

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Charlotte Schiff
November 9, 2015
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PREFACE

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CHARLOTTE SCHIFF

November 9, 2015

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Charlotte Schiff. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on November 9th, 2015 and is taking place over the telephone at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and in Bloomfield, Connecticut. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Charlotte Schiff: My name is Charlotte **Minna Schiff**. My maiden name was **Goldschmidt**, with a D-T at the end.

Q: What is the name that you were born with?

A: Charlotte Minna Goldschmidt.

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

A: I was born on July 1937 in **Fulda**, Germany.

Q: July what?

A: July one.

Q: July one. And let's talk a little bit about your family, your parents. What were their names?

A: My mom and dad's names were Herman and Irma Goldschmidt.

Q: Can you give me a little bit of their background? Were they in that same town themselves for a long time?

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A: No, they lived a good half hour from Fulda in a town called **Faha** [ph] and I was just born there because it, the hospital suited my family better. I believe the nuns took care of people there so they preferred that place and my father was in hides and skin wholesale, importing them from Russia. So fur coats, the furs and leather for handbags, shoes and gloves. And he had his place there where he had to take care of these things and store them. And that was also in Faha and we had a house and a place of business there.

Q: Your house was where the business was. Is that what you just said?

A: No. The house was a 16 room house that my dad had built in the early 1920s and a little bit away was the business and some acreage and like a, like a warehouse.

Q: How much education did your father have?

A: It was, in Germany it was called Kaufmann. My father had intended to become an attorney, was born in 1886 and at the age of 14 unexpectedly lost his dad. So he took over his dad's business which was hides and skins imports from Russia and selling them to factories, sorting them for curing them properly and sorting them, and storing them and selling them to the factories in Germany.

Q: How far back can your father's family go in Faha?

A: I believe he was the first one to build in Faha. He was born in **Wehrda**, which is really very small town and that's where his family resided and when he then built his house and the business in Faha.

Q: How do you spell the town that he came from?

A: It's spelled W-E-H-R-D-A.

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Q: Did you know your grandparents on your father's side?

A: My grandmother on both sides. They lived with us, but they were on in years and they were in wheelchairs. And we were supposedly a little better off and had a bit more heart than the rest of the families and also they went already to the United States. So they both made their home with us. My dad's grandma passed shortly before I was born in 37. And my mom's grandmother went with us to the concentration camp, lived for several years there and not too awfully long. And I remember visiting her and she was on this, instead of a mattress, a straw sack and being an old lady and not having any care and she finally succumbed to the little care that she received there.

Q: Tell me about now your mother's family, did your mother work, first of all?

A: No my mother was a homemaker.

Q: How much education did she have?

A: She had just a regular education that was customary at that time and my father had about I don't know exactly the amount but had a little more. My dad came from a very religious family. His mom wore a **sheitel** and my grandpa had a beard. And my mom's family were not that religious but my dad was married for seven years, first to my mom's sister. They had no children and she was diagnosed, I'm not sure if she was born, but it was discovered she was a diabetic and in them days that couldn't be taken care of. They at least they saw after seven years of marriage to my dad and no children she passed and then after one year my dad married my mom.

Q: Are you an only child or do you have some –

A: I am an only child.

Q: I know you were quite young. Do you have any memories that you can talk about before things started to change? Do you have any early, early memories?

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A: Well we lived in Faha for two years in that house my dad had built and in, I was born in 37. In 38 my dad shortly after -- it was in the fall I believe, in November, he was taken for several months to Buchenwald.

Q: This is after Kristallnacht.

A: Yes. And shortly thereafter and he was beaten to -- he was getting off the bus there with iron bars. He injured his back and that was never taken care of. And as the years passed by it got worse and worse and a nurse got into the vertebrae between and caused, made it more painful for him. And as the years passed and no medical and proper nourishment care he eventually had to die from the effects of that treatment. And after he came out, it was more difficult in a small town like Faha to buy groceries because the store had signs that Jews are not welcome here. And it was a town of five, six thousand people and everybody knew the --

Q: What year are you talking about now?

A: I'm, in 38 he was, for I believe three months also went to Buchenwald. When he came out, I'm talking now about 39. We moved to like, many people from small town, and documented in the paper you have there, they moved to the city. We moved to Frankfurt. We left our home, our furniture, everything. And we moved with my grandma, my mother's mom, we moved to Frankfurt.

Q: And you're still a baby? I mean you're just a --

A: I was two years old then. And we stayed there for three years in an apartment.

Q: In Frankfurt?

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A: In Frankfurt. In several **strasse en seben en swanzig** [ph], 27 that means an upstairs apartment. Of course no elevators. And til in 1942 we went to the concentration camp of **Terezin**.

Q: Let's stop right here. Do you have any other memories? You were very young, I know and you were only five at the time, but do you have any memories of the life in Frankfurt yourself?

A: Not really.

Q: Right, cause you were so young, you were so young.

A: I was so young. I remember my grandma in a wheelchair and but really nothing just –

Q: Was your father able to work in Frankfurt?

A: No, he was not able to work anymore.

Q: So how did you, do you know how the family supported, your folks supported themselves?

A: Well my family was well off and they probably through a savings that we had. But we could again not go to stores there, but we met non-Jewish people. Without their help life would have been really difficult to get food. And they would under danger of their life they would bring us food which was not allowed. And that helped sustain us. And til we went to the concentration camp. Then I do remember being transported there in cattle cars.

Q: Do you remember leaving your apartment in Frankfurt? Do you have any memory of that?

A: I know the outlay, the living room and kitchen, I remember but otherwise, nothing.

Q: Do you remember the actual leaving, walking out of the apartment. Do you remember?

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A: No like nights when the sirens. We had to go down to the basement. I remember some of these _____. In the middle of the night, we had to go down there and –

Q: Was that very frightening for a little child?

A: Absolutely and when other children would go, if my mom would go in the park or on the street with me and other children could buy an ice cream cone, she had to tell me I don't know exactly what she, what she said but she had to say well probably because I am not a good girl, she cannot buy me an ice cream cone because we were not allowed in the store to buy that like other children, could lick on their cones. Now this was, I'm sure very difficult for my mom and for me to understand why they could and here I was a good little girl. That was not allowed.

Q: Did your mother have to wear a yellow star?

A: Yes. My parents all did. I don't believe I did but my parents did and there in your possession, I gave them quite a few years ago along with a little money from the concentration camp, a picture and a few – and my identification card from the concentration camp. I gave that to the Holocaust Museum.

Q: Wonderful, thank you, yes. Ok so and now it's, you said you're leaving.

A: In cattle cars. To –

Q: Do you have any memories of that journey?

A: Standing in these cattle cars, yes. I have vaguely. You just stand there like sardines packed. No.

Q: You're now five years old, right?

A: I was five years old, yes.

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Q: And you're with your parents and your grandmother.

A: And yes.

Q: Do you remember what your mother said about where you were going or –

A: No, that I do not but when we arrived there my mom frequently would say we took some, some like Italian bread and some, some they call it raw sausage that you can keep and I used to like that. I was not a good eater, but that I enjoyed. And when we arrived there and were put on, in an attic, with 120 people on the floor, men and women, one next to the other, I would tell my mom, at five, that I didn't like the apartment but I liked the food because I still had Italian bread and that. Like a raw bologna, something. I do not know exactly how it is in English. It really doesn't exist.

Q: You spoke in German, I assume.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you speak Yiddish also?

A: No. No.

Q: Just German.

A: And shortly thereafter and my dad was, and my mom we were all separated.

Q: You were separated?

A: We were separated in the – it was everybody in the concentration camp. And for a while I stayed with my mom there on the attic and dead people and live people, one laying there next to

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each other. But after a little while we were all separated. I was in a children's home. My mom took care of children in a different children's home and my dad was living in a what's called **caserne**. It was a military garrison place at Terezin. And yes, I would find my way around there. Even so, it's been a while, but as the years passed, we were not allowed –

Q: What did you do during the day?

A: Not very much. We were not – when I, I was there from five to eight, for three years.

Q: Do you know what month you arrived in 42? Do you know what month you came there?

A: What month. I, I –

Q: Or the season. Was it –

A: No I could only take a guess. I really do not know that.

Q: Was it warm weather or cold weather?

A: That, I think it was cool. I don't believe. But I –

Q: So you've been separated and you're living in the children's home. Who were –

A: In a children's home.

Q: Who were some of the other children? Were they your age or were they older?

A: They were different, different ages and the bathroom facility was not a regular bathroom. You had to go outside. On a balcony in a latrine like you call it. Not a bathroom. And it was not allowed to teach children anything. When I was eight years old, I could not write my name or anything. I was pretty –

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Q: Who were the adults with you, watching the children?

A: I do not, were some, whatever watch you can talk about that. I do not know who -- they were just regular people. It's whoever worked there. Like my mom wasn't planning to take care of the children she took care of.

Q: How often did you see your mother and your father?

A: Not, not too often. Maybe, every several months or so.

Q: Every several months?

A: Yes. Not very, not very often. They, I don't know who gave them, I couldn't just go to them. They had to come to me and see me and I do remember my dad saving the little food he got so I should eat it. Still I wouldn't eat it because that was not, not my favorite thing to do. To eat so but he saved it up for me and he gave it to me and we'd see each other now and then, not together and not very frequent. And the food we got there, well since I did not care to eat much, it was not very, not healthy food or good food or anything like that. It was kind of what we would refer to as boring. Nothing interesting and nothing they did with us. We were just hanging around, passing the days with nothing.

Q: Did you make friends with the other children?

A: Well yes as much as you could. As I said, they weren't exactly the same age or so. And it's been such a long time ago. Yes, I –

Q: Were they from other countries?

A: That I cannot tell you. I do not believe so.

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Q: They were from Germany?

A: Yes. And then very frequently they didn't stay all that long. As your _____ there, the kinder transports. At the time we were there they did not gas people in Terezin. They sent them to Auschwitz, these transports.

Q: So some of the children left on the transports?

A: Right and I was already at I believe one point, possibly more to be sent too. How my dad did it but he had as I said, we were well to do and what I was told is they had money sewn into shoes and from the shoe maker, even though it couldn't be too much but whatever they were able to do they sewed into old shoes, not nice looking shoes. And also a coat my mom had, that, that was old and they made it, dirtied it a bit and some tears and they had cloth buttons at the time. In them days. Big cloth buttons and they had some money put in there too from the seamstress. And also diamond pendant necklace that my dad had bought in Berlin in the 20s for my mom, had it sewn in there. Their wedding bands were sold for a little bread in the concentration camp. They came out without wedding bands. This diamond survives and it's in my possession and I had it made into a ring after my mom passed. Well she had it made into a ring and I had it sized then. I have it. It is about between two and a quarter, two and a third carats and of supposedly good quality and I was offered a decent amount of money but of course I would not sell it and I do not wear it daily because it needs insurance and being a widow this is not necessary. And it's not a priority of mine to walk around like that. So that –

Q: You said that there were no education but –

A: No education but –

Q: But there were secret classes at Terezin. Did you –

A: Not to my knowledge and I was not able to attend any of them.

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Q: Didn't go to any of them. What about the famous children's operetta the **Brundibar**. Were you aware of that?

A: No, I was totally ignorant coming out.

Q: You were very little, you were very young.

A: Yes, some, between five and eight years old. I didn't know what a banana was, never seen anything like that. Or writing my name. I had no knowledge whatsoever.

Q: So just every day you just walked around and could you walk.

A: Whatever I was told to be obedient and didn't do. Just pass, pass time. I remember doing just nothing. Taking a nap in the afternoon and –

Q: Did you have any like crayons and paper to color or –

A: Not, not that I remember that. I certainly would do something like that. No, nothing, nothing was, was done. We were just hanging around useless. Don't remember playing with any toys or any, anything.

Q: Do you remember playing with any of the other children?

A: Well whatever playing we were allowed to you know.

Q: Did you have your own bed or did you have to share the bed?

A: It was a bed, pretty close by, bunk beds like. I do remember that and if you didn't want to sleep and had to stay there, I had to fake it. So and one day it was my turn to be – so when I was supposed to go to one of these gas camps, my dad said later. First of all my dad did not want after the war much to be said about the war years. Not to make my life any sadder than necessary

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so I got things from here and there. And supposedly he gave the money that we brought to, to these people that were responsible there to send them to the gas chambers. He gave whatever he had so I didn't have. There was I'm sure a little luck involved too. But he, he paid whatever he had so I would not be sent to the gas chambers. And then at another time the, the not my parents, all I, I along with thousands of people on a fall night were gathered on a pasture like. It was dark, no food no bathroom facilities. We were standing there and we were surrounded by machine guns and supposed to be all shot. It's my understanding that the world got a whiff of that and they

Charlotte Schiff: Life at some point in the concentration camp. I saw many people.

Gail Schwartz: Let's go back a little bit. You were talking about standing in a field with people, with guns. Can you repeat that to make sure we get it on –

Charlotte Schiff: Thousands of people, one next to the other, on a really cold night. I remember wearing a lot of underpants. I can't count how many. And why that was I don't know. We were not told. And we were surrounded by machine guns and were supposed to be shot all of us. And then supposedly the word that this is it. And then they cancelled that. And I made it again.

Q: You actually have memories of that time?

A: Of that time, standing there, yes. I could find my way around there and where that was, yes. And of course my grandmother she passed in the concentration camp and where the bread was delivered one day and the dead people were the others. They were thrown in the water there. They were not buried and my mother said the rest of her life, knowing that, that was very hurtful to her. And then –

Q: So your grandmother died –

A: In the concentration camp.

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Q: In Theresienstadt.

A: That was my mom's mom. And my dad's mom died shortly before I was born.

Q: Yes, but I'm just saying your grandmother died in Theresienstadt.

A: In Theresienstadt yes. Her name was **Philipina** Goodman.

Q: What about clothes? Did you have enough warm clothes?

A: No, whatever they gave us, whether it was mine or not necessarily. Whatever these people gave us. We came with nothing. No suitcases, no anything. No warm clothes, whatever they wore. I did have the mumps while there. And I do remember my neck being swollen and they put some brown smelly cream on me which did not seem to help and then they put me on a table, not in a hospital. There was not such a thing there. On a table and they cut, make a cut and you can, quite a cut, several inches on the side of my neck and whatever and that took care of, remedied the situation. And what the sedation or what it was, I do not – I was all by myself and whatever they done, they were – what could we say. Being dumb, uneducated. And whatever was done to us, whether you were young or old, you had to submit to, no choice.

Q: Do you remember talking to the other children at all?

A: I'm sure I, I did. I was shy by nature and that situation, being away from my family I was a little spoiled, being an only child. My mom said when I came to visit her I would put my hands and fingers into her neck to be with her. But she had to leave. She couldn't stay and I'm sure I was affected by that. Growing up I was pretty, pretty reserved and shy for quite some time. It has worn off after the years, thank, thank goodness. And –

Q: Were you a strong child? Physically? Or you were delicate? How would you describe yourself at that age?

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A: No I was, I was I remember after the war being, not, not a very strong child. Plagued by colds very much and put under x-ray machines for my swollen tonsils repeatedly. Afterwards. And now of course, I'm very much aware not more of that than absolutely necessary. I had enough of it. That was a way in them days of finding out and they did not of course know the harmful effects which were much more harmful, the x rays direct in face than they are today.

Q: What other memories do you have of Theresienstadt that you can talk about?

A: When, when they came to visit the SS people and the head person, **Rahm** supposedly was his name. He would come and there was a nice children's playground which we never got to play with but we went there at the gate. This was the entrance to the town and we, when he came in and said Uncle Rahm was his name. We have to eat again sardines, but we never got sardines. It's just something they told us to do. When the camp was inspected. But other than hanging around from day to day and being, having no knowledge of anything, it just passed, passed by and being really happy when I could see my parents.

Q: Do you remember snow, the bad weather times at all and what –

A: I do. I, many of my memories, a little I'm sure has to do that you kind of want to shut out things that are not very pleasant. I think that has a lot to do with it. But of course after the war I had very vivid memories.

Q: We can talk about that later. Yeah.

A: Yes, so what happened there is not but when it was over on our way home, it was on buses.

Q: We'll get to that in a minute. I just wanted to talk a little more about Theresienstadt. About if you have any other memories, any other incidents that happened while you were there.

A: Nothing. The days just passed. Not, not eventful or anything. My mother just being –

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Q: For three years, for three years.

A: Yeah, exactly according to my mom, 32 months. And of course no holiday or birthday celebration or anything. The day went by one like, like the next. And –

Q: Do you remember the Red Cross coming to visit?

A: No, no, no. No knowledge of that. Nor did I hear that from my parents. No.

Q: What kind of, do you remember what state your mother was in or your father when they would come to visit you? Were they very emotional or were they more reserved or do you have any memories?

A: Well they were very happy to see me having only, it means even more. One side and my dad was on in years. My mom and dad were married 14 years til they were lucky enough to have me. So, so my dad was about 50, 51 and my mom 36 because –

Q: When you were born?

A: When I was born. Because they were married for about 14 years before I was born, couldn't have any children. Nothing was done. It finally happened. And of course they wanted children. That's how it was. And the age difference is because my dad was married to my mom's sister for seven years and then he was in the family and stayed in the family and my mom was a good looking woman and so that's how that happened. So what I wanted to bring up is to my dad, he was there a grandpa at that age with people, or more mature, children are even more meaningful than when you were young and specially after they've been through all that. It, it means much more and –

Q: You had said that he did not want to talk about what he had been through.

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A: After the war, not in my presence. Not in my presence. My mom didn't say anything about that. But my dad did not want, when my mom and dad together or others to talk, well he couldn't force others. But together no mention about that time at all.

Q: Do you know what he did in Theresienstadt? Your mother was in the children's zone.

A: He didn't do anything.

Q: Cause he wasn't well.

A: He walked on a cane and he was a little over for the pain which increasingly got worse and worse. Til he finally was, after the war, confined to a wheelchair. And we get to that after how, how that situation.

Q: Is there anything else you wanted to say about being in Theresienstadt that you haven't mentioned yet?

A: If you want the, if you want the time in the camp, it was, it was not eventful. We were separated, living from day to day. Nothing happened. As I said the dangers of which my parents, they knew about more than I did and my father as I said, they're selling their wedding bands and giving all their money to save me. A little luck played in with it also, that I was not taken to the gas chambers when they first wanted me to.

Q: When you left Frankfurt to go to Theresienstadt, do you know if you took anything special with you. You were very young, you were you know five years – any toys or anything like that.

A: Not that I remember. Of course we were very limited. We had to leave already in Faha everything when we went to Frankfurt, we always had to leave everything. We couldn't sell or do anything.

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Q: So you didn't have a special toy or anything with you?

A: Not that I remember that. Only I do remember the Italian bread. We call it **gowash** [ph], it's a smoked sausage like that doesn't need refrigeration. ____ and the taste of it, the salt and the spices. I seemed to like it. So I would tell my mother. I don't like the apartment but I do like the food here. I liked, for a few days I still liked that and of course they'd save it for me.

Q: Aside from the mumps that you had, your health was pretty good in Theresienstadt?

A: Well and not I'm sure colds, but nothing, nothing that stands out that I was malnourished of course, but I did no activity and no, nothing, nothing just, just existence by me and by my –

Q: Do you remember feeling hungry all the time?

A: No, I was never hungry. I never wanted to eat. That was not my favorite pastime.

Q: Did you see people who were dead? Did you ever –

A: Well my mom after told me that the dead people 120 on the attic were kept there for a while next to us. Til they finally removed them. And my grandmother was put on the wagon where they transported ____ to be thrown in the river but these are stories I have heard. I was too young and specially since I left the education and all that. I wasn't aware of any of these things.

Q: Let's now move on to the next chapter, which is how did you know that you were going to be leaving Theresienstadt? What was the next big change for you?

A: Well I was not, I was told, I did what I was told to do and along with my parents on a big bus and we left through Prague to Frankfurt.

Q: What did that mean to an eight, you are now eight years old right?

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A: Right.

Q: What did that mean to you? You were back with your parents.

A: I was back with my parents which was more important of course. Upon arriving there I do vividly remember I think **Kolb** was his name. K-O-L-B if I remember right. He was the mayor of Frankfurt and he greeted the bus of survivors. Somewhere there with tulips, a bunch of tulips and my mom came back. She didn't have a pair of underpants to wear under her dress. And we were, we were fed and taken care of. We were, we were then taken to –

Q: Do you know what month you left Theresienstadt in 45?

A: No, no I don't want to just take a wild guess but I cannot tell you that.

Q: Now you're in Frankfurt.

A: Now we were in Frankfurt. For how long. A short time but it was days or weeks, I do not know. We were transported to **Kupen** which was a hospital with different wings like schools. They emptied one wing for the Holocaust survivors and they housed us there for ten months. It was part of the hospital because they didn't know what to do with us and I was ridden in the sickness, was plagued by colds specially the tonsil and as I mentioned before the x rays and all that. And I was finally free and could go outside and the people there talking and on holidays, trying to make it a little festive and all that. So after the ten months we went back to Frankfurt and they made available a wing that was a hospital before the war, was mostly destroyed but a half a round building was made available for all the survivors. And I go up there it was called an old people's home translated. It was in **Stagenstrasse**, even, even what's her name. Not Susan. The other lady that was pediatrician that is friends with Susan. **Ilse**, Ilse **Nussbaum** they came from Faha too. She came to visit us. And we stayed there til I almost left for the United States. We were fed there. The government supported us. We had no, no money and all the other people were on in years and it was called an old age home translated. I grew up with people 80 years

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old. I was the youngest there, the only one. I learned to play cards from them. I learned their mood swings and what makes people tick and I learned a lot. I went into school.

Q: I was going to ask when did you start school?

A: Mm hm.

Q: When did you first start schooling?

A: I was approximately at the age eight and a half years when I learned to write my name. And all that and I did not have anything to put my books, nor did I have a pencil. So it was given to me. It was a pocketbook really, not suited to go to school but that's all I had and somebody was nice enough to give me a pencil because we had no money and so we couldn't go to the store and do anything. And we were living there in one room, my parents and me. And the exterminator had to come frequently. There was dead bugs in there and they took care of us but I went to school. It was, the adjustment was not that easy. But, but reluctantly I made it. At home I was happy even without these things because I felt always cared for and loved. But after several years in school my parents were wise enough to realize that if it was possible to send me to private school. The schools were pretty much destroyed during the war. A private school with less children in a class and so I could get a better education and I was always older than the others that started school at the age of six. So they, they I was able to go with a little money we had, they would send me to a private school which, which one, that they had to pay for of course. And I was very happy there. I did very well.

Q: Was it nearby?

A: No, I had to take what's called a **strassenbahn**. It's a, it's not a subway but it's an above ground streetcar. And I had to change in the middle of the town. It took me about a half an hour to get there.

Q: This is still in Frankfurt?

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A: In Frankfurt. It was a private all-girls school. And I made good progress. I was happy. I was a good student. I jumped twice over classes because I was always the oldest due to circumstances. And I did graduate number one in my class.

Q: Were the other students Jewish students or was it mixed?

A: No, I was the only Jewish person. The, no Jewish students. First of all the Jewish people were all killed. Supposedly, according to my mom. I mean you must know that better. I am probably the or one of the youngest survivors from the concentration camp and supposedly one of five families where mother and children came out of the concentration camp without losing any, anyone of the close family members. And the people there helped me in the beginning with homework and all that. My parents were, my father's condition got worse of course. That he had to be find a, go, be in a wheelchair, but the surroundings I grew up in are not the norm. But remarkably at that time and even today, I do not feel deprived because I was loved and cared for and had experiences. And all that adds up to making me the person I am today which is great understanding of people. You name it, hardships or everything. I was already very poor and I was well to do so I can identify with both of them. And the most important thing in life is what people do each other, to each other when they don't care, care enough. My values are different than the norm, as shaped by all my experiences. And of course I have a special soft spot for the elderly. I feel that the younger people get all the attention we did. And the elderly they have done their job and are now left alone, lonesome and deserve more attention than they are given. And I still today, even a few days ago stand up when I see something is, is not right and could be changed to make an older person happy. So as I said, I don't need anyone to feel sorry for me. Ad I have not spoken up after all these years. Even my close friends didn't know about my past. But what maybe my husband's parents would say that I was in a concentration camp. I would never even mention that because I did not have the needs that anyone feels sorry for me or refers to me as a concentration camp survivor or anything. I just wanted to be treated like any, anyone else. No, no special attention required.

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Q: Can we get back to your story about going to school with non-Jewish children back in Frankfurt. Did any of them ever ask you about your background? Did you become friends with them?

A: Yes, I have not. Yes, except one incident once happened in the private school. A girl that told a girl friend of mine about the dirty, dirty Jew and she told it back to me. I told my mom. She went to school and, my mom, and was very upset and it was found out that the parents of that girl were in the Nazi party. And the girl was much too young to form an opinion but heard this from her family at home. And they took disciplinary action.

Q: Did you experience any other anti-Semitic incident?

A: No. Only when I would travel in the streetcar and of course people didn't know who, who I was and they would now and then make comments and then I was finished with school I wanted to become a nurse. And there was the hospital that was a gift from **Otchets** [ph], started before the war from Jewish people. And I wanted to be admitted to the nursing class there. I went there. I was accepted and then they, it's such a long time ago. You had to fill out your religion. I don't think that's the case here today.

Q: What year are we talking about?

A: We are talking about the mid-50s, the mid 1950s. I went there with my mom, filled out the papers. What was required but it said also religion and of course they wouldn't let me fill out papers if the place was full. As soon as we got home there was a phone call and we didn't have a phone of our own. We used the phone number of a neighbor cause we couldn't afford a telephone. And was a phone call saying they could not accept me because the class was filled already which was not true. We could put one and one together. Because of my religion. So when I was still in my mid-teens, my mom did have the foresight, it would be a good idea to apply to go to the United States which although I am independent can go during the day wherever but I, I do need a home and at night be with my family. So I, I really didn't pull much but she said well you can just put your application in. That does not mean that you have to go. So

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I did what she told me and it took several talking now about that legal and illegal immigration took several years and when I first finished school, I realized that there was an apply and being denied there the job and what I heard _____ and people didn't know who I was. It was still a good amount of anti-Semitism there and the future not too many Jewish people there and the future is really not -- and my parents were open to me marrying somebody that is not Jewish. As long as they, even though my dad was what keeps the holidays and on Yom Kippur wouldn't eat no matter what his health was. He would, til the day he died he wouldn't do that. And also in the concentration camps and afterwards he would rather go hungry than he eat something he shouldn't eat. But he did not, he wanted me to have somebody. He didn't say Jewish or not Jewish, somebody that treats me good. That was the main thing in his, he could be poor but somebody that's good to me. So I figured there is no future for me here. And I think that I will take a chance. I had an aunt and uncle, my dad, my dad's sister and her husband and other relatives, well they were in California but my dad's sister and her husband who lost a child in a car accident. They were in New York. And I figured, I go there and my dad said if things don't work out I can always come back. So I figured that is not a bad idea. I am going to do that. So I turned 19.

Q: So this is 19 –

A: It was the SS United States. It's a still a _____, it is dumped now the ship. I came over with that ship, tourist class and Margaret Truman was on that ship.

Q: I'm sorry what was the name of the ship?

A: The SS United States. They're just _____ to find investors to, there was a big write up in the Hartford Courant, the local papers about it. And I hear on the news and all that. It's now in Philadelphia. It was a luxury ship. It was only a few years old. Lightweight. We ran into a storm and I was quite sick. And I said no more do I go on this.

Q: You were now 19 years old, right?

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A: I turned 19 on the ship.

Q: So this is 1956.

A: This is 1956, that is correct. That is, that is and I came here the fourth of July. Yes.

Q: What did the United States mean to you as a 19 year old?

A: As a 19 year old, freedom like I have never experienced it before. And achieving my dreams and being able to do what one wants to as long as you don't hurt somebody else and having, having a life like you couldn't have in Germany. People didn't, much, much different. Not resenting people from other cultures since this was a melting pot of many is the United States which Germany isn't. They, even some years ago, visiting anybody that's different from them, they kind of don't think that's the way to live. Only their way and I felt total freedom doing whatever I can achieve without any –

Q: Did you know any English?

A: Yes, I took English in school. I was good at it. In writing and speaking, maybe better than today because we spoke only German with my husband's parents. Even though they could speak English and so did my husband. So yes, I spoke English, French and German and I was fluent in reading, speaking and writing when I came to the United States.

Q: Who met you when you arrived?

A: My, my aunt and uncle which is my dad's sister and her husband and a boyfriend that was a Jewish guy that was in the military in Germany. I met him in synagogue there and we were friends and corresponded and he picked me up with my aunt and uncle when I arrived. And another boy and I still know his name. And another boyfriend also in the military, Jewish man, he, he brought me to the boat in France in Le Havre. When I left on the boat to the United

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States. But of course one didn't know from the other. But it was just a platonic friendship, nothing else between all of these.

Q: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

A: Absolutely yes. It meant ultimate freedom to me. And I worked, I worked across the Statue of Liberty in New York in Wall Street for two years. I saw it from my window every single day. I know the meaning, the gift from France and it is something else.

Q: You stayed in New York City in the beginning?

A: I stayed in New York. I lived a few weeks with my aunt and uncle. They had a small one bedroom apartment. They had a pull out bed that they bought in the living room. A small place in Washington Heights. And then I rented a room from neighbors in the next building. I ate and lived with my aunt and uncle but I had my home and my clothes over there, because their place was really, really very small. It was a disappointment that I couldn't, couldn't stay but now. After when I was more mature I understood that they really didn't have room. And they did everything possible to make me feel comfortable. And we were good to each other. And –

Q: Did you go to school or go to work?

A: I went to night school and I went to work. I worked at Associated Metals and Minerals, 75 West Street, down near Wall Street. I took the IRT and the subway every day to make it to work and they wanted to keep me there after I got married, but –

Q: So when did you get married?

A: I got married after I was two years in the country. I could have gotten married before but it wasn't what I wanted and I was still really young and there was no need for it.

Q: So this was 1958?

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A: I was married, I was married in 58. That is correct. I was married on June the 22nd, 1958 and it so turned out that my husband's family and my family knew each other from Germany. But we did not, we did not know that before. And I had my mother and my dad. My dad died, my dad died in 57, September the 13th of 57, my dad died. And –

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: On a blind date. When my dad died, a mutual relative of my aunt and uncle and also of my husband came to pay their respects to my aunt and uncle. And I was there and she said she had a relative in, in Connecticut and if I would go out with him. And so he came, weather permitting. It was winter time. Due to a snow storm, we had to postpone it. And we met I believe it was in February of 58 and in April we became engaged and on June the 22nd we were married. And my, I had my mom come over to this country, on a permanent visa. But she decided this life style was not for her. Not speaking the language and being used to a different life. And having her friends there and now that I'm married, she decided one day after we came back from the honeymoon that she is going back to Germany, which she did.

Q: Was your husband a survivor also?

A: My husband was born in **Bad Kissingen** in Germany. He came here when he was five years old. He came to New York with five. He had no accent and –

Q: What year was that, that he came over?

A: He was born in 37. No he came over in 37. He was born in 32. He was five years old and I was --

Q: So he came over earlier.

A: And I was a little thing when he came over to this country at the age of five.

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Q: You moved to Connecticut after you got married?

A: Yes, because my husband lived in Connecticut, yes.

Q: Did you work or what did you do in Connecticut?

A: No I have been, I was a homemaker. My husband, I would have liked that but my husband did not want me to work. He was used the old fashioned way. He said I can support a wife and a family and he was five years older than I was. And –

Q: What kind of work did he do?

A: He had a, you are not from around here. We had, they had a farm. His dad bought a farm when they came from Europe here. And my husband worked on the – he didn't do the work. They had help, they had hired help. They had cattle and they went to auctions and bought them and sold them to farmers and milked them in between and they had hired help for that.

Q: You lived out in the country then?

A: Yes, it was right outside Hartford in Bloomfield, the town I live in now.

Q: Do you have any children?

A: Yes, I have one, well I lost, I miscarried a little boy that was totally formed. Was three or four months old and still born. And then we had our only living son who is now 56 years old. He went to UConn in Storrs. Then he went to Case Western in Ohio and he stayed there and became an attorney.

Q: Can I ask you, do you have any grandchildren?

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A: Yes, yes. I have two grandchildren. A granddaughter of, that she's 28. She manages a ski resort in Colorado. And I have a grandson whose wedding I attended over Labor Day. He's 30 years old and he lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

Q: Can we now talk about some of your thoughts. Are you more comfortable around other people who are survivors than people who didn't go through what you went through? Or does it not make a difference?

A: It doesn't make a difference. In fact I rather am around people that are not survivors because I don't want to identify. It's just part. Everybody has different experiences. We all have a suitcase and I, this is not what I want to be known for, talk about. This is not my, this is just, just a part of, everybody has something else happen to them and I'm much more comfortable around people that are not survivors than people that are, because I find they want to talk about this and that. And I really don't, don't want. It's like rubbing on a wound. And I feel more comfortable not talking about that. Just letting it be, like losing my husband to Lou Gehrig's disease and all this. I do not, this is part of me yet, who I am but it is not in a social situation, this is not what I like to focus on. I like to talk about other things that are of interest to everybody.

Q: When you meet people and they ask you about your background what –

A: Well it sometimes comes because of my accent that they, it depends how close I want to know them. I will cut them off or walk away if I can, if I feel it's just a terrible situation. And I really don't like to dig into this. It's not what I want to do with anybody. And I don't feel comfortable, unless I'm in a close friendship or relationship. I do not like to talk about these things.

Q: You said your father didn't want to talk about let's say the Kristallnacht.

A: Right and as a result I didn't do that to my son either because I think it, life presents enough hardships. And it, you want a happy, a happy life. No, you have to know the bad in order to appreciate the good. I understand that. But to all, to always do it with miseries. I didn't, my son,

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it's the same thing my dad did to me. He never talked about it when he was going. I don't like to dwell about it. It's something that happened. I cannot change it. He could not change it. And the -- it's more to life. Life goes on. I feel whatever life presents me, I do my best to improve it, remedy it. And after I've done it all, I have to let go and move on. I can't change, change anything.

Q: Do you feel, how would you describe yourself? German? Jewish? American? How would you, what would you describe yourself as?

A: I would –

Q: Do you feel German?

A: No, absolutely not. No, no way. I would describe myself, describe myself as an American Jew. That would describe myself best.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany?

A: Pardon me.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany?

A: That there are good and bad people in the, in the world and these things would not happen if the majority would be good people. Even so there are good people in the old ____ and I am personally friendly with them. Still, still have some that are still alive. But the majority is not good. These people I was there visiting with my husband and I heard them comment about people from other countries, that look different than they are. It is difficult for that society to, to accept people that are different than they are. Here our make up is the melting pot from all countries. Maybe that has something to do with this. Other countries are more their only. The majority is of their own backgrounds. And they are really narrow minded and, and all that and it is, it is not my cup of tea.

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Q: You have been back to Germany?

A: I have been back to Germany. I don't discuss any of these, these things with them. I know who they are. I want no part of it. But I don't –

Q: Why did you go back to Germany?

A: Because first of all to my mom's funeral. I never went for pleasure, to spend my money there. or about finding out after the reunification, the property was in the Russian occupied zone. What I forgot to mention is that when I finally with attorneys of course and proving that I was here and the only child and all that, got the property back. It took a long time. They still owe me money for now I would say 65, 70 years. They do not deny that when I was there, from the rent, from the 16 room house. They put it into three, four apartments and the town collected the money. They had to give me my, after reunification, they had to give me my property back or my name. It could not be changed after my parents passed. But it was Russian zone. But after the, the help from attorney I was able to -- but there is no law saying for all the years they collected the rent, that they have to pay that back to me. And since my husband could speak German, but more dialect and not in writing and it was up to me. And the family. And we had to take care of my husband's parents who could, it was not the ____ power, or they were very dependent on us taking care of them. That I didn't, I -- since there was no law and no need to fight any more. Even so, I consider myself a little fighter. But I did not want to carry on because it would be pretty useless wasting more time rubbing on these things that I cannot change. So they still owe me the rent. They don't deny it but since there is no saying, no law saying that they have to give it back to me, I –

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: Yes I do.

Q: How do you feel about that?

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A: How do I feel? I am absolutely deserving. I, my life was, you cannot make it up. The reparations don't, don't cannot give back what they have taken away. It is just a token. It's not enough and, and it is deserving money. And what can I say. I did not, it's not a substitute for if that wouldn't have been. I would have it had the other way around.

Q: Do you think you would be a different person today if you hadn't gone through in your childhood what you did?

A: Absolutely. Yes, because I know I am very different than most people because of it because we are formed not only by our genes but a lot of our life experiences that make us who we are today.

Q: How would you be different? What do you think?

A: I would be not as compassionate, understanding and have a very different values. Probably not better. I think these are better what as a family, education, being considerate of others. Not being judgmental and all these things are part of my experiences that make me who I am. But I think, I and more important, I did not, I was never short cut the time together of love for my family. The value of family and that was more important and still is important to me. Not material things or any of that. Its good health and happiness. And financially worlds are two, two just completely different things. And one thing I am not looking for and don't need is means any pity. For this is not and that I find, I find that survivors dwell too much on some of that, that issue. I don't want to be treated different than just a normal person. What I am. I don't want any, I am not in need. I, also I am, I am very caring and compassionate but I am also strong enough to, to know that self-pity does, has no value.

Q: Are there any sounds or sights or smells that just trigger memories of your childhood?

A: Well whenever they come, and when I don't leave my mind, my mind is usually either if I do something or with thoughts, I keep my mind occupied but when it comes to the suffering that

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mainly my dad and my husband experienced, it is unreal. And difficult to understand, especially in my dad's case why people do that to each other. They hatefulness for people that one is jealous and the other one has something more or better that they worked for because it's like education and therefore could allow to this, had a higher standard of living than others. Why these things happen. And I don't believe we ever can change that. It's very unfortunate thing but —

Q: Did you ever get more schooling?

A: I would have got more schooling, absolutely. What amounts to supposedly what I have, I was told amounts to two years of college. I absolutely, the school at the private girls school I attended was, would qualify me to go wherever I want to go. There are different school systems in Germany. There are three levels, at the time. I don't know what it is today. It's either if you want to just be a, a regular booker school system to go which is elementary school or the day school. Then the middle school if you want to be a secretary. And I attended where you can go to the university. And I was able to do that and I did have the grades to do that. And —

Q: Have you ever worked in the United States?

A: Yes, I worked in New York. I told you.

Q: Right, in the beginning right. And then after you got married.

A: No, my husband did not, did not want me to go to work. He wanted, I was offered a job that I will regret, not as taken, as long as I live, as a head at Hartford hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. A Jewish man by the name was Monroe Himelstein. He came from a farm. His father died unexpected early too. He became a top notch surgeon. He operated on my husband for peritonitis and my husband almost died from it. And he operated and we talk frequently together. And my husband was for three weeks in the hospital. And during that time my mother in law was this, at the time was in a convalescent home. And my husband's dad was in another hospital with pneumonia. And I was left with 30 cows and 20 calves. And we talked frequently about different

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things and he wanted me, he said I would like you to come and work for me. And this is, this would be the job of my dreams. My son was grown and I could have done it but my husband didn't want to. So when I turned him down, he went to my husband and said you know I would like your wife to work for me in my office. And I told him at the time that I was not trained. And he said he knew that I could do this job and my husband turned him down. He said I need her more than you do. My husband came home from peritonitis and three weeks and no food, no IV and having a couple feet of intestines lost with an open belly that he needs attention by a nurse every day. And they wanted to send free of charge of course from the insurance company, the hospital, that the nurse comes here daily until that is healed. When Dr. Himelstein came and heard it, he said there's no nurse coming. Charlotte can do that on her own. It was rather scary to expect me to take care of this open wound cutting through the belly button to let the pus come out and clean it out daily. So I did it. It was scary but I did it. And it healed up nicely and -- but my husband didn't want me to take the job. He said I need you and he told the doctor I need her more than you need her. So but that was something up my alley.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember?

A: I did not have that much time to give it the proper attention like I would today. As I said between the business and the family and with my husband's parents and my own mom, I did, I cannot give you any opinion on that because my -- I already was my devotion total devotion to my family before actually. And so only after everybody unfortunately was gone did I spend time taking care of --

Q: What year did your husband pass away?

A: My husband passed away nine and half years ago after being diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease unexpectedly. His lab work was perfect and all of a sudden he got that disease. I knew there was something like that. I did not know how it was called and how it was and I -- read all the papers after, all the information. I offered to go to Israel and see if they could help us but he said he wouldn't and of course they couldn't take care of, that. This is something. Well there is no, no cure for at this point and even after I contacted so many people and was told not enough

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people. Too many but not enough have it so enough now the ice bucket and all that. Not enough money is put into the research. Why that happens. Supposedly most people that were in Vietnam exposed to Agent Orange which he was not. Why he got this suddenly. And in hindsight, after we got married, shortly after there were signs which were never recognized and excused this, this and that. And even if we have gone a few years before, the signs are not recognized by, are less. I mean I talked to other people that had that in the family and we all had the same experience. Doctors that studies it does not have first-hand experience. It cannot be diagnosed if there is no test or anything. Only people that have been unfortunate through it once can, can say hey this might be the culprit of it. But it is, still a ways to go, it is very miserable disease where your mind stays and your body shrinks away. And we have to accept it and I cannot, whether it is my dad or my husband, the suffering. That is the worst about losing somebody. The suffering these people go through that is immensely scary. And when these thoughts come I have to keep doing something else. I still have a chair that we bought that my husband had to sleep on in my living room. It's like no I cannot sit on this chair. Even so it's the most comfortable because it brings like a movie. The memories come back what happens there or saying this with my dad. Any of this if something mentions I don't want to be reminded. It's part of me and I try to keep right away occupy myself and get different thoughts if these things cross my mind which they certainly do. So I try to stay away from it and don't want to talk really to people. Don't try to have my friends because they make me sad. Even here people from the concentration camp, they are sad and I don't want to be part of this. It's part of me and I have to make the best of it because it's past and I did my duty to the best of my ability and that's all I can do. And to make things worse by dwelling on it doesn't serve any purpose.

Q: Before we end, is there anything you would like to add that you haven't mentioned.

A: The suffering after the war I don't think it is understood properly for all people after that have been in the concentration camps that it did not end. Heaven did not open. Life was very, very difficult. Being three years in the concentration camp is one thing. After that's growing up in an old people's home and I am again now living in a very nice even luxurious retirement home. But with old people again. This is my second chance. Yes, I'm more understanding toward these

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people. But for me to have to go through that again is, at times is a bitter pill to swallow. But it is something, having lost all my family I –

Q: Did you lose any other extended family that you know of, besides your immediate –

A: Well my cousins they are all gone. Most of them aunts and uncles and cousins. They perished in the concentration camp and the others. Due to my parents' age and circumstances, they were all about 15, 16 years older than I am and I'm 78 now. And they have all passed. I have nobody any more. Except the son and the two grandchildren. And my son turned religious but that he is an educated religious man, but he was left without any conscience or heart shall I say. And the grandchildren except my grandson, they are not much different. They are good people. But they have different values and I hear from my granddaughter rarely. Not even for the holidays. And my son now and then. And that is something. When I went to New York, I would write to my parents twice a week letters. It's a different generation maybe. I hear complaints from others too. Maybe I'm a little less fortunate in that respect. I tried my best and that is all I can do. And to do justice to my dear husband, I would like to say he was suffering in this Hebrew home and hospital on the hospital wing for over half a year, dying from Lou Gehrig's. My son never once came to visit him. Never once. And not a phone call either. And it's a hard pill to swallow. But I do not talk about these things. Only one or two of my closest friends know about it. Because it is what it is. And –

Q: Do you think the world has learned anything about, from the Holocaust?

A: People seem to forget too fast. I really don't think so. Otherwise things that are going on today would not be happening. And I don't think what in Israel, if we can change it, it's really sad. Nothing now is coming yet. Now is a thing with our president and I hope things for some reason they don't see eye to eye. And I was hoping that a person of minority like President Obama would be more understanding toward our situation but it did not turn out to be that way. And it's, I am all in favor of Israel, but not to the point that I want to spend my life there. I was and visited Israel for three weeks, with a group with my husband, was very impressed. But I choose to live in this country but I am also very much in favor of Israel being treated the way we

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deserve to be treated. And it is after all our strongest ally in the region and it has not gotten the attention that I think we deserve and Jewish people still seem to, to think President Obama is doing the right thing by voting for him. And I think it is important that he sees that Israel remains strong and if they can't have a life of peace and not live under the threat of the same thing or even worse happening again.

Q: That's an important note to end on. I want to thank you for doing this interview and I just want to say just a closing sentence, that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Charlotte Schiff.

A: Again I thank you so much and I hope I answered a good part of your questions to the best of my ability and for your own information I cannot stress enough how important the times –

(end)