United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Trudy Schonberger
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PREFACE

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TRUDY SCHONBERGER
January 16, 2014

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer collection interview with Trudy Schonberger conducted by Gail Schwartz on January 16, 2014 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Trudy Schonberger: Trudy Schonberger, no middle name.

Q: No middle name. And what was your name at birth?

A: Trudy **Wellisch**.

Q: Wellisch is your –

A: The maiden name, yes.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Vienna, Austria.

Q: And when were you born?

A: May 20th 1926.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family now. Your parents' names.

A: My mother's name was Irene Kohn, K-O-H-N which translated to American Cohen, C-O-H-E-N, but hers was K-O-H-N. And my father was Hugo Wellisch.

Q: How far back can you trace your family in Vienna or how far back can you trace your family?

A: Well as far as grandparents, I did not know my mother's parents, but I did know my grandmother on my father's side and her name was Rosa Wellisch and she lived with us. I didn't know her husband, my grandfather.

Q: So you knew one grandparent.

A: So I knew one grandparent.

Q: How far back in Vienna did the family go? Do you know?

A: Well I don't know. This is about as, I know you know my aunts and uncles.

Q: Who lived in Vienna?

A: Who lived, some lived in Vienna and some lived in other towns outside of Vienna.

Q: Surrounding –

A: Surrounding -- well let me. We lived in a small town called **Wiesenfeld** where my father had a kind of a big business.

Q: What kind of business?

A: It was like a, you might call a general store or a department store because he sold everything. Besides selling groceries and materials for clothing and shoes et cetera. He also had a wholesale lumber business and grain, like corn and I don't remember what else. I just remember that quite well. And he catered to all the people in the area and this small town of Wiesenfeld was about an hour's drive from Vienna. I don't know whether it was east or west. Let's not ask me directions cause – so it was about an hour's drive.

Q: But you were born in Vienna?

A: But I was born in Vienna, yes. My parents were born in the country. My mother was born in a town next to mine, to Wiesenfeld, called **Traisen** and that's spelled T-R-A-I-S-E-N and my father was born, I believe he was born in Wiesenfeld, cause the house we lived in was my grandparents' house.

Q: How religious were your parents?

A: We were not religious but we were well aware and made sure that we observed all the holidays. I had to learn Hebrew. My brother was bar mitzvahed, but that was in another city, not in Vienna but in a city called **St. Pölten** and they had a synagogue there, that's spelled capital S-t period. And then capital P-O with an umlaut – L-T-E-N. That had a synagogue and bigger schools and all that.

Q: So you, obviously you said you had your brother. Did you have any other siblings?

A: No.

Q: And your brother's name?

A: Eric.

Q: How much older –

A: He's six years older.

Q: Six years older, ok.

A: And he's living in North Carolina now.

Q: Let's talk about your life. So your parents were not overly religious?

A: Not overly religious.

Q: Did you observe Shabbat and things like that?

A: Not really, no, no.

Q: Just the big holidays.

A: The big holidays.

Q: What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

A: No Jews. We were the only Jews because it was a very small village. It was in the foothills of the Alps, beautiful area, but we were the only Jews in that town. The rest was all mostly farmers, peasants you know and that's what my father catered to all these people. And further out even. He had a big surrounding area that he catered to.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: German.

Q: German. No Yiddish or anything.

A: No Yiddish, no, no, no.

Q: You went to a regular school. What kind of school did you go to? Starting from when you were young.

A: There was no school in Wiesenfeld. There was nothing in Wiesenfeld. What do they say, if you blink, you're gone or you're done. So I had to start school in a village called **St. Veit**. That's spelled capital S-T and then capital V-E-I-T. And that I started first grade to probably third grade maybe, fourth grade. I don't quite recall. And we walked and it was about maybe from half a mile to a mile. And then I transferred to the other town that I mentioned, Traisen which had a school that went to seventh grade or I don't recall. But I went there with my cousin Lily who lived in Traisen. And they had more Jews there, not many but a couple of families. So I went to Traisen until I was 11 years old. And then I was sent to Vienna, to the gymnasium which is like our high schools but a lot tougher. Very tough. I had to pass an entrance exam to get in. and I was very tempted to cheat but not for the good, but for, so I didn't have to go. But I passed it and I lived with friends of my parents. In Vienna. I really didn't want to go. I was kind of a home body. And these people I lived with were very nice. They were not Jewish. They had a daughter, a little bit older than myself. And we both went to that gymnasium.

Q: How did your parents know this family –

A: Oh they had been friends for many years, through a sibling of theirs. Of either the husband or the wife, who lived in Traisen. And my parents had been friends with them and that's how they got to know each other. And they were very nice to me.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. When you were growing up in your village was there, do you remember. You were of course quite young – any experiences of anti-Semitism. You were the only Jewish family.

A: Yeah, yeah. No nothing as far as –

Q: You played with the other children?

A: Oh I had good friend, right across the street. Very, very poor and she was my best friend and I would share my toys with her and my mother would give her clothing and things like that.

Q: And with the teachers. No expressions of anti-Semitism.

A: Not yet. It's coming.

Q: In that first school you didn't experience –

A: No, not, not yet.

Q: Were you a very athletic type child?

A: I was not, not in the gym and –

Q: Did you like sports?

A: I, skiing and skating and sleigh riding we did that. And the skiing was relatively simple for us because all I had to do was put on my skis and walk up the hill, go across the road and walk up on a mountain and –

Q: Did you like to read?

A: I did like to read and when I was very little I recall my mother reading me beautiful stories. You know.

Q: Would you call yourself an independent child? Were you –

A: Not really. Not really. I was very attached to my parents. But then when I had to go to Vienna which was a good thing

Q: Now you're in Vienna and memories of that. You said you went when you were 11 so –

A: So ok so that was –

Q: 37

A: Exactly and I went there in August to get ready for the opening of school in September and when I started this gymnasium, I hated it immediately. The teachers were so strict. And I was –

Q: This is a co-ed.

A: This was girls only, girls only. But anyway I made it and now –

Q: Before that or up to that point, Hitler had been in power. Again you were young of course. Do you have any memories of this man Hitler in 35, 36, 37?

A: Not that because that was Germany.

Q: I know but you spoke German and did your parents hear him speak over the radio and –

A: I was not aware of any of that.

Q: Of what was happening in Germany.

A: Nothing, no, no. it didn't, if they talked about, among themselves. I don't recall that, no. The only thing I do remember was the chancellor. His name was **Dollfuss**, during 35 or 36. He was assassinated. And I heard that and because they were talking about it in school, but I thought oh that's too bad you know. But me.

Q: So now you're in gymnasium.

A: Now I'm in gymnasium and I'm hating every minute right.

Q: That's 1937.

A: So I get through it and now comes the month of March 1938. And I'm at home with the family. I think ready to go to school or whatever the date was. A lot –

Q: In Vienna?

A: In Vienna.

Q: With another family, not your family.

A: No the foster family let's call them.

Q: What were their names, do you remember?

A: Her name was **Geezi**, Giselle and Hans hm.

Q: Ok so you're with them

A: I'm with them and there is a fantastic commotion and noises and yelling and screaming and airplanes and we are running to the window and it was, I don't know if it was the **Luftwaffe** or German aircraft throwing down pamphlets and propaganda and later on we ran outside to pick it up but it was the **Anschluss**, the annexation of Austria. Right then and there. Pouf. And shortly thereafter Chancellor **Schuschnigg** went on the air and saying goodbye to Austria. Austria is no more.

Q: Had you heard of Hitler? When did you first hear of Adolf Hitler?

A: Well this was all right now you know at that moment, it was –

Q: This was your introduction.

A: This was the introduction and I don't even know whether Hitler's name came up, but Germany. What is this? I'm 11 years old. I have no idea what is going on. Anyway my foster mom said when things started to calm down, it was time to go to school or whatever it was I went back to school. Had to go to school. And things went on sort of normally. One week passed by. The principal came into the classroom and said all Jewish girls out into the hall. And at least I knew enough I was Jewish, you know. I went out into the hall and there were other Jewish girls already out there. And the principal said pack up your books and whatever belongs to you and get out. Do not come back. No Jews allowed.
So the comprehension wasn't there yet, you know. What? What's going on? So I took my books and my coat and whatever we had and I took the streetcar and I went home to the foster parents. And she said what, are you all right? What's happening? I said I'm ok but I got kicked out of school. She said what did you do? I said I don't know. So I'm proceeding to tell her, the principal said don't come back. They don't want Jews. And she, I remember this like it was yesterday. She sat in the chair and she said oh my god. I guess we have to call your parents. And she immediately went and called my parents. And it was either my mother or my father. I don't recall said I guess we'll come and get her. So I was there another day and they came immediately and brought me home. And you know what I thought. I thought you know what. This isn't so bad. I hate this place anyway you know. Not realizing yet what was to come.

Q: So you weren't frightened at that point?

A: I didn't have sense enough I think to be frightened. Really. I did sense –

Q: Something wasn't –

A: Something you know. My parents and the foster parents and that excitement and not good excitement, not happy excitement but tension. So I went home. Now you can't just sit home. What are we going to do now? Ok. My mother called the school in Traisen where my cousin lived and they asked if they would take me in school. And they said yes. So that wasn't so bad because my cousin Lily, my age, we were like sisters. And she had two brothers, Oscar older and

Otto younger. And so we were kind of together and the school was right across from her house. So we would go to lunch at my aunt's, Tante Olga was her name, Lily's mom and her dad **Isadore**. Isadore was my mother's brother. And so things were not too bad. This is now April already. Took a while to get me in and you know the details of all this stuff.

Q: Were there any banners or any symbols around –

A: The swastika.

Q: Was that by then, in the town?

A: Everybody had the swastika. Everybody. I don't know where it came from. So quickly. The A –

Q: I mean to an 11 year old girl.

A: What is, just what's happening? What is happening? And then you'll find out. This is how I found out how things are getting worse. Now we're finding out. A very nice teacher came in one morning to the classroom and all the kids jumped up Heil Hitler with the arms. That was the law. And Lily and I jumped up too. We thought it has to be this way. And the teacher said Trudy and Lily, you say good morning. You do not say Heil Hitler or he said you don't have to say. So we thought ok, **Guten Morgen**. We never saw the teacher again. It was the last time. He just disappeared. Never knew what happened. I would think some of the kids went home, told mommy and daddy – unh. Away. Ok life goes on. About a month later, another teacher said to the class. He was our math teacher. His name was Richter. I remember that. Well I guess you'll see why I remember it. He said I have good news for you children. We are going on a field trip to Linz. Big city in Austria. So I'm handing out the forms and you get your parents to sign it and Lily and I were it's great. So we went home and showed it to Papa and he said I guess it's ok. He had a little thinking but I thought well that's Papa. He worries about everything. And Lily went home and she got permission. And we brought the forms back and the teacher takes the forms, looks at them, tears them up and says Lily and Trudy you cannot go. We do not take Jews. Then

this is now we cried. Why? What did we do? Now it's beginning to sink in. Something is with the Jews that they don't like. And he wasn't all nasty about it. He said I'm so sorry. And that was it. We couldn't go. So now this is beginning to sink in what is happening.

Q: At that time did any of the Christian children say anything to you about that?

A: No, I don't recall them. I think if it had been anything nasty or mean I would remember it, but there was nothing pro or con about it. Neither way, no. So it was beginning to be quite painful. Well then came the summertime and there was no school and Lily and I spent a lot of time together because our gentile friends were no longer our friends. They weren't allowed to play with us. So we spent time together and did what we could. We visited each other. We couldn't go to many places. You're not allowed to do anything. In the meantime –

Q: What weren't you allowed to do?

A: Well I mean to really my parents and her parents did not allow us to run around and to – because it was getting dangerous. My brother for example was in a gymnasium in St. Pölten which I think I mentioned to you. And he had just finished gymnasium. He was 17. And he was a valedictorian and the principal or the superintendent called him in to the office because they are graduating now and said Eric we will give you your diploma but you cannot come to graduation. So then I knew this. Eric was talking about it you know. And he said I can't go to graduation but at least I graduated. Eric always had a sense of humor about everything and he took things – I'll get to that a little bit later but now we are coming back from summer vacation and back to school.

Q: Was it frightening seeing German soldiers?

A: I wasn't that frightened. I kind of liked seeing them. They're marching you know. We weren't, maybe we were dumb or something. I don't know. But kids love to see marching. We weren't aware that the soldiers were going to – there was going to be a war. That was not -- but

they marched right by my house. I remember that. And waving to them and you know. It didn't last, believe me.
But now comes September. We are back in school.

Q: This is September 38.

A: Exactly, 38. And nothing much is happening and now we go right through until November 10th. And we're in school and we went, as I said, home to lunch every day to Tante Olga, Lily's mom. And we're going to lunch and it is very cold. And we're getting there and the door is open and a window is open. Sometimes she used to open a window to air it out but always close it and all that. And we walked in and Lily calls mama. No answer. Again we're running through the house, mama, mama. Nobody there. And I'm yelling Tante Olga where are you. We are home for lunch. We only have half an hour. No answer. Lily and I look at each other. Something's not right. I said what do we do? She said I know the **Tikler** family here in town, another Jewish family. Why don't we go there? Something's happened. So ok we started going down the street, when all of a sudden across from us, we're walking straight and perpendicular comes what we call the green Henry. It was a green police wagon. And in it is her father. And we see this and my uncle just waved goodby. And then we just were so scared. And we started running and we get to the Tikler house and they're all women, no men gathered in that house. And we said to my aunt, and she said what happened. How come we didn't know where we were, where you were. She said I didn't have time. They came and chased me out. And they wouldn't even let me leave a note or go get you so what is going on.
Well nobody told us anything. The women were there and they were all very upset. An old woman who was uh, and babies. I mean there must have been ten or 12 people. Where's my mother? We don't know. So I said I'm going home. Oh you can't go alone. So Lily said I'll go with you cause I will. You can't stop me now. Now I'm getting independent. (laughs) So Lily and I start walking. And the distance was maybe a mile from where we were to my home. In Wiesenfeld. We get about half way. I see a bicyclist coming towards us. There was minimal traffic at that time. Nobody had a car, you know. It was, so here comes a bicycle rider. Even that was a big deal. Come closer. Who is it? My mother. She said papa is in jail. Where's Eric? He's in jail. Oh god. And uncle Isadore. We just saw him go by. They must have taken him to

jail. What happened? A Jewish kid, my mother is saying. Come on, let's go. I'm going to take you back to the Tiklers. We're all going to be together. The story was and everybody has heard the story. A Jewish kid killed a Nazi official and we're ok. Everybody paid I don't know how many marks. Plus being in prison. So that's what that day was Kristal night. They took my father into a jail in some other town, and my brother and they were sitting there and my mother. They were taking my mother too. But my mother, if you want to know somebody feisty, she was, she said you're not keeping me. You can shoot me first. You're not keeping me here. I got to go get my daughter. She didn't do anything. She's 11 years old. What. And they said ok, go, go, go. So that's how she got out.

So we went back to the house and all the women. Uh, what are we going to and kvetching and crying and my mother said. You know what. We don't have time for this. We better sit down here and think about what to do. So perhaps we could find, she just made things up to keep them busy, to get some clothes together. Or get whatever we need. Get some suitcases. Maybe do whatever we have to do, even if the suitcases are empty. Just, you never know what we have to do. And they said ok and they, I don't know what they did. But by that time things were coming towards supper time. And my mother said now maybe we could find something to eat. Could make a sandwich. Have some fruit. And so we all did that. They did that.

And now it's getting later and later and now there is a banging on the door. Must have been eight, nine o'clock at night. Open. Open up. It's the Gestapo. So everybody is cowering. My mom close to the door and she said yes. And he said how many of you are there. And my mother said I don't know. And get out. So my mother said what do you mean get out. You get out in the street all of you. Now. You can grab what you can and go and so people who had been futzing around and looking for clothes. They had stuff and they had a coat and whatever we had. And we were on the street now. It's cold. Quite cold. My mother says what are you going to do with us? We decided. There were three of them. You are going into that factory that's a few streets, I don't recall where exactly. Was an empty factory. And they were going to put us in there and we were to stay there. And this was a cement floor and nothing else.

So we get there and all of a sudden, my mother stops and she said to them, excuse me, sir. I want to a, tell you something. And he said yes, what do you want? She said when we were young and I lived in that house where Lily lives now, and my aunt. I used to live here and you used to come to the back door and ask for me and when I came out, you tried to kiss me. And he

said to her. Shut up. She said but you did. What if I spoke very loud and everybody would know that you, a Nazi officer, kissed a Jewish girl. And he said if you don't shut up, I'm going to send you and the kid to Dachau. Meaning me. She said that's very good officer. You can send me and my kid but before you do, I'm going to scream it all over this town that you tried to kiss a Jewish girl. He said what the hell do you want? She said all I want is to take these people instead of putting us into the factory, to my home in Wiesenfeld. I have a big house and we can stay there. And of course they argued. And they can't do that and who do you think you are. And she said ok, it's your choice but I can scream. And I thought he'd shoot her right there.
Go ahead, he says. Take them and go. I have to laugh at her. Cause she said but it's so cold. We can't just walk. We've got this old lady and a baby. And he just he was getting crazy, this man. And the other officials heard him say what does she want? She can't walk. She says I want a truck and they said get her a damn truck. They got a truck. They loaded us on. They got us a driver and they got us a bodyguard with a machine gun or whatever. And they drove us to my parents' house.
So she saved the day. Now it took some time to find out what happened to my aunts and uncles. And for my father to be released and in the meantime, while we were all mulling around in my big house, my mother sent a telegram to a cousin we had here in the United States. My cousin. It was my mother's niece who married an American physician. And this physician had gone to Vienna years before in the 20s, to study at the University of Vienna. And

Q: So you'll continue.

A: Well he went to study, post graduate work at the University of Vienna and he met my cousin and they dated while he was there. And he was there about a year or so. And came back to the United States and sent her a telegram. Will you marry me? And she sent back yes. So he came back again and they were married. So lucky for us. Now she's in America, he's an American citizen. And my mother sent them a telegram. Can you send us an affidavit. We got to have something because Hugo is in jail and Eric is in jail and they sent an affidavit to Eric. To get him out first, my brother. Because they were really after the young men.
So they sent Eric an affidavit and to make a long story short, they let Eric out. And this was maybe December now. Kristal night was November. So December. And he was able to get a

visa and a passport to come to the United States and he came alone. And my cousins, they picked him up and they took him in and they took care of him. Now –

Q: Was there any destruction on Kristallnacht in your town or in your father's store?

A: Not in my father's store. No. I think he was a very well-known man and he helped a lot of people. Not that it make any difference to some of them, but it did help. I'm sure.

Q: So you did not see any destruction?

A: So, I would recall it but no destruction. No it was I think there were a couple of people who came to our door at midnight to see if they could help. Good people. Solid people. One woman was my mother's washerwoman. And she risked her life to come to do whatever she could do. She even brought bread. She thought we were starving. But before that I forgot to put this very important element in.

Right after the Anschluss not much time passed when a Nazi officer came to my house. And I happened to be – it was a two story house. And downstairs was the kitchen and a dining room. My father's office, his business. Upstairs were bedrooms and a music room. And I had a baby grand piano. And an old fashioned bathroom. We did not have running water. We had a beautiful home but there was no running water yet. My mother wanted to institute that and hadn't gotten around to it and blah, blah, blah. So.

This Nazi officer came to the door and said -- I was alone. Where's your mother. And I said she's upstairs. Take me. so I take him and I called her and I said, **Mupik**, somebody to see you. She comes out. He says to her, where's your piano. She said, show me. so she shows him. It will be taken within the hour. And my mother said, what? What do you mean, it'll be taken within the hour. He said don't you know yet, lady, that Jews are not allowed to have anything of value. And she is thinking that this is a joke. And he said now I'm going to give you a chance. Make a decision. It's either you or the piano. They were going to take either the piano or they'll take her. Now what do you do? Even when you are feisty. You can't stop that. So that was I forgot all about that. It was at the very beginning.

Q: Do you remember them taking the piano?

A: Oh god yes.

Q: What were your thoughts?

A: Crying.

Q: You stood there crying.

A: I was crying. But we still had the house until two weeks after that. They came again and they saw my father. And they said to him you know that you cannot possess your house any longer. No business, no nothing. I want you to sign an IOU. And my father said I'm not signing anything. You, you what do you mean, my house. We are here to possess, to take possession of your business. And your house. And my father said and what are we supposed to do. He said well we're not evil people. We will allow you to live upstairs. So it took a while to straighten all this out. It was awful. We had to move upstairs. And if we wanted to cook and eat, the bathroom happened to have a stove where, for heating. So we had to cook on that. There was a bathtub in there. Toilet was somewhere else. And we had to go buy our own groceries.
And the house was no longer – he had to sign it over to the German regime. It wasn't Austria anymore. It was all German. So that's how we lost everything.

Q: What was your father's state of mind then?

A: My father was a very, he didn't, he coped with everything. I mean he thought things through and he – this is what is happening. Let's figure out what do we do now. And it was very difficult for him of course, my god. So ok, now that's gone. Then later that was March, I think or, Hitler took in March so you know as the weeks went by all this happened.
So then as I said, Kristal night, I already explained that. Papa is still sitting in jail.

Q: Do you know if at that time you knew what had happened in Germany on Kristal night?

A: Oh yeah because we knew it happened in every –

Q: How did you know that? Do you know how your parents knew it?

A: Well we had a radio.

Q: You had a radio.

A: We were allowed to have the radio. So and the talk, calling on, I mean you can't just whisper these things anymore. It's out now. And so we are now old enough to know what's going on. You know and especially after Kristal night it was totally clear for Lily and me and her brothers that nobody, they hate the Jews and god knows what's going to happen to us. So now comes the affidavit for Eric.
Now he's allowed to go. What's going to happen to papa now? What's going to happen to us? So Eric comes to the United States and he's being taken care of by the American physician and his wife. And Eric is learning English and he gets himself a job. They lived in New York. So Eric is in New York. Now Woodside, Long Island which is almost part of Manhattan. And somebody from Europe told him that there is a guy in New Jersey and he works in a factory and he used to know papa and Eric why don't you try to contact him and it worked. He contacted this man and the man got Eric a job in that factory. In New Jersey. It wasn't all that bad to travel you know, to commute but –

Q: Who had the money to pay for Eric to come over?

A: My father.

Q: Do you know what ship he was on?

A: No, not, not what. I don't know what he was on. I can only tell you later what we were on. And –

Q: So he gets this offer, this job in New Jersey.

A: So he takes the job and a man said to him Eric, you look a little bit depressed all the time. What's the matter? And he said I'm worried about my parents and my sister. They are still over there. And this man said to him, well why don't you write to President Roosevelt and tell him. And Eric said yeah, right. I can't, I can't even speak the language. I can't write and I'm going to tell the president, hey you know. And this man said well you never know. And Eric said no I'm not going to do it. This man kept pushing. He said Eric you got to try things. And Eric finally said he got disgusted. He said ok already. Will you help me? And the man said I'll help you write the letter.

So Eric writes this letter. Dear Mr. President whatever my parents, my little sister. I'm very worried. It's a terrible time. Sent it, forgets about it. Two, three weeks pass by. A letter comes from the office of the President. From his press secretary. Dr. Mr. Wellisch, the president has been made aware of your situation and has directed me to tell you what to do and how you can get your parents out. And it had to be a farmer's visa because the United States had a quota, didn't let everybody in.

But if you were, knew anything about agriculture, you had a chance. Luckily my father owned a farm. I've got pictures over there. I can show you later. He owned the farm right in Wiesenfeld. It was a big farm. He owned it but he didn't run it. Somebody else who ran it, but papa was the kind of man who was well informed about everything. He owned the farm. He knew about farming.

He knew about lumber and everything that he did, he was well informed about you know.

So my brother was able to communicate to papa to apply for a farmer's visa. To make a long story short, he got it, but it took from January or February until the end of August for us to get out. We lived under the Hitler regime for a long, long time and things were getting harder and harder. But he did get the farmer's visa. And he was able to have enough money to have transportation for us to come to the United States and the ship we were on was called the

Volendam. So in August of 28th we arrived in New York and this was about a week before Poland was invaded when that was it. Nobody got out.

Q: We will get to that of course. You said things got worse between January and August when you left. What kind of things, how did your life change? What weren't you allowed to do?

A: We weren't allowed to do anything. I mean we were just sitting tight. My father was allowed though to go to different offices to try to get the visa. He had to do that. And you have to get a passport. And you have to get stuff together to, what are you allowed to take out. What are you not allowed to take? That kind of stuff. That he was allowed to do, to go to Vienna and do that. But other than that, nothing. I mean –

Q: When did he get out of prison?

A: Well he must have been from Kristal night, November tenth. I don't know. About a month or – yeah.

Q: What other restrictions did you have in that January to August time span? You, as you –

A: Well I couldn't play with anybody. As far as a child is concerned. I was able to go to Lily you know and we could be together. She was with us anyway. They were in my house until all these people that my mother rescued kept us busy because there were a lot of people to feed and the bedding and –

Q: And so they were up on the second floor with you?

A: Yeah. In different bedrooms. My grandmother lived with us so she, and she had died. But we were able to use her – she lived in. She had a kitchen and two or three bedrooms and so we were able to put these people in there. And my parents' bedroom, my bedroom. Had lovely music room. Everything was used. And we left them there.

Q: Did you see any signs or in the street about Jews not being able to do certain things?

A: Not there, in this town. There was nothing except where my brother was in that city, in St. Pölten, there were signs on the benches around the schools. No Jews allowed. They couldn't sit there. And my uncle, the one whom I told you we saw in that green wagon, he was taken to Vienna to scrub the sidewalk with a toothbrush. You've heard about those things. So he was one of them. But he made it. Now the sad part is that after we were here already, we were very concerned about the rest of the family. Especially and Lily, I was worried more about Lily. We were like sisters. And the edict more or less was that the Nazis were after the men and the young boys. And so my uncle and my, Lily's older brother were able to get out through some Jewish organization here. I don't remember which one. And they left Austria. They left Wiesenfeld where they were in my house. And came to the United States and my uncle thought he could get his wife and Lily and Otto out. And never made it. So he's here with his son and with the guilt. Why did I do this? And you know how you can, my cousin is still living in St. Louis. Lily's older brother. He is ok but another, there are so many stories attached to what I am telling you. It would take me all day.

Q: Let's talk about your leaving. What did you say to Lily when it was time to leave?

A: When it was time to leave I said nothing. My father told me to be very quiet. We are leaving midnight on a train that we didn't have a school in Wiesenfeld but we had a train station which to this day doesn't make any sense. We were going to take the train to Vienna and from Vienna we were going to Holland. And I'm not to say anything to anybody. It was too dangerous. So –

Q: What did you take with you?

A: Ah, we had a few things we were allowed to take. At that time it was still not as bad as later on. I mean ridiculous to even mention it cause nobody lived anymore. But we could take our clothing and my mother had some silver spoons and she had that in her suitcase and that was ok and this necklace. That's hers. That was my grandmother's. Now I don't remember how she got

that out, but that and nothing else. As far as jewelry is concerned because one day the Nazi came in and asked again where is your mother? And my mother is – where is your jewelry? It's in the drawer wherever. Open it. She opens it and he goes through it and he finds her engagement ring which was a gorgeous ring. An emerald surrounded by diamonds. Ah, ok, in the pocket. And I had a little ruby that I loved. Oh, is that the kid's? Oh that's mine. Yes. Oh, ok. That kind of thing so but papa said you know that's not the worst. We're getting out now so when we did get out, this was in the dead of night in August. And I couldn't say anything and I was pretty upset about that. But we –

Q: Did you take anything besides clothes, like books or anything?

A: Yeah, we took books. My mother's, she had a beautiful library and she packed them in some kind of box and I don't know. I guess of all things you know but when you're in the situation like this you want to take something that –

Q: Did you take any dolls or anything?

A: No couldn't take anything. Mm, mm not that. Mostly clothing and no linens. Nothing. Mostly clothing and a few odds and ends.

Q: So it was August and what port did you leave from? You went –

A: Well now this is another story.

Q: You took the train to Vienna, you said.

A: Took the train to Vienna and my father's aunt was there at the train station. And I don't remember much about anybody else but she was there because she was my very favorite aunt. And she hugged me and she said you should be very happy. You know why. I said why should I be so happy? She said not only because you're getting away from here but because you won't

have to go to school on Saturday in America. (laughs) and we cried and she said my darling I don't think I'll ever see you again. And I never did.

So we got on that train. When we get to the border the Gestapo comes on. Checking papers. Come to papa. Papers, passport, takes the papers, walks away and brings another officer and says there's something wrong here. Get off the train. Take the kid, take your wife. Get off. We had to get off. The train goes away. That was hell. They took my father into an office and they told my mother and me to sit and wait and we sit and we wait. And train after train is coming and going. Our train long gone. No Papa. Now what.

I said to my mother I think we're going to die. And she pushed and she said we are not dying. I, if I have anything to do with these guys we (laughs). They could have killed her more than once. She had a mouth and I mean it was about three or four hours later when Papa came out. We can go. What happened? They did not believe that he knew anything about farming. Because he was a businessman. And they brought in a knowledgeable agricultural expert who grilled him for two hours about cows and milk and what have you. And Papa thank God, he knew the answers. He was well informed about everything. And they finally had to, well they didn't have to let him go but they let him go.

So we got on the next train and went to Rotterdam. And they met the Jewish committees and even the Dutch people. They met every train coming from Germany. And they put us up in private homes, in hotels. Wherever there was room and we were put up. At first I think it was a hotel. We didn't stay long because the ship was leaving anyway but they treated us like royalty. They were so kind, the Dutch people. And when we did finally get on that ship it was of course, the Volendam, a Dutch ship, Dutch crew and they treated the immigrants beautifully. And I remember having to eat brick ice cream three times a day. They brought this ice cream. And to this day if you show me brick ice cream I will ugh. (laughs) And we got here –

Q: Were you sad about leaving Europe, leaving –

A: Well you know when, I was distracted a lot. First of all you get into Holland. You meet all the -- another country. You're going to a hotel. So much distraction. But then it hit me. What's happening? What, what, am I ever going to go home again? What's going to happen to Lily? Lily, Lily, Lily. And all my other relatives. Lily was killed with Otto and my aunts in the 40s.

In Sobibor or someplace like that. Shot in the mass grave. And other people. Horrible stories that my family suffered like so many others.

So anyway, this is interesting. We come on the Volendam, right. Took us I think almost two weeks because we found out later from the captain that the ocean was mined. And he was trying to figure out what the best – where would the Germans not put a mine. So that's why, luckily you know we avoided that. The Volendam went from New York to I believe Cuba with some refugees. Dropped them off. Went back. And that's all I ever knew. And after I was here and married already, my brother in law took us to a very fancy restaurant in New York. It was some kind of celebration and he took my husband and me and he and his wife and, and each table almost had their own waiter. It was a bit much. They come and put the napkin on your lap and the, and I'm not you know, and this one waiter said, spoke with an accent. And he was very nice and very courteous and I said so where are you from. And he said I'm from Holland and I said you know your people are wonderful. And he said oh madam, do you know anything about Holland? And I said well I'll just tell you briefly. We came from Austria through Germany. And your people helped us and he said oh yes. He said may I ask you what ship. And I said the Volendam. And he said oh, almost like Oh. I said are you ok? And he said at that time I was a crew member on the Volendam. And we had a trip to Cuba and on the way back we hit a mine and all my crew members died. I am one of the very few survivors.

And I said I think that's the end of my dinner. I can't, can you – That was quite a – so that was one of the stories that made me very sad but I said I'm so glad you're alive so. He had tears in his eyes and he walked away.

Q: Do you remember the organization that helped you and the Jewish – was it the Joint Distribution Committee, in Holland?

A: Or the Jewish, what else is there? What, we had so many organizations.

Q: Now you're in the United States. What did the United States mean to you as a young girl?

A: Well I tell you, the first impression, seeing the skyscrapers was – I said this cannot be. This is, I come from this little town in Wiesenfeld. Vienna is gorgeous. Have you ever been? It's a

beautiful city. It doesn't have, it has some now though. But this is ridiculous. (laughs) So I was very impressed you know but very, my English was minimal. I did have English in school. But yeah, it's difficult when you're in the country and you try to converse with people. You don't understand because it's, you think, why do they talk so fast. But I had to go to school. And I was admitted to first, to sixth grade. Now here I am 13 now. So I am the oldest in the classroom. And the children were very nice to me. And the teacher explained – her name was Mrs. Sacks, a Jewish lady, that Trudy has just come from another country and she was trying to put a little history in there to tell the kids why this is happening. Why I'm here. And they were listening and very polite and very sweet and can I help you and all that.
So the teacher said you don't have to do anything, to me. Just listen to the language. And I'm listening and I guess I'm learning. And three months passed by and she said we're having a vocabulary test today. We're going to have a hundred words and I raised my hand and she said yes. I said could I try it. And she said yes. I got a hundred. And the next day this was after she comes in and she said, I have an announcement to make, class. We had this vocabulary test yesterday and I want you to know that Trudy got one hundred percent and they all stood up and that made me and that was America, my goodness. Whereas in Europe you have to sit quietly and most of the time you have your hands on the table and, and you don't say a word and you don't, and here the children got up and celebrating this. I thought America is wonderful.

Q: Where were you living then?

A: Woodside. And then I skipped sixth grade and went to seventh grade. And I was in seventh grade for a few months. I don't remember how long. And I skipped to eighth grade. And then I moved to New Jersey with my parents. And both my parents worked in factories and had a little room. I couldn't live with them. They had no room. I lived with my cousins. The ones who brought me. I stayed with them for oh a year or two. Well while my parents were looking for work. Oh boy it was hard. So they only had one room.

Q: Were you in touch with Lily at that point?

A: No more.

Q: Once you left –

A: Once I left –

Q: You had no communication.

A: No, nope, nope, no. So at any rate, then my parents were able to get a little apartment. One bedroom and they got a couch so I could sleep in the living room.

Q: Where was your brother then?

A: Let's see now. My brother, this was already, oh. My brother, he got a job after the factory in a tobacco, on a tobacco farm and he worked there in the summer. And again somebody said to him, Eric you seem like a smart guy. You want to do this for the rest of your life? And Eric said no I don't want to do it but right now I don't have much of a choice. And this man said did you know that about Johns Hopkins is giving out scholarships and Eric said so what? And this man said you are smart. You ought to try it. Again, the same thing. The way he spoke about Roosevelt. Oh he says, don't be ridiculous. To make a long story short, he applied and he got it. Got a scholarship to Hopkins. Came for an interview and the dean, whoever interviews, said we have these two scholarships, specifically for immigrants.
So that's the good news. You are definitely in. You want to hear the bad news. And Eric thought oh God. You know I've had enough bad news but what's the bad. He said you have to do it in three years, not four. And Eric said so what. That's not bad news. I can do that. So he said to him, if you think you can do it in three years, you're in. What would you like to study? And Eric said law. Man leans back. He said Eric, I don't think so. You have such an accent you'll never make it as a lawyer. Pick something else. So Eric said well ok, I'll be a chemist. That's what he became. Went right through Hopkins in three years. The war came. He enlisted. Then he came back and went to Columbia, got a masters. And then Purdue and got a PhD so works out ok.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Trudy Schonberger. This is track number two and you just finished talking about your brother so let's get back to your story. You're in high school now.

Trudy Schonberger: I'm in high school in New Jersey. It's a breeze. I loved it. And now I'm graduating. And I'm graduating with honors and I was very happy about that. Now what do I do?

Q: Did you tell all your friends about your experience? They knew?

A: Well they knew. You know I had an accent and how come and I did tell them some. I didn't tell them all that, you know but they knew and they learned some from teachers, but not enough. It wasn't taught.

Q: How were your parents' English?

A: Not too great. We had more fun with that.

Q: So you continued to speak German at home?

A: Yes. My father's English was better than my mother's. Oral English. My mother was, her writing English was better than my father's. So they'd always have a repartee. You see, I can do better than you and so that was funny. And he said to her one day, you know Irene, they have a good, your favorite pie downstairs in the bakery. I can't think of the name, but you know what your favorite pie is. And she said oh why didn't you bring me one? I didn't have money with me. Go down. You can get it. She goes down, comes back. No pie. What happened? They said they never heard of it. And my father said, what do you mean they never heard of it? What did you ask them for? She said I asked them for a merchant marine pie and they never heard of it. What

it was, was lemon meringue but it was war time and she got confused. (laughs) That's the English.

Q: So now you're graduating?

A: I'm graduating. Now what do I do. My parents working in the factory. We just about made it to pay the rent and live. Now what. And I always wanted to do something in medicine. And it may be the influence of the physician who brought us over because he was a wonderful person and a wonderful doctor. So I suppose he had this influence of what I wanted to be.

Q: Did we get his name?

A: Leo **Lefkowitz**. And he was in the war too. Oh god, that's another story I'll tell you. Anyway that was, what could I possibly be? So papa said you know what. Maybe you can just find a job for the summertime and we'll discuss it and see what you can do. You know you should really be a typist. I said I don't want to be a typist. Yes, that's good for a girl. You know you, I don't want to be a typist. I hate typing and I hate paperwork. Get a job in the summer, whatever. What happened was friends of my parents were neighbors of a couple who had two children and they needed a babysitter living in for the summer. Do you want to do this? And I said I like kids. She said, why don't you – I will call them. Maybe they'll have you for an interview. I went for the interview. I got the job. She had to go for surgery and she needed somebody to be with the two little ones. And as she is recovering, he said to me, his name was Dr. Dan Moore. What, he said you and I haven't talked about you at all. He said to me what do you want to do now? The job is almost over here with us. What? I said I don't know. What are you interested in? I said oh I don't know. Something in medicine. I just, I don't want to be a nurse. And he said to me, do you know what I do? And I said no, not really. He said I'm a biophysicist. And I have a laboratory in Columbia University right across the bridge. They lived in Leonia, New Jersey which is you've heard of Fort Lee recently. Next door.
He said would you like to see my laboratory. And I said oh yes. So he said to his wife. I'm going to take Trudy and I'm just going to show her around. And she was lovely. She said whatever. So he took me.

Q: This is what, 43, 44?

A: This is 45. I graduated, yeah, 45.

Q: So the war is over.

A: The war is just about over I think. It was August. When did it end?

Q: Well in Europe, it was in the spring. Japan was in the summer.

A: Yeah, ok. Japan we're still going. Ok so he shows me his laboratory. It was at Columbia College of physicians and surgeons. And I was so impressed with this whole thing and going to a big laboratory. What, he said, I do, I do some research in an area called electrophoresis. And he said of course you don't know what it is because it's so new to all of us and it is the separation of proteins in the blood, to study proteins, cause there wasn't too much known. And I thought well ok, you know. Then he said to me, how would you like to work for me? He said I cannot pay you but I'd like you to learn. And I almost fell over. I said Dr. Moore, I do have to speak to my parents about this. I'm 18 years old and I don't want to make – this is just too much to comprehend. And I went back home and I called my parents. And I said I got to talk to you papa. What is it? I have to come home. I got to talk to you.
So they let me off for a few hours. I went home and I said this is what's happening. What do you think? And he said I don't have to think. Take it. He said it's like going to school. Doesn't cost you anything? Ok. You won't make any money but we'll figure it out. We'll give you money for the subway and the bus and we'll feed you and see what happens. That's how I got the job. And about six months or so later, he said I can pay you a little bit. So he started paying me $50 a month. I thought oh it is fantastic. But there is a hang up here. Uh oh. I think you should go to school. Oy. What, what, what I don't have any money. He said I'm going to give you a day off a week and you can go downtown and start taking courses at Columbia. He gave me a day a week and I started taking physics of all things. I thought I must be crazy because he was a

biophysicist. So I took physics and as time went on chemistry and more and more stuff. And he started to pay me more and more.
And then in 1947 I got married. And they came to my wedding and I learned a lot. So I thought I was the luckiest girl in the world. At any rate, the job ended because I married and we moved to Montana.

Q: We'll get to that in a minute. During the war years, when you were here with your parents, did they have any communication with family back in Europe? Did they know what was happening? What was their state of mind? You know talking about –

A: They were all dead by then.

Q: So once you got here, your folks had no communication with –

A: Well when Eric enlisted, he was in the Battle of the Bulge. You want to hear a little aside, you might like this story. He was a sergeant and he was in charge of a platoon. And you know about the Battle of the Bulge, how horrible. And they were stuck in the ice and the snow and Eric was – and he's trying to get a jeep out. I don't know what. When a voice came above him and said, what the hell are you doing sergeant? And Eric didn't even look up. He said what the hell do you think I'm doing? And the voice said look at me sergeant. And Eric looks up and he said oh my god. It's General Patton himself. (laughs)
So anyway they made it through and where were we?

Q: I was asking if your parents had any knowledge of what was happening to the extended family.

A: Well because of Eric who stayed after the war to try to find what was going on.

Q: No, but I meant during –

A: During. No.

Q: No knowledge.

A: No, no.

Q: Do you remember your parents talking about –

A: Oh yes.

Q: During the war.

A: Yes, oh yes, oh yes. Then we all, you know I was of course already of a more mature age that I could participate and –

Q: Did they try to contact anybody in Europe?

A: The only ones that we were able to –

Q: During the war.

A: During the war was a cousin who made it, a cousin of my father who made it to Bolivia. That's another story, that's --. He, her husband, she was my father's cousin. And her husband was my mother's cousin so that's a little – Kristal night. His name was Richard. And he was taken away and sent to Dachau. And she was left alone with her baby. In Vienna. And the Nazis said to her, if you can get yourself out of here, I'll let him out and he can go with you. Let's get him out. And so she starts going from one embassy to another embassy. Ends up at the Bolivian embassy, gets permission and they really let him out. It's now a few days before departure and the kid gets scarlet fever and they can't go. So now you start this whole thing again. But she was smart. She said I might as well go to the Bolivian embassy and tell them what has happened. Maybe they'll – and they did. But it took time. You know everything takes time. In the meantime the Nazis come and take this and finally they're able to go by ship to Cochabamba

which is the second largest city in Bolivia. They get there. I don't know how long it took. Heinz, the little boy, who is now 76, still living in Vienna, whom I saw a few years ago, so they're on that ship and they're getting to Cochabamba and it's on the weekend. And Richard says I do not feel well. And all the immigrants are in that camp. That's where the refugees had to go to an immigration center. And they said oh that happens all the time because the altitude is very difficult on people. You'll be ok.

Richard wasn't ok. He got worse, but there was no doctor available on the weekend. He had to wait until Monday and he's getting a fever and a lot of pain. Finally Monday comes. Richard can't talk anymore, he's in so much pain. The doctor says you have a burst appendix. We've got to go quick. They get him to the hospital, put him on the table and he died. So she can't get out with the little boy. She didn't know what to do and that's where my father's communication began. At least to somebody. She had no idea what happened to any, any of the family. Until much later on we found out. Eric found out. My cousins, they were all in **Theresienstadt**, most of them. And Eric found her. This is my Aunt Elsa, the one who met me at the train station, said you don't have to, her daughter was in Theresienstadt, survived and but she was deathly ill. And Eric found her, found her in Vienna, after and saw how sick she was. She had TB. She had kidney disease. She had, you name it. And he arranged it for her to go to a sanatorium in Switzerland. Until she got well. So he was able to save her and her husband whom she met in Theresienstadt. He was a roofer. His name was Alexander **Bernot**. He was in Theresienstadt and he saw Anna scrounging around for some food and they got a little bit. He tried to help her. He was a roofer in Vienna. He did most of the roofs of the big, like St. Stephen's and he was – and so the Nazis used him to fix the roof here and there. They didn't care if the water dripped down on the inmates, but they wanted their roofs to be free from rainwater and all that. So he did that so he had a little access to more things. And then the rumor came that the war is coming to an end and Americans or British bombers are going to bomb.

So the inmates said so now we're going to, we survived this. Now we're going to get killed by – he climbed up on the roof of the barracks, with red paint. And he painted red crosses on the roofs. If he had been caught he would have been dead. But the thing was that some of these roofs leaked and the red paint dripped on some of the prisoners. They had no way to get rid of it and some of the Nazis saw them and they thought they had some kind of terrible disease. They ran. (laughs)

Q: Let's now get back to you and you said you met your husband. How did you meet your husband?

A: I met him at a dance, at a synagogue dance during the war. He had been discharged. He had been hit by a, grazed by a bullet and he started to get migraines so they discharged him you know.

Q: He was American?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you got married, in what year?

A: 47.

Q: 47. And so you then moved to Montana?

A: He was a teacher and he was a teacher and they paid better in Montana than they did in New Jersey. And he had a friend from the army who said hey why don't you come to Montana? See how the west lives. Instead of in that crowded east coast so –

Q: Your husband's name?

A: Seymour Schonberger.

Q: So you moved, where in Montana did you move?

A: Oh, a small little town called Harlem. But originally they spelled Harlem with two A's like the Dutch. But they changed it then to H-A-R and it was also a little town and the people were wonderful and you know it was just a –

Q: Was there a Jewish population there?

A: Oh no, not in Harlem but it was, there was one family who lived about 40 miles away and they took us to services, to Yom Kippur, to North Dakota to (laughs). And Susan was born in Montana.

Q: Your first child?

A: Yeah. And I thought oh my god, what did we do? This is ridiculous. I'm here in wild country. It was the best care I ever had. Such care. When it was due, when she was due already I'm in labor and called the hospital and they said come on in. I get there. No doctor. Where's the doctor? Oh, he went hunting. He's out in the Rockies. We have to send a posse. (laughs)

Q: How long did you stay in Montana?

A: Two years.

Q: Two years.

A: And we came back. I wanted to come back. My parents were alone. Eric was, where was he at that time? Still getting his doctorate maybe. And it was time to come back.

Q: So you came back to New York? New Jersey?

A: Well to New Jersey for a time and then my husband got a job in Connecticut, New London, and we moved there. And I didn't work.

Q: You stayed home. Did you have any other children?

A: I have a son born in New London. Then we moved to East Hamden, Connecticut and from East Hamden, where did we go? We went to I moved, near New Haven. And my husband got a beautiful job as director of music at a regional school system called Amity, one of the best in the country. Well known for its curriculum and he was lucky enough to get, he was lucky. I wasn't so lucky. He hired a choral teacher and that choral teacher had never been married and she kind of flirted with him and he fell for her and they had an affair and it broke up my marriage. Kaput. So he always said I'm coming back and it's over and I fell for this whole shtick. Had two children. I didn't, I was terrified. And he got a principal-ship in Enfield, Connecticut, away from her now, this woman. And he said I promise it's over and we'll start over again and Susan was going to college now at this time. Just starting. Steve was last year of high school. Stupidly enough I said ok. And we sold the house, moved to Suffield, where we lived and the affair had not ended. It kept on going and going. And then finally it was time to say goodby. You know I can't take this anymore. He married her and got Parkinson's disease and he died. But before he died, and still dealing with this illness she said I want a divorce. I'm not taking care of you. So I made it, you have to make it, you make it. And, and in 1972 papa died. And **Mutti** was alone. They managed to buy a little house in East Hamden Connecticut. And they loved it. A little garden and but papa died and my mother didn't drive. In a small town so she came to live with me. And we made it together. She did the cooking and people said what. You're letting her do all that stuff. And I said yes. She wants to do it, she can – whatever she doesn't want to do, she doesn't have to do. And she died about 16 years ago at the age of one hundred. What else?

Q: Can we now talk about some of your thoughts and feelings about what you went through? Do you feel Austrian at all?

A: No. I feel completely American, except for the music part in me which I feel very much, I think Viennese. Is that silly? You know all the composers and that I feel, but when I – and the beautiful music, I just, that's in me.

Q: Did you play on that beautiful piano that you had? So you had music. That was one of your interests was music.

A: That was my – but I wasn't any good. I mean I had to stop but the teacher couldn't come any more. My mother was very much interested in music. And then the people, the doctor and his wife that I lived with in Woodside was all music.

Q: So you were surrounded by music?

A: I was surrounded and they were wonderful. They took me whether I liked it or not to Carnegie Hall to hear Sibelius or Shostakovich. Well I wasn't too thrilled with that at the time but my cousin Leo, he said sit down. I'm going to talk to you about this. So you know you learn.

Q: You said you feel American now?

A: Oh yes. I've been her 70 some years.

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

A: I was just talking to my neighbor who, he's a doctor. Next door here, who's from the south who has part German in him and he's very much pro-Israel.

Q: Is he German Jewish or German?

A: No, he's not Jewish. But I could, but he's very Jewish oriented. He's an atheist. And he says to me you know finally I'm not, I don't believe in any of this religious stuff. It causes all the problems but if I had to choose, I'd be a Jew. Regardless. I said to him the other day about, I said Germany has grown and is rich in economics and I said deep down, I hate to say this, I resent it. And I can't help it and I know German people and I'm friendly, but there is this residual feeling and it isn't just the Germans, it's the Austrians too.
And the Austrians in many ways were worse, well you can't be worse. You can't be worse, but they were I mean, they welcomed Hitler with open arms.

Q: Did you ever see him?

A: No, not, no I heard him speak. At the **Heldenplatz** in Vienna when he came into Vienna.

Q: On the radio?

A: Yeah. I did see, I think I did see Goering, marching in, big guy with his troops but you know then it didn't impress me very much until later when you think oh I saw that. I wish I could have.

Q: You were saying you feel American.

A: Oh yes. And I think you know as many problems as we have, it's still the best. If it weren't for America, I would not be talking to you I'm sure.

Q: What was it like to become a citizen?

A: It was great. I had to become a citizen by myself because at the age when I turned 18 you had to -- first of all there was a five year span before you, but if you turned 18, you cannot become a citizen with your parents. You had to apply on your own. So this was in New York and I had to have two witnesses and my boss, this Dr. Moore from Columbia said I'd be happy to be a witness and an aunt of my husband's. We went and I was just so proud. And they did, I don't remember them asking many questions. Who's the president? Oh, Roosevelt. You know, and, and the judicial system. They didn't ask much. Ok. I was very happy.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through what you did, those difficult years in Austria?

A: No, there isn't anger. It would be – how can you just say oh no I'm not angry. I'm mostly angry at all the people that I lost. Such sadness and how can people do this to anybody? How can you not be angry? Or what is that feeling? But it's not, I don't even say hatred but an anger. An anger that people, I thought we were civilized in the world now but this went on.
One more thing that might interest you. When we, when we were divorced and I hadn't worked since Columbia, a good friend, we lived right near New Haven, near Yale. And this woman, her

husband was a research position there said you know you're going through all this trauma. You really should get a job. And I said to her, Gloria, I haven't worked in 15 years. What can I do? Wash dishes or – she said no, no, no. You have experience. Go to Yale and apply. I said you are crazy. I'm not doing that. And she nudged like somebody nudged my brother. So I said all right, I'll go. I get to the employment office. Gentleman says what would you like to do and I said well I thought I could get a job in a lab but I tried to talk myself out of it because I was too –

Q: You seem to not have a college degree. You were just taking courses.

A: Not yet. I was taking courses.

Q: You were taking courses at Columbia.

A: Yeah but I left in the meantime so, so he said well what. I said I haven't worked in 15 years. He says did you work in a lab. I said yes. What did you do? I said electrophoresis. And the man said what did you just say? And I thought he didn't. I said electrophoresis. He said don't move. I said oh my god. This has nothing to do with electricity. He said please don't move. I have to make a call and he's making this call and he says Dr. **Herschkowitz**, I have a young lady here who did electrophoresis a long time ago. Oh really. Oh, ok. I'll tell her. By. Get over there now. He wants to see you. (laughs) I said you wait a minute. Do you know this is a little bit much? He said go over there. He has been looking for a technician who knows anything about electrophoresis for a year. So I go over there and there's that sweet little man and he said oh my god. Come in. I'm never going to let you go. (laughs) and I said well I do want to make you aware. I haven't held a pipette. I, they used to have long pipettes. Are you familiar with any of that stuff that you suck up? I mean I can't even do that. He said I'm going to give you a beaker and a pipette and I'm going to leave the room and you practice. So he gave me -- and it was like you, you just don't forget you know. And he said to me. He didn't ask me anything. He just said when can you start? And I said, I don't know. Tomorrow. He said good.

Q: So you worked in his lab for how long?

A: Four years. And then to the, he left and went to work in Texas with that heart specialist, DeBakey. He wanted me to go with him but I was married. Uh. So he sent me to the veteran's hospital. I worked there for two years. And then we moved. Then I guess it was Suffield but he came, my husband said everything's ok. We moved to Suffield. And I worked, got a job at Bay State Medical Center in Springfield, Massachusetts and I was there I think 20 years, clinical medicine.

Q: In the lab you mean?

A: Yeah in the laboratory, doing all the testing like if you need your blood drawn and all that.

Q: So did you ever, you didn't need a college degree?

A: Well then, they had a program. Because I didn't have my degree, I could get my license as an official medical technologist, if I choose to take a national exam but it had to be in all fields of medical technology – micro biology, blood banking, hematology, parasitology, chemistry. And oh, my god, that will, that's like taking a college course and I said you know what I'm going to do it.
And there were a couple of other people like me. We've had all this experience but not enough to get the, to goes through a degree is the best thing you should have a degree. So we thought we'd try it. We got a book. It was this thick. We had to study and finally the day comes of the exam and I thought, I think I'd rather be dead. And we had to take it in Boston and there were 400 of us taking this exam. And it was a whole half a day and the first question in chemistry that I should be familiar with, I didn't know the answer. I thought oh, all is lost. But I remember what a counselor had said. You don't know the answer, just go right to the next. Well I passed anyway. Then I became an official med tech.

Q: When your children were the age that you were during Kristallnacht and the difficult times that you had, did that bring back those memories? Did it –

A: Not because of no, not particularly when they were that age. No, no. It brings back –

Q: When do you think about it?

A: I think about it a lot.

Q: And as you've gotten older?

A: As I've gotten older, I think about it a lot. And I've been, I have my grandson, one of my grandsons lives in California. And they had a little girl and they called me and said oh god this is fantastic. What's her name? Her name is Elizabeth, but we're going to call her Lily because – so I have a Lily. She's two years old. She's adorable. So things like that come – and my older grandson, the one, his brother, who lives here who has Mattie. He named Mattie, Matthew Ian and I said where's the Ian? He said that is in honor of my grandmother, your mother Irene, starting with an I because he admires – he's not a talker. Never talks about you know things that oh what a great lady or blah. But he does things, he acts on it and I thought that was really in honor of Omi, they called her Omi.

Q: So you told your children about your experience?

A: Oh I wrote a book, not a book but in the form, it could be published as a book but I wrote my story.

Q: I meant when they were growing up.

A: Yes oh yes. I did and I think because of it my son went to Israel, became an Israeli citizen and served in their defense forces as a parachutist. So I said I don't have enough **tsures**, you've got to do that.

Q: Does he live in Israel?

A: He lives in New Jersey now. He's a writer. He's written quite a few books.

Q: What are your thoughts on Israel, considering what you went through?

A: I think if Israel had existed it wouldn't have happened. But I mean I think what they have done with that country is phenomenal. Why can't people do that? Why, I mean I say a lot of why's in my head. Why this? But it doesn't, not too many answers come from the why's. We don't know why anything. Do we?

Q: Do you feel you lost a part of your childhood?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did you ever get it back?

A: No. I don't think so. I had a good childhood before. But then it was over. It was over. Because of not just what was done to the whole world almost, but you dwell on the people you loved so much and suffered so much. And when I found out exactly what happened to them, it, you know everyone had a story of what happened. It just, no. I manage to enjoy my life. Because I think I have a lot of blessings now. I have my children and grandchildren and great -- and friends here and you have to enjoy what you can. The sad part too is what happened to my brother. Excuse me.
He had two sons. Wonderful guys and the younger one was 19 and he said to Eric, they lived in North Carolina. I have pain in my back. And he was an athlete, very athletic. So go to the doctor. X rays, couldn't find anything. Michael you got to stop for a while. Don't do any soccer or whatever he was doing. And it got better and then it came back and it got worse and it got worse and it got worse. And they finally discovered cancer of the muscle, called **rhabodymo** sarcoma. And they amputated. He went to New York to Sloan Kettering. They amputated his hip, all the way down. And six months later he's dead. Nineteen years old. So my brother has one son left, thank god. He's in Chicago. But Michael is dead. So that's when I get angry and I'm saying isn't it enough he had to lose this child.

I went back to school after I took this national exam. I did go back and I got a degree in liberal arts.

Q: Where did you go?

A: It was a community college. And I thought that's enough. I don't need that degree in –

Q: What brought you down to this area?

A: Susie my daughter and my son in law.

Q: Live nearby?

A: Like I mean I came here visiting all the time you know. And then when it was time, after my mother died, they -- it's too much. I had this house. Three bedrooms and dining room and basement, the living room. Oh too much. All alone. Who needs it?

Q: Have you been back to Austria?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What are your feelings when you go there?

A: Well I love Vienna the city. But feeling, I could not live here. And I met, they had a reunion for me. My, the children I went to school with when I was eight years old. We had a reunion. I didn't recognize any – one I recognized and she had been corresponding. She is the one who set it up, but I didn't know the rest, except for this young man who's now 88, who lived across the street from us. And we were always together. We were in school and I always liked him you know. And he said we should meet again in Vienna as long as you were here. And well, the very first time, before the – I was going to the reunion but he left a message with my cousin, the one my brother rescued that I should call him. So I called and he's very, very not rigid but precise

you know. The timing. I would like to meet you for breakfast tomorrow at nine AM at such and such you know. So I said ok. He came with a dozen yellow roses, handsome as can be and that was the first time I've seen him. He was a, an American POW, served in the German army and told me he had to join the Nazi party because they all did. Most of the men and women. But because he desperately wanted a university education. So he became what is equivalent here to the Secretary of our Interior. That's what he was in Austria. So that's nice.

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: I do.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: Nothing they can give us can make up for what was done to any of us. And I feel we deserve it. I have no qualms. They took away everything. They took away my education that I could have had. They took away my home. They took away life. Not my personal life, but life. Yeah. And I don't know how other people feel but I have no qualms about it. And if they paid me millions of dollars, they would not bring back Lily. Or Tante Elsa or Tante Olga or any of them. Uncle Ludwig, who was a jolly, jolly man. Always had a good sense of humor. Loved kids, never had any of his own. Was sent to Dachau. Came back a broken man. And one day he went downstairs. He never left his seat, didn't want to go anywhere, do anything and his brother my uncle Isadore was coming to visit him and all of a sudden he says to his wife, let's go meet him downstairs and she thought he's snapping out of it. Oh yeah. So he says to her. You wait at the front door and I'll go to the back door. Fine. Never saw him again. She's standing at the door. He's never coming. They found his coat on the edge, on the banks of the Danube. Now what, does it take a genius to figure out what, he just couldn't take it. What did they do to him? So should you not be angry? But you can't live it all the time, you know. It would make you do something to myself. I wouldn't be a good mother. I wouldn't be a good grandmother. You can't live that way. But I think about it almost every day about some aspect.

Q: Do you feel that you're like two different people, somebody on the outside and somebody on the inside?

A: Yeah, yeah. Good way to put it. It's difficult. I don't know how other people – well Erica, the woman I was telling you about who lives here, who wrote a book. She was sent to Scotland, to a convent. Her parents, her parents converted to Catholicism. **Gordish ga'al fin** [ph]. They died. I don't know where. They tried to save her so I guess. She didn't know she was Jewish until she came to America, 20 years later. Her aunt. She had a cross on her bedpost and her aunt came in and said Erica what is this. She said mother superior gave it to me or whatever. And she said but we don't have a cross and Erica said why not? She said because you're Jewish. And Erica said, what? I'm Catholic. She hasn't really been able to deal with it, yet.

Q: Are you more comfortable around other survivors, people's whose lives were in danger than the people who were born in America?

A: No, I'm comfortable with everybody but I understand.

Q: Do you feel a greater connection?

A: Yes, you do feel a greater connection, of course cause you feel that you know what's your story. What happened? And how did you deal with it? But I haven't felt that until now, until I'm in Ryderwood. I met three other people and we have lunch together and you can't help it you know. But I feel comfortable with, well I feel comfortable with just about anybody. I don't have trouble making friends.

Q: Your civil rights were taken away after Kristallnacht.

A: Everything.

Q: Were active in the civil rights movement here because you had lost as a child, you lost your civil rights?

A: Not really active but I contribute to what I can. I support it whole heartedly, whole heartedly.

Q: Has the world learned anything from the Holocaust?

A: No.

Q: Do you think it could happen again?

A: It could. Maybe not the way we knew it as, to the Jews, but it's happening everywhere. It's happening. Look what they're doing in Iraq and in Syria and – it's happening.

Q: Would you have been a different person today if you hadn't gone through what you did?

A: Perhaps, but how would I know. How, how can you –

Q: Did it make you more independent?

A: It, I don't know if that, I was pretty much overprotected I think when I was growing up. I don't think you know I think I was more independent, became more independent when I was divorced. I had to –

Q: Not from your childhood and not from your experience?

A: No.

Q: Were you a very protective mother because you –

A: No, my husband didn't allow that which was a good thing and they're very independent. Look at Steven, schleps himself to Israel and jumps out of airplanes. (laughs) And Susan opened

up her own practice in acupuncture and massage and all that right down the road on 29. Right above, you know where Trader Joe is. Right upstairs. They're very independent.

Q: Before we end, is there anything you wanted to add to your grandchildren or your great grandchildren, a message to them before we –

A: Well the only message is to tell them to live well and to be kind to all people. And I don't think they need to hear that from me. And that I just love them very much. And they, and to read my story in case you forget, which one of my grandsons typed out for me. I have no complaints about the family, thank goodness you know. So I guess sometimes things turn out in the end, don't they? Anything else I didn't answer?

Q: No. Thank you --

A: Take those pictures. See those pictures. It's just a little, it helps to put it in your head.

Q: Is there anything in the pictures that you could talk about during the interview?

A: Well it just, there's a picture of my house, my mother and father. There's nothing to talk about it.

Q: Thank you very much for the interview. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Trudy Schonberger.

(end)