

Interview with Hannah Eisner.
Dec 24. 1977

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Offenbach in Germany in 1924 and we emigrated when I was 14 going on 15 in 1939.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your education in Offenbach?

A: I first went to the public school to which all children went, and in 1934 in Offenbach they made a Jewish school where the teachers who had lost their jobs in the public school system got together and the Jewish children from our own area -- sometimes from the little villages nearby -- they had already known some violence and so on. I had really felt very little of it and this is interesting -- I remember my father being against the idea of a Jewish school because he thought that if in the regular schools they don't see that the Jewish children are just as good and as normal as the Christian children, then the Christian children in the regular schools will -- might become more anti-Semitic, not having Jewish examples different from the Stuermer -- the paper. So with this, I was influenced by my father, too, and sort of went to the Jewish school -- well, there was no choice but I also felt that split and I never quite knew where I belonged because we were not really observant family. My father, even though he made kiddush, my parents never really went to Temple, my father, maybe on a rare occasion on a seat given by the director of his bank. And their friends up until then had been quite a few non-Jews and colleagues of my father, so it wasn't such a Jewish background at all and I didn't feel particularly Jewish. Rather mixed up.

Q: You were about 10 years old at this time. Do you remember the first time you went to this Jewish school as opposed to the school you were used to?

A: Actually. No. I do remember an incident, hardly an incident, in the other school when they sang the German National anthem, I didn't want to sing it, so I was mouthing it and I always felt as if they were watching me, my gentile neighbors, and wondering why would a Jewish kid sing it and I felt oppressed -- I mean didn't feel very Jewish not to sing it but I didn't sing it, and I didn't feel very German -- I felt oppressed. This is a feeling when I think back, because I also remember my parents sometimes went away over Easter vacation to little hotels which were not Jewish, and I remember walking there along and they sometimes had asked, and from some other guests, the children to join me because I was an only child. By their choice, the kids went along and you know Germany has a lot of churches all over and they would say to each other, I'm going to this church and I'm going to that church tomorrow morning, and I remember feeling oppressed to this day because I thought the next question would be what church do I go to, and I didn't feel so Jewish and I knew I wasn't Christian. This sticks

with me and it is in a way why now I feel rather affiliated more than ever before. I didn't belong anywhere -- being put to a Jewish school, being neither one nor the other -- becoming Jewish by the Germans pushing me out.

Q: Before you went to the Jewish school -- did you have many non-Jewish friends?

A: Yes. My closest friend and neighbor, and this building just had two apartment buildings, was a daughter of a colleague of my father and we were the closest friends growing up together -- playing together in a little hallways outside.

Q: Did you feel yourself and your family well integrated and accepted in Offenbach?

A: Yes, yes, among the gentiles, yes.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

A: He was with a bank and it was a private bank owned by a Jew, but except for him and one apprentice, they were all gentiles.

Q: When you say owned by a Jew, financed by Jewish capital?

A: Yes. But more so I think there were -- like Lehman Bros. here -- there were then small banks yet which were family owned but had connections.

Q: As you continued in this Jewish school and as time went on, did you notice any change in the attitude of your gentile friends?

A: Slowly they disappeared. I didn't have gentile friends. It somehow fizzled out. I remember once a gentile friend defending me when another kid from the neighborhood had perhaps called me "Jew" I wasn't quite sure and this gentile friend of mine took me right to this boy's mother to complain for me, and again I felt oppressed -- I wanted to crawl away -- I didn't want to fight as a Jew and I didn't want a gentile to fight, and I felt just pretty crummy about the whole bag. And I didn't feel so Jewish associated until I think later at the Jewish school as time went on and we were by ourselves.

Q: In the Jewish School, was there ever any discussion among the students or the teachers about the situation?

A: No. Never, never.

Q: Did you hear any discussions at home about the situation?

A: Yes. The discussions that I remember were mostly that it couldn't continue that way -- that the Ausland, the other countries couldn't let this happen. Slowly, it was more than a matter of where one would emigrate to, but yet, I remember my

father was reluctant to accept an offer from a niece in America to come. I forgot the year -- my parents didn't discuss it much with me at all -- even though I was old enough by standards nowadays. I was kept out of it as a child. Perhaps also they were afraid that children would say something to the outside world. And anything could be misinterpreted by a Nazi or by a gentile for their own gains -- not that they even needed an excuse but an excuse might have been better to further their own ends. So things were really kept -- one thing I remember, my mother once asked one of my father's colleagues if she could see him and she had me along and she asked him in case my father ever has a political debate with him, she asked this gentile not to take my father serious. She was afraid -- this I understood -- that perhaps he could land in a concentration camp for his views. And she stressed that this is not what he really believes but maybe just some kind of academic talk like don't take it too serious -- I case he might make some anti-Hitler remark, not to get that known

Q: Do you remember if any of your father's colleagues or employees in the bank made trouble in any way?

A: No. Some were Party members but I'm not aware -- I as a child -- that he really had trouble. Perhaps the reason that he didn't get one higher position was that the man who later took the bank over was a gentile. I became aware that my parents slowly withdrew a little bit or maybe talked less freely but there was little of real anti-Semitism as one hears it now.

Q: Did you ever see signs in stores Juden Unerwünscht or?

A: Oh yes, yes. I didn't see it happen to my own father, but a friend of ours who had stores -- they were demolished. There was Kristallnacht when many of my teachers were taken to concentration camps and all the fathers of my then Jewish friends except mine. Now, we lived a little bit -- our building was kind of in the back of a bank -- like a hinted? house kind of thing. It was perhaps a little bit difficult to find but perhaps someone protected him -- I don't know, but I felt bad about that. I felt torn between my loyalty -- I was glad my father was safe and I felt bad facing my Jewish friends. I remember a friend of mine who stuttered -- how much more she stuttered when her father was taken away -- it was horrible. And I remember our school after Kristallnacht, how it was smashed.

Q: You said that you didn't belong to a congregation but did you...

A: Yes, but the Jewish school was part of the Temple compound and there I was a student and eventually part of the setting, I was one of the group.

Q: What was your father's reaction after Kristallnacht?

A: He was generally a quiet, philosophical, a somewhat pessimistic person. We didn't discuss this.

- Q: Do you think that was because of the German attitude towards children?
- A: My father felt there were always good people everywhere. In fact, we had some good gentile friends who again at the Kristallnacht, after that -- I think Jewish homes were searched for weapons. Now even a bread knife would have been considered a weapon by German standards. We had a bread knife. Our gentile dressmaker came -- risking her own life -- and took the bread knife from us that it shouldn't be found with us. We were always torn between some really decent Germans and the guilt and feeling bad towards other Jews.
- Q: Did you know either any of your former school friends or any local children who were members of either the Hitler Jugend or BDM?
- A: Actually whether this next door neighbor who was my friend ever became one, I don't know because we slowly withdrew and again, it's foggy in my mind. I'm unaware but when we did leave in 1939 and they knew that we were moving out for good, they didn't say good-bye. They didn't come to the door even though there was no one who might have seen it.
- Q: Had your father made plans to emigrate before Kristallnacht?
- A: I believe so because it took that long to get the affidavit. We were given a number and then I recall too the horror when we found out that the American consulate was closed over the summer -- it seemed that our number would not be called until after the summer and my father made a remark like we're lost -- verratzed was the term which was terrible -- really gone. And I don't know why, but our number was yet called before they closed -- we came in April.
- Q: Was there ever a question of where to emigrate to?
- A: Slightly Israel. And then somehow because we had more friends here, it came to being here, to America. Something I remember well, I think since the Kristallnacht and by that time also an aunt and uncle of mine had lost their business because people wouldn't go to the Jewish businesses anymore -- that uncle had been taken to a concentration camp and their daughter was working in a household then -- in a Jewish household in Offenbach and their son learned to be a locksmith in Frankfurt for emigration purposes. And after Kristallnacht, that school was also smashed by the Nazis and I remember him phoning if he can come. And here was a real horrible thing -- my mother was so upset that if the boy could come and two men in the building -- maybe it would be more conspicuous -- maybe then my father would be taken to a concentration camp -- that she first didn't want him to come. And my father -- this is the first quarrel I remember -- really saying vehemently, "No, Ernest can come." And I being totally upset again not knowing which side to take. My mother wanted to protect my father. This split loyalty -- and my father who wanted to let his nephew come

rather than playing it so safe as to having no one notice anyone coming into the Bodenheimer apartment. This I remember with real horror -- it doesn't compare to some of the sad stories but this I remember with the utmost depression -- it weighing on me about Ernest coming -- should he come or not and my mother crying that he shouldn't come, really being afraid and my father insisting he must come.

Q: Would you say your father was a German patriot? Did he serve in WWI?

A: Before the First World War, he lived in Paris and then in England. He was taken a civilian prisoner. He was never a German soldier because he lived in England. Since he had liked it in France and England and part of his training was to know other banking houses, he was more a citizen of the world. He was not so affiliated. He was not a nationalist.

Q: Did he consider going through France and England through any of these connections?

A: No. They didn't exist anymore -- this was before he was married. No. He came then here and he was rather philosophical and pessimistic. He sold Fuller brushes first and was later a shipping clerk. And I remember talking with him here too, the cold weather -- he was pessimistic.

Q: When you say he was philosophical and pessimistic. I don't know how old he was but he must have been middle aged. That must be very difficult for a man of that age to readjust. How did he feel about this?

A: I think again he felt that they came out alive -- they have no kick coming. And many were in the same boat. Many were in the same position -- just because he spoke English, that was good but on the other hand, he was not a business man type and my mother at first went cleaning and later on helped with some dressmaking, and sewing. And we had two rooms rented in a five-room apartment. We took in boarders which was what most of them did and I who never had a room to myself, until I worked and never had an apartment alone with my parents at all -- it didn't bother me then. I mean it was part of the immigration, part of the group. One thing I felt in Germany and then here, like if kids seems to be sometimes foolish or laughing, I felt they don't really know how serious things can be. I knew the reality. When I recall leaving my grandmother in the Black Forest, I remember parting from the family because we took a trip to visit those who were then still there -- a last goodbye. And I knew we would go to safety and it was quite obvious -- even though it was never really talked about -- it was doubtful if they would ever live and see us. So therefore, my youth, here, putting up with boarders and roomers, it seemed part of the total.

Q: Let me just go back a moment, when you went to say goodbye to your grandmother, was this your mother or father's mother?

A: My mother's. My father had no parents.

Q: How did you see your mother on that day?

A: I see my mother almost always nervous. And now I understand, that time I didn't, they tried to get a little bit of money out on which there was a death penalty. And they sometimes mailed it out. When they sent a little package -- some kind of boards -- to relatives here -- some kind of boards on which one could tie on one's bed sheets in order to make it neat in the linen closet -- between these boards they put some money -- not much. The main thing I remember is the fear of being anyone's burden -- of having to ask either those who gave the affidavit or anyone else. The fear of being poor. I know they never mailed it with a return address, and yet one was always afraid of being caught. You know in Germany, it was more a homogenous group and everybody knows who is a Jew and who is not -- especially in a small town.

Q: Do you remember in Offenbach ever trying to go to a movie or to buy something and being refused or made to feel...

A: Once the movies had a sign out that Jews were not wanted, we didn't go and stores -- one had to go. There were small stores and again some knew us and were friendly and I remember also at the market place, my mother knew some people who would be friendly. What I do remember of anti-Semitism is whenever they would be marching by, the Germans, how the Jews would run away. And my father explained that even if I would for some reason greet the flag, it could be considered hypocritical and it could be an insult and if you don't greet it, it was an insult so whatever you do, you were better off running away. I often felt I was a little better off than some of the kids coming from the villages who really had stories of real violence and we only had that after Kristallnacht.

Q: Do you remember such instances?

A: Yes. Later on, when the school started again that I looked into the synagogue which was totally smashed. All the pews had been hacked I think by the fire department because first they had burned it and then to prevent it from spreading to other homes. The teachers who had come back or the women teachers didn't want us to climb up to some windows and look in -- for some reason not to see. And things were never really discussed. But I did look and it was very depressing and sad. And I felt rather helpless -- not knowing what's up really.

Q: When your parents told you you were going to leave, how did you feel about it?

A: Oh glad, with joy. It was not sudden -- it was a slow process. We go to America. Some others go to South America. One looked forward. And the funny thing was in our school, as each class got smaller due to emigration. It was almost funny --

it was not sad. Maybe I as a child didn't see the sadness and maybe it wasn't sad -- we were glad to get out. And it was an accomplished fact that we would leave. Once we knew that the visa was granted and once we had been examined in Stuttgart, -- then there was the story of a teacher's daughter who learned the numbers by heart because she was very near sighted so she wouldn't be rejected. But then they changed the chart and the child kept on saying it but they got out -- how these people got out? I remember my father always saying something and being told take it easy or don't worry because he was worried about whatever condition -- I was near- sighted, not that bad, but near-sighted too. One always was worried, is there anything that can foul it up because we knew we would be lost -- that staying is death.

Q: When you saw your friends going, was that a difficult time for you?

A: Strangely enough, it seems in a fog. I don't even remember some friends if they came after me or before me but I met them again here. Those who were going to New York City, somehow one felt we would meet again but the whole thing was sort of an oppressive mood -- I was always afraid of poverty. Maybe some got out more money, maybe and I thought of living in dungeons. It never occurred to me that New York might have a Fort Tryon Park. We knew we would be safe but beyond that, I wasn't much looking forward -- and I was afraid of English. I didn't speak English and you know what you learn in school -- I was afraid. One sad thing I had a little parakeet to which I was much attached so naturally you don't take a parakeet to America and then again the seamstress took the parakeet and I remember crying about the parakeet. Not about my grandmother -- this was strange. When I left my grandmother it was all an oppressive, quiet thing -- there was not much emotion shown -- maybe my parents tried to hold back and therefore I did too -- I just picked up the pattern.

Q: What did happen to your grandparents?

A: My grandmother died in camp -- in Gurs. The other aunt whose husband was killed in a concentration camp -- my aunt was killed in a concentration camp also. Their boy who we did let come, Ernest, he was killed in Israel by a mine by Arabs. And he had a sister and her story, it came out later, she trained to go to Israel too and then there in this camp -- Haachura it was called, she had a boyfriend. They were about 16 years old. The boyfriend had a chance to get out and he didn't want to leave her and they both got killed.

Q: You, your mother and your father all left together. When you landed in New York, what did you do the first day?

A: There was a cousin and an uncle, they had rented a room for the three of us.

Q: Were they the ones who sent you the visa?

- A: No, they lived in Arkansas, in Fort Smith, Arkansas and they never came and my mother said why don't they invite the child once to Arkansas away from New York?
- Q: How did you know them?
- A: This was a niece of my father who came here early. Sometimes German Jewish fellas or girls would emigrate. They came in the early 1920's. But these were others who had come here as we did. They showed us this room for the three of us and they were refugees like us so we were rather glad that we could speak German and I know that the landlady took me along to a little deli -- a little grocery store and instead of buying just one egg as you were accustomed in Germany, I think she asked for a dozen or six and I thought it's really a nerve to ask for so many eggs -- a chutzpah because it was unheard of. And I also realized later, that for this little party which they gave us, we were charged. My cousins didn't pay. I mean my parents were already a little bit sad like here, they are giving a little beginning party to my cousins and uncles and then have to pay for it when they had just arrived and really didn't know how to make out.
- Q: One thing I forgot to ask and it occurred to me just now. Was your father ever dismissed from the bank where he worked?
- A: Oh yes. One day, he just came up -- he was just let go.
- Q: When was this?
- A: It must have been before the Kristallnacht -- he was just dismissed. After twenty or more years, just let go.
- Q: Was the bank Arisiert?
- A: It must have been in the process -- the owners went to England where they had family. It was to be expected but it came worse than he thought.
- Q: But you already had made plans to leave?
- A: Yes, but this made it more final. After all, there was no more income.
- Q: Getting back to the early days in New York, how did your father manage to earn a living during the early days?
- A: Through connections. When we after six weeks got an apartment, the people who had the apartment over us were also refugees and their son-in-law was a Fuller Brush man and they told us why don't we go and try that, so that's how it was.
- Q: How did you manage during those six weeks?

A: I'm trying to think. Then my father took me to school one day.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Humboldt Junior High -- 173rd Street. I had wanted to wait until our lift came which might have had my report cards which we did bring over which would have had more credits but my father didn't want me to wait six weeks or whatever and he thought that if I get a lower grade, it would be easier for my English. And so he took me to school and at first I was put in a class with mostly immigrants and here to, it was odd. Not that we were so crazy about New York and I never got used to the fire escapes -- the ugliness in some way and there was this little Dutch boy in the class and I don't know what the talk was but this very strict Irish teacher said to us if anyone doesn't like it here, raise your hand. I was smart enough not to raise my hand -- I wasn't so happy but this boy -- Blitz was his name and he raised his hand. And she said to him -- Take the first boat and go back. Then I learned to shut up and don't criticize even more. We were sort of a nice bunch of refugees and we spoke German amongst each other and we often were caught and we were scolded a little bit not to talk so much in class and I talked a lot in class and I was so surprised when we went from one room to the other which is different from the German system that in all rooms I found a few more I could talk German with and I was really quite happy.

Q: When you first got to school this must have been an entirely new experience for you, and you were about 15?

A: Yes. It was even a little bit of a disappointment because in our little German Jewish School for instance, we had a much nicer gym. We would have gym outdoors which I liked. We would change for that and we had a much more rigorous physical activity and I thought our teaching was better -- more was expected. It was in a way more enjoyable -- here. I felt a little bit strange. The fact that you could never get out between classes -- that is the worst thing and I think so to this day. That you cannot have periods to change, to run around, to talk to your friends, but here in America, you just go from one classroom to the other.

Q: Did you feel the refugee children kept together?

A: We kept together, yes. And I liked that. And also then I met another girl who was a very bright girl and I wanted to get to know her, and my mother was a bit against my meeting Americans. Somehow she wanted to be sure she knows the background or with whom I associate and then we took up some homework too. Again from the family above, they showed us. There was a woman who was older than my parents and her husband and they had a married daughter and son-in-law, and a son living with them -- this is how people shared apartments. And they not only helped my father get the Fuller Brush job, they also showed us

where to get some homework -- where some Russian Jewish people who were here longer brought some homework home where my mother did some cross-stitching and sewing the bottom of slippers and the upper part of slippers. It was very hard work on the hands.

Q: Yes, because it's tough to get through. Did you do this also?

A: Not so much. My father tried to help her too. It's amazing how, when I think back, how they worked together. How they stuck it out and the sacrifices. I remember my father coming home really tired -- the Fuller Brush people that time, had to make their own deliveries too -- there was nothing else. He would usually after dinner go right to bed -- read a paper or a book -- that was it.

Q: What did they or you do for recreation then?

A: I then later joined the New World Club. I had friends -- we had even dancing lessons -- four or five girls, and we met some fellas. There was also a refugee woman -- Mrs. Peretz, who gave some gym classes and also dancing lessons. We stayed within this refugee compound and I think I was quite happy. We went to George Washington High School then -- there was no talk of taking a bus -- we walked it from 180th Street. It was not an unhappy time.

Q: You mentioned that your mother did some cleaning and this piecework...

A: Yes. And she did this piece work which I sometimes helped with, and I cleaned the house while she was out cleaning, and we had the boarders -- who were at one time, the boarder was a distant relative which was nice. Another time, the boarder -- roomer -- they didn't eat with us -- was also the mother of some other people who were friends. Again they were refugees, and later a friend of (word missing) who was later to become my husband who had a sad story of his own -- had gone through concentration camp.

Q: Had your mother ever worked in Germany?

A: No. Earlier she had worked once as a secretary in Heidelberg, and as a teacher of business courses during the First World War, but not menial work.

Q: How did she feel about life in New York?

A: You know, one didn't really discuss feelings. It was a necessity, nor was I so geared. I just felt my own restrictive parents. I didn't take it really as depressing as it would be if I had to go cleaning now -- what it would mean to me. If I now had to go cleaning, I would feel terrible, it never occurred to me how my mother would feel doing that, but it was also done by many of her other friends who had been in Europe, who had been in Europe in similar financial, or even better circumstances.

Q: Do you think that made it a little bit easier?

A: Perhaps a little, but I remember she had jobs where she would only come every other week, and my father saying that's pretty rough, because if people wait for every other week to have it cleaned, it's dirtier than a job where one cleans every week. I know he felt a bit bad that she had to do it -- that's why he maybe helped her with the cross-stitching, and also helped cleaning their own house. That might have lasted not more than two or three years, and later on when he did a little bit better, and she then had the connection through a cousin whom she would help with doing some of the needlework, on drapes. This cousin was working for an interior decorator, and she got some of the jobs which the interior decorator gave her. And my mother also would sometimes be a companion or a nurse helper, and then she also cooked for someone who had a room somewhere else. And this she liked a little bit more, and we were all happy with it, because she felt better doing it -- you feel you are helping somebody.

Q: Going back for a moment, when you were in Germany, what did you hope to become?

A: I was a bit interested in art. But I also felt one cannot really make a career here, the main thing is to earn a living, and at one point, here, my teacher said I should go to college, I had good marks and my mother sort of pooh-hood it, like it was out of the question, and sometimes the children -- someone was taken out of school to become an operator in a factory -- and I was glad they let me finish high school. But I regretted a bit that I couldn't go further, yet I knew that at that time, I couldn't do more. Also when I then got a job at eighteen, the question of going to college was out, because in case I wouldn't be up to it, and God forbid I would lose my job, because I helped my parents -- it was a very negative situation, that one didn't plan ahead, or at least I didn't.

Q: What kind of job did you get?

A: That was then as a billing clerk for the same firm where we had done the cross-stitch, and I was there for many years.

Q: How was your social life organized?

A: The social life wasn't bad. I now wish I had planned more of a career at that time, but it somehow seemed out, and also it had to do with being a girl, you don't want to get too much of an education. If you haven't got money, you don't really -- the best thing is to work and not to be a student. The social life was the New World Club, and we had a room that we rented -- a kind of a super's apartment on 164th Street, where we held meetings, and a lot of us got together there -- we even managed to have a little newspaper. We did a lot of that, and then also the Temple Habonim had a hiking group and there was also a hiking group Zigzag to

which some -- that was a former Austrian travel agent -- a little munchkin of a man who would take people not only hiking, but on unusual side trips -- places of interest.

Q: Were the members of this group refugees?

A: Yes. We stayed within the refugee group.

Q: Did you date any American Jewish boys?

A: The family with the cross-stitch -- they had not only a daughter with whom I was friendly, but a son on whom I had a crush, and the son had a friend. We were together in a group and we went out together sometimes, until both were in the army. I was 15, they 17, and after that I got more into a refugee crowd again. Before that, I was a little bit with these Americans.

Q: How did your parents feel about that?

A: I think my mother had a little bit the feeling that after all these are Eastern Jews. My father was more interested because the boy was brilliant and I had a crush on him, but he didn't return it. But his friend liked me and we were kind of a group - - the sister with whom I was friendly more for the purpose of meeting her brother. And there was another family -- I think they also did these cross-stitches, and their daughter also came over to pick up the homework. With them we did interesting things -- we saw that time Fantasia, we saw Native Son. They had some theater productions in little movie theaters. That was a good era, these two or three years, and then the war came, and after that, I got more back into the refugee community.

Q: Did you all continue working until things got a little easier?

A: Yes. They worked forever. My father worked until he died. He died at age 62. My mother stopped when she was about 74 or 75.

Q: Was there ever a chance of your father going back into the banking business?

A: He never tried -- times were bad here, and I remember my mother once asked a teller about her husband. No, he didn't try, nor did he take courses in bookkeeping or accounting or taxes which some did.

Q: Why do you think he didn't?

A: I think he was a bit pessimistic and he didn't really try. He was not an aggressive person, and he was also small. I think his figure might have mattered a little -- he thought people with a good appearance get further.

Q: But he had gotten that far in Germany.

A: Yes. But there because he knew many languages. He knew French, English fluently. He was not that aggressive.

Q: Did you as a family partake in the cultural events in Offenbach?

A: I think my parents – again due to Hitler, they couldn't do many things anymore. Finally, if the things were given in the Temple, a concert, sometimes. But they were interested. My father played the violin, my mother the piano, and they sometimes played duets. They knew operas, they knew the arias. If they went actively, I don't recall.

Q: Did they feel the loss of that when they came here?

A: Yes. My father would say that to just go to bed after work is no life. But it was accepted. They didn't fight it much. They didn't often go to the movies. My father read a lot -- once he took me to an opera that I should see it. Together I think they did little of that stuff here although they were cultured people.

Q: How did they feel when the Wiedergutmachung came?

A: That came later and my father never expected it. Never, and he didn't even apply. My mother, through some prompting from relatives after my father's death – or if he had applied, it was a dormant thing, and he never in his wildest dreams would have thought it would be as good financially as it is now.

Q: How did your mother feel about it?

A: Good. She went then to visit her sister who managed to get to Switzerland, a few times who meanwhile died. She is glad that she cannot be anyone's burden. The main fear was always to be a burden.

Q: Have you ever been back to Germany?

A: No. I would not want to go back to Germany. I have been to Austria -- where my husband comes from. My husband had a Catholic mother who became Jewish by marriage, but it was really a Christian household, and if it hadn't been for Hitler and the Anschluss -- that family would have been Christian. His feelings were not so bad and he also wanted to visit friends who had been helpful to him.

Q: Would you ever go back to Germany?

A: No. I don't want to go back. I feel oppressed and I don't want to see it. Austria I didn't mind and I went to Israel. Our first big trip was to Israel -- very purposely. And I've never been happier -- I never felt more that this is a country that you

belong. This was an experience where we both had tears every day. And we were really not affiliated until 10 years ago. We floated around not belonging, and we are both very happy that we have hooked on to Jewish things. It came about by chance when my husband took some courses which turned out to be much more Jewish oriented than he had anticipated, and so we slowly grew into a Jewish thing -- almost like fate, and it has been a blessing. I don't want to be corny but after my experience, we finally know where we belong, which we didn't know during Hitler or before.

Q: Did you become affiliated with the Tabernacle then?

A: Yes, for the children's sake and because it was the least orthodox which my husband could get into with practically no Jewish background at all. And there again, we met the German Jewish crowd and there we found a niche -- maybe it's too narrow a horizon but I don't care. We finally have an identification, which in retrospect I feel I didn't have in Germany. And if something would, God forbid, come here, I would try to speak much more with my children about what goes on. But you cannot blame them either, because my father, who came from an orthodox home, simply was not an orthodox person -- he was much more philosophical in his outlook. That time it was fashionable too, to be more of a humanist.

Q: How have you transmitted this story to your children?

A: I failed.

Q: Not necessarily.

A: Perhaps not. I had at some point wanted them to watch a TV program which showed the concentration camps, and things which maybe was not a good idea. They were not interested. They don't openly show a great interest. I have asked whether they want to go to Israel, but they have not been interested. I don't want to rule it out yet, but I feel I haven't transmitted it the way I wanted to, or the way I feel now. But we slowly grew into it.

Q: Do you see yourself today as more a part of the American mainstream, or more a part of the German Jewish community in New York?

A: The German Jewish. Increasingly less American.

Q: How do you see your children?

A: More American. Far more American.

Q: In terms of your children's ambitions for their own lives, how do you think that is different from what you experienced?

A: Well, there are no restrictions on them. There are no financial restrictions. They can reach out and if they lose a job, they don't have to worry about supporting us so they are freer, and yet, I feel, they also missed something good that we had. We belonged somewhere. We belonged to this refugee clique afterwards, and to this day.