things that my mother and father had when they were getting married. You hear. And all the garbage that they would allow us to take, it was absolutely ridiculous. We were standing there with Nazi boots and a whip and if God forbid we did something wrong or tried to smuggle something into the box, would have been goodbye Charlie you know yeah. So –

Q: Do you remember what you actually took with you?

A: Pots and pans. Nothing. They wouldn't allow me. The guy standing with the whip.

Q: Could you take any clothes with you?

A: Oh wait a minute. I smuggled a ring that my mother gave me, yeah. I did smuggle a ring yeah.

Q: Did you take any clothes with you?

A: I don't know. I really don't know. I don't think this is going to be very easy for me cause it's kind of difficult yeah.

Q: Painful. So you get over to England. You got to England eventually and where did you stay in England?

A: All I know is I don't remember where I stayed in England. All I know is that my sister was busy with her friends. And we only had so much allotment of time to spend time in London by

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the English government. So I said, she said she wanted to stay for a while and so I said to her, don't worry. I may have been maybe 14, 15 years old. But I spoke perfect English from school you know.

Q: You learned English in school?

A: And in addition to that my mother hired a woman from London and what's this.

Q: Why don't we take a break at the moment?

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Marianne Roberts. This is track number two. And we were talking about how you and your sister got over to England. What did you want to say now?

Marianne Roberts: And my sister was engaged and she wanted to wait for the fiancé to come to London. And, but the fiancé had been a bad boy. He did some business in Germany that was illegal and so he was not able to gain entry into London, something like that I think. He was refused entry into something, must have been London. So –

Q: How much money did you take with you when you left Germany?

A: Well, my dear, love. That was Hitler. You don't think he let us take any money.

Q: You took no money?

A: In other words they allowed us to take the equivalent of four American dollars to travel to another continent.

Q: So you stayed in London. Did you know anybody in London? Or where did you stay?

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A: I probably didn't stay very long but all I know is the fellow in – I couldn't stay very long because London only gave us the limitation on the amount of stay in London so we would need special permission. So me, you know being 14, 15, but I was always very sensible. I said Lottie don't worry. I'll go to the government and I'll get permission for us to stay longer. And sure enough, I went to the Home Office in London. You know what that is, the Home Office. The Home Office in London, government, yeah. And so I was a little kid and, but I had not only learned how to speak English in school, but my mother had always wanted us to learn languages. So without any further ado she hired a woman from London and she, but she spoke us the king's English. She taught us half past, you know that. So made no difference really. So I said to my sister, don't worry. I'll go and get an extension for your stay in London. And I will continue on to America, you know.

Q: You're 18, 19 at this point?

A: No.

Q: This is in early 1939.

A: 18, yeah. And –

Q: What was her fiancé's name?

A: Her fiancé's name. Ernest. And I didn't like him at all. But he was no good anyway.

Q: His last name, do you know his last name?

A: **Lostig, Lustig**, Lostig, yeah.

Q: So you tell your sister you'll go by yourself? You were very brave.

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A: So I told my sister, I told my sister first things first. I have to go to the English government for them to give her permit an extension and also for me until I could leave for – so I made an appointment and I didn't think I was as old as 18. I thought I was about 16, 17 but whatever. And so this man was sitting opposite me. In my best English because not only my mother had hired a woman from London to give us English lessons, just for the sake of lessons, but also I had English in school. In the first, the first class, the first session in school they taught us in, was an English lesson, the first one yeah.

Joanie: So you got the extension for Lottie to stay but you got yourself a trip across the Atlantic.

A: Yeah, just a minute, you're jumping ahead. Because I said to Lottie, don't worry. I'll go to the English government and I'll get you an extension to stay. And so one day I found myself across this man, sitting across the table and in perfect English, the king's English, I told him what happened and **que pasa**, you know that I wanted to continue on and she wanted to stay. So he was so gracious. Oh my god, he was such a nice man. I'm sure he had a lot of respect for a young kid to take, to undertake such a mission you know. So sure enough he granted it and she was waiting outside in the street for me. And I came out and I said Lottie you can stay you know.

Q: Did you want to stay with her or did you really want to go to America?

A: No, I wanted to go to America.

Q: Even by yourself?

A: I had no reason to want to remain there. She, her reason was her fiancé that incidentally never materialized, that didn't work out but I was –

Q: How soon after did you sail to the United States?

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A: I guess very shortly. As soon as I could get a ticket to go. You know. I was always a very independent person. Always, yeah.

Q: Which is different than what you said when you were very young that you always depended on your sister when you were little. When I asked you were you an independent child, you said you always looked up to your sister.

A: I was dependent upon her when I was very young and then furthermore when she grew older and she had all her own friends, I was clinging to my mother's skirts. But once I, my mother died and she and I were alone, my sister, I became independent yeah.

Q: So what boat did you sail on?

Joanie: Cunard White Star.

A: Oh. Cunard White Star, yeah thank you my dear.

Q: Were there any other refugees on that voyage?

A: No it had nothing to do with refugees. I was just, I got, bought a ticket and I went.

Q: As a regular passenger?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did America mean to you at that age of 18?

A: Freedom.

Q: How did you know that?

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A: Well I mean I went to school and I was fairly well educated and I had one set of cousins who were living in the United States and my mother when she was still alive, she tried her darnedest for us to go to America. So I knew that should be my goal.

Q: America. Did you have any sad thoughts about leaving Germany? Was that hard for you?

A: Ach, my dear girl, you didn't know Adolf Hitler. I was thrilled to death to be able to go.

Q: But did you feel German at that point when you were leaving or Jewish or, what did you feel that you were?

A: Probably mostly Jewish. Probably. But –

Q: Not German?

A: I couldn't tell you the correct answer to that. The Germans, the kids used to come and stick their fist in my chest and say you killed Jesus Christ so what should I love about Germany?

Q: And now you dock in New York. You're on the boat.

A: Yes.

Q: Any memories of the voyage, anything special, any special memories of your voyage. From England to New York.

A: Of the voyage. Yeah well one of the officers tried to date me but I was in no condition.

Joanie: So one story you used to tell me was that when you left Liverpool and you saw England behind you, you said never look back.

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A: Yeah because I was with my back to the boat the way it was going. And I said to myself, Marianna never look back. It was a new start and I was a kid. You know.

Q: You were very brave. And then you come into the New York harbor. And any thoughts, any emotions, any memories of what you felt when you saw the United States for the first time?

A: When I saw the Statue of Liberty, I really was all shook up. That's true.

Q: And then you get off the boat and who met you?

A: Some distant cousins. A husband and wife and I stayed with them for just a few days.

Q: This is in New York City?

A: Yeah, downtown New York. And the English was Anglish. And it was – **toity toid** street on the **toid** floor. That's what it was yeah.

Q: And then you stayed with them for a few –

A: I stayed with them for a few days and then they got me a position in Brooklyn where there were all two family homes, with a lovely Jewish family as a companion to their daughter, who was my age yeah. So that was very nice yeah. And I remember they always used to say how come that you always have to go to your sister? How come she never comes here?

Q: When did she come, when did Lottie come to the United States? How soon after you?

Joanie: A few weeks.

A: Really.

Q: A few weeks? So it was a short time?

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A: Why did she come shortly after? What happened?

Joanie: Because she only had an extension for a few weeks to stay in England.

Q: So she joined you?

A: I was the one that got her the extension, yeah.

Q: So did she join you when she came?

A: No she didn't join me and the people for whom I was working, they always used to say to me, I don't understand. You always have to go on your day off to see your sister. Why does she never come here? And she was busy. But I got a job with Eda, and she worked in a book publisher's office so she got me a position there as a file clerk. And I remember. The boss was a little guy, little old man. There was a big barrel at the front of the office, indoors. And people threw all the paperwork in there. And he used to climb into, this guy and jump up and down and it was so funny.

Q: The original compactor. So then you stayed there for how long?

A: I don't know for how long.

Q: And where did you go after that?

A: Well then, all I know is eventually my sister and I got a position at a doctor's office in Coney Island and so first we grew up as receptionists and then the doctor showed us, he had a spare room lined up totally with x ray equipment. So he saw evidently that we were good material. So he called in the head of Picker x ray, the head and the result was that this head of Picker x ray came several times to give us lessons how to take x rays. Cause the equipment was there. We were so lucky that this happened to us. Then you didn't need a license. In more later years we

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had to be state licensed by the, to be an x ray technologist. And so anyway then the doctor made more money because he was able to x ray patients and we got a salary and all was well. So that's what happened.

Q: And then, did you have a social life at all? Did you meet anybody?

A: Well my sister was the social butterfly and the woman, the neighbor who lived over there in the doctor's upstairs the doctor's office, she once pulled me aside and she said my sister was the divorcee after all. Didn't I mention that and so this woman, mean, well meaning, she pulled me aside and she says your sister is taking away the guy, the boyfriend from Celia, from the doctor's secretary. She said you should be the one to be taking a guy or whatever. But of course that was not my cup of tea. And –

Q: So you stayed at the doctor's office for how long?

A: Well the doctor's office had – was a house and upstairs was like a railroad apartment. That was empty so we lived upstairs and we were on call for the doctor day and night. It was –

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: Ah, I don't remember.

Joanie: Were you still there when you met dad?

A: I don't think so no, I don't think so.

Q: Then you met your future husband. How did you meet your husband?

A: Ah, I know. In those days in Brooklyn there used to be dances, social dances and so I had a friend and she said, she was a do-er and go-er and she come, Marianne, let's go to the dance. So this is how I met Murray, yeah, yeah.

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Q: And when did you get married?

A: June, July the 22<sup>nd</sup>. 49.

Q: 1949.

A: Yeah.

Q: And was your husband also from Europe?

A: Was my husband what?

Q: Also born in Europe.

A: No, he was American, yeah. And it was not the best choice for me. No, no. C'est la vie, such is life.

Q: But you had children? By your husband?

A: Yes. Two very wonderful children. My son Noah and Joan. And they are wonderful.

Q: Can we talk a little bit now just about your feelings for a moment. What are your thoughts about Germany today? Did you ever go back?

A: One time. It was a business deal. My husband and I, we had to go back and the mayor of the – there came a time (sigh) there came a time when the German government told each mayor to invite the Jewish people that had been thrown out of there. And to show them a wonderful time. In other words, this is like in Spain. In Spain the Jewish were –

Q: After the Inquisition, right?

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A: So yeah.

Joanie: We went back in 1997.

A: To Germany.

Joanie: Or 1998.

A: So they were certainly showing us a wonderful time and everything but –

Q: What are your thoughts today about Germany? Anything?

A: I went there once and it was enough for me. Of course my parents' graves are there so I couldn't find my mother's grave, but my father's grave I could because he was at the very beginning of the Jewish cemetery. It had just been opened, but my mother's grave I couldn't find.

Q: What happened to your extended family in Germany? Did any of them –

A: Who is my extended family?

Q: Like cousins.

A: Cousins. They ---

Q: Were they able to leave Germany?

A: Well the cousins were the first ones to come to the United States and to Israel.

Q: So they all were able to get out?

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A: But that was before when I don't know. I don't remember whether it was at the beginning of Hitler. Whatever it was, they had a reason to flee as quickly as possible. Must have been Hitler.

Q: Did what you had gone through and the difficult times from 33 to 39, which were very difficult and frightening, did that influence you in how you raised your children, do you think? Did it make a difference?

A: Oh no. my children were raised the way I wanted to raise them. It, are you asking me whether I asked my children to hate Germany?

Q: No, no, no. I didn't mean that. I just meant, no not at all. I just meant in the way that you raised them. Were you strict with them? Did you try to get them to be independent because you knew later in life you had to be very independent.

A: Well –

Q: You had been through a very difficult time.

A: Yeah, she always, Joanie always says to me, mom you can do anything. And I said you know why. Because I went through a lot of tough times. That's what it is.

Q: Right, right and you became very independent as you said. So when your children were the ages of 13 to 19 which is when you had your difficult times, did that remind you of what you had gone through, when they were the same age that you were?

A: They never had to thank God, to go through what I went through so there was no need for comparison.

Joanie: But you did not speak about Germany at all until we were grown up.

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A: I was not aware of that. Would you believe this? I was not aware of it. Because something had happened and it never occurred to me that it might be of value to you children to hear about it. Because it was not a good news. No.

Q: Were you ever active in the civil rights movement? Here you lived in a country that deprived you of your civil rights.

A: Jewish people were never able to join those –

Q: No, I meant in the United States. In the 1960s, 1970s, the height of the civil rights movement.

A: My civil rights movement is the fact that for years and years and hopefully much longer, anywhere and every place I get up and I speak about the Holocaust. Anywhere and everywhere. This is my, this is my gift.

Q: Where do you speak?

A: In schools, in colleges, in universities. Any club that wants to hear. I have spoken for example I swear to you, in front of a thousand students in Chapel Hill, I remember. What's her name was with me, in fact. And she came in to see how it was done. Which I didn't know here. So –

Joanie: Just this spring, 2012, you have spoken in front of 900 eighth graders who were studying the Holocaust.

A: And many more besides that yeah.

Q: And why do you do this?

A: Why?

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Q: Yes.

A: I do it because of what I went through. Yeah.

Q: What lessons do you want to impart to the children? To the students?

A: Not to honor Hitler.

Joanie: But as you say in your speeches, this must never happen again.

A: So there's your answer actually. It must never happen again because I've had my share and, and other children shouldn't have to go through this.

Q: Do you think it could happen again?

A: Well it depends who is in government. How, how fair people are who are in present government. I would not want it to happen to a dog, really. I don't believe. I cannot say I don't believe it will never happen again because I don't know who is in charge.

Q: How do you feel about coming to the Holocaust Museum? What is it like for you to walk into this building?

A: I feel I've come home. I am so elated to be here today, you have no idea.

Q: Because?

A: Because of the relationship and the memories it brings, good and bad. This is my field, the Holocaust Museum. I am very happy. And don't think for one moment I appreciate so much what you are doing. But I can tell you it ain't easy. It isn't really. And but it's something that needs to be done. It needs to be talked about that this should never ever happen again. And the more people hear about it, the more important it is. It is yeah.

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Joanie: This has been your mission in life for the last 20 years.

A: Yeah.

Q: To speak about the Holocaust.

A: Oh yes. I mean --

Q: How did it first start? Did someone come to you to ask you?

A: The rabbi, the rabbi asked on the day of the Holocaust that six people of his members in temple, would come up and light six candles, light, each one light a candle.

Q: This is in North Carolina?

A: This was, was this in North Carolina?

Joanie: That was in Florida.

A: In Florida, so yeah Florida. What would I do without you? So anyway, then he said to me so then I lit the candle. And he said to me, Marianne, I would like to ask you how about speaking about it. And this is what got me started. I very soon after I found myself before 1000 temple members. He was a very young modern rabbi. And I found myself before 1000 temple members and standing up there and I was looking around and I said to myself, how come you don't feel anything? It's because of my youth. My parents owned movie houses. We were always in the limelight. And I always had to shake hands and say good day and make a curtsy. You know when I was a child. So this is why to this day, nothing bothers me. Nothing bothers me. I'm a lucky duck really to say nothing bothers me.

And so the rabbi had asked me to -- there were a thousand people in our congregation which was a reform congregation and I spoke and I had, he had --

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Q: Applause?

A: Applause yeah and from that, the next step was the high school in back of the temple, again they brought all the different classes in. A thousand students and from that day on, that was it yeah.

Q: Up to that point, would you tell people what, up to 20 years ago before that, would you tell people what you had gone through? Did people ask you?

A: Well of course, because I spoke with a foreign accent.

Q: And you were willing to say what had happened?

A: Well I don't remember, but I'm sure that I must have said, maybe I didn't talk about it too much, yeah.

Q: When you meet people from, Jews from Germany or other countries in Europe, do you feel a special connection to them?

A: I tell you the truth, I have not as yet met any Jewish people that came from the same environment. They, some Polish people, yes. But the Polish people suffered a great deal but not from Germany.

Q: So you stayed in New York for how long?

Joanie: From 1939 until 1980.

Q: And that's when you went to Florida?

Joanie: And then 2001 to North Carolina.

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Q: Is there anything you wanted to add, anything you wanted to say, any message you wanted to leave?

A: I think I'm emptied out. I'm a lucky duck to be living in the United States, that's all I have to say. And my mother always wanted to and unfortunately you know she couldn't come with us but –

Q: How did she know so much about the United States and what do you attribute that to?

A: The Jewish people were all talking about the haven, the United States. And which other country would take in Jewish people. It was a mixture, a mélange of different things. That, the United States was the, the – and that in the United States people could live and have freedom. That's what we didn't have in Germany, you know.

Q: When you meet a German today, what are your thoughts, a non-Jewish German?

A: A non-Jewish German? Well of course I can very easily say I have no love for any one of them, because I remember some very sad things in Germany. When I was a little girl and I was maybe in third grade, and there was one girl, Gentile J, a Gentile girl who was very beautiful and I admired her so for her beauty. And we went home with the same trolley car. So she sat near the window and I sat on the inside. And I always admired this girl for her beauty. And so this was the first time we had a real good conversation. And then I was the first one to get off the trolley car because I, that was home. And as I got up and walked away, there were two seats between her and me. She looked at me after all the nice conversation we had and she said you dirty Jew. So I said to myself, how could you love people like that really. You dirty Jew she said. And then I remember in front of our movies, there used to be other kids my age. And really a little bit older perhaps and they would put their fists into my chest and say you killed Jesus Christ. So I personally did this you know.

Q: Was your father's, was the family movie theater destroyed on Kristallnacht? Was it damaged?

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A: Well yes. It was. And also they made such a horrible mess of it. You remember yeah. It was very sad to – they destroyed it.

Q: They destroyed it so it wasn't fixable, it wasn't put back together? It was destroyed.

A: I think they made a candy store out of it. My father –

Q: What was the name of the theater?

A: The Rheingold. Rheingold because it was near the river Rhine. And Rheingold was a big deal over there. The gold of the Rhine. And –

Q: It was totally destroyed on Kristallnacht. Or –

A: Well it was yes. Yes, destroyed but disfigured. They made a candy store out of it. I was sick you know. I was sorry, I had Joanie with me to see, because I always told her how that it could have stood. We always have said that the movies could have been here on Broadway. It was so gorgeous cause my father was such an entrepreneur. He had such great big wonderful ideas. But, C'est la vie. What can you do? I look pretty disgusted here, don't I?

Joanie: Mom, this is the left ear picture. Can you tell her about that?

A: Yeah, all right.

Q: You had a picture taken, by whom?

A: Yes, as a matter of fact I did. You see each city was able to devise plans to embarrass and hurt the Jew. So therefore in our particular city the guys who ran the city hall, they were a bunch of, ah. So they called me up and I should come over to city hall. So I went. I don't remember whether my sister was with me. I think I was alone. I was about 14 years old or 16.

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Joanie: 16.

A: 16. Yeah so I came to city hall and they elevator there it goes, it never stops. The elevator going upstairs in city hall. It never stops. You have to leap upon, onto the elevator. Yeah. Yeah. So then I ok so I went to them. And they asked me questions and so on. So finally they said ok. Expose your left ear. I was afraid to ask why. So I looked and they said, the Jewish left ear is different from Gentile left ears. So I knew that this was such garbage like I never heard in my life you know. But I didn't dare oppose them. So this is the picture they took of me here. With the left ear exposed. I look like I was 16 years old here. I look like I was 90. Look how dejected I am. Yeah, disgusted.

Q: They gave you a copy of the picture?

Joanie: This is the original.

Q: So they gave you the picture?

A: I guess they must have. It's many a moon ago you know.

Joanie: And then they asked you to sign your name as Sarah.

A: I signed my name as Sarah. And the men's name would be Israel. Yeah, yeah.

Joanie: It was an identification card that they made for you in this picture.

A: So that's why we have this, the Holocaust Museum here they have this picture up on the wall. Yeah.

Q: Did your sister have to go in and have her left ear photographed?

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A: I don't think so.

Joanie: She probably did but we don't have the picture.

A: I don't remember.

Q: Did anybody else you know have to do that or were you the only –

A: I really wouldn't know. I was so disgusted and so glad to get the hell out of there, that I didn't care who else had to do, expose their ear. Bunch of idiots. In other words each city comprised their own way to humiliate us. That's all I can say. I look like an old lady on here. Take a look at this. I'm 16 years old. Look at this. I'm so dejected yeah.

Q: Before we finish is there any other –

A: I think if we don't finish pretty soon then I'm going to disappear from this earth.

Q: We don't want that to happen. So thank you so much for doing this.

A: Thank you for asking me.

Q: A wonderful addition to the archives.

A: Thank you for asking me really. Yeah. It's you know, after a while you become so angry when you have to rehash this whole thing and that's what started to happen to me. I became so worn out. Yeah.

Q: As I said we appreciate what you've done today. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Marianne Roberts.

(end)