Eva Feist 5/20/78

Q. Where and when were you born?

A. On September 13th, 1920 in Eisenach, Germany.

Q. Did you grow up in Eisenach?

A. I grew up in Eisenach as long as I stayed in Germany.

Q. Can you tell me a little bit about your education there?

A. Yes. I went four years to elementary school as everybody did in those days, and then went to the *lyceum* (higher academic education) and then after a quarter, I think, I said to my parents, "I think it would be better if I would go to the *handelschuler* (business school). I would get some more practical education besides the strictly *lyceum* education because the way things look it might be more advantageous for me for later years. And they agreed to this.

Q. You said, "The way things look." How early was this?

A. That was about '33.

Q. How did it look in '33 for your…

A. From my angle it was Eisenach was…Turin was a stronghold of the Nazis from the word "go" and, of course, it manifested itself very rapidly then. I had always been friends with Jewish as well as non-Jewish girls and boys, as far as that's concerned. We were kids together: same neighborhood and the ones with whom I really got close, the ones who really lived close to me and with whom I got together daily on the basis of the elementary school being in the area, they were 90% non-Jewish. On girl, in particular, grew up more in our house and my nursemaid at the time took her for walks as well as me. She was always in our house. Her father worked for the government and almost within 3 – 4 months of Hitler come in, she drifted away completely and I got the signal very fast.

Q. To a 12 year old girl to lose a best friend like that, it was very hard to understand…

A. Yes, very traumatic and very upsetting and this to me gave me the first "What's the matter? Why am I different all of a sudden?" I can also say that I had another girlfriend who, to the last day said to me "Well you are no different." That was just before my immigration and I said, "Look, you cannot walk down the street with me." "What do you mean I cannot walk down the street with you?" You also had some, but not many, of these in Eisenach. But the majority of those in Eisenach was pretty anti-Semitic.

Q. Did you ever remember going home and telling your parents like when this first friend you mentioned wouldn't talk to you anymore…how did they try and protect you or how did they try and explain to you?

A. Well, they said it's a political thing. Her father works for the government and she probably cannot. Their livelihood was more important than children's friendships. And of course I drifted more with Jewish and stayed with the Jewish friends.

Q. Were you ever prevented from going back to school?

A. When I changed schools to the *handelschule* I soon afterwards I find tickets on my desk. "This is a ticket to Palestine. One way. No return…." We were maybe 4 or 5 Jewish children altogether in this school and one after the other resigned. Some graduated, some resigned and I **was strictly** by myself finally. None of the others really wanted to have anything to do with me and I was called Jew and dirty Jew and and all the favorite expressions. One day, the *handschule* did not have a big gymnasium for various functions, we used the *lyceum* gymnasium and the principal said to me, "you go ahead and sit in the last row by yourself." So I went. I went home and from that day I said I'm not going to school anymore. My parents, as much as they hated me to leave without having gotten the *einyager*, could see my point. I went to the school and said that I wanted to resign. The principal happened to pass me and said "What are YOU doing here?" I said I want to resign. He said, "Thank God, now we are rid of the last Jew!"

Q. Again, for me, the most difficult thing is for a 13 - 14 year old girl…

A. I was a little older. It was very upsetting. The whole surrounding at Eisenach had this kind of an atmosphere.

Q. Did you ever see signs? …or you were *verboden* (forbidden) or…?

A. Yes, yes, *Der Sturmer* was…visible page by page in showcases. Every new edition was displayed in various parts of Eisenach.

Q. You mentioned that…did your father's business suffer beginning after Hitler came into power?

A. Yes. My father's business suffered drastically.

Q. What kind of business did he have?

A. We manufactured high-priced furniture frames, hand-carved, etc. Manufactured, not imported. Nation-wide, not international.

Q. About how many people did your father employ?

A. I can't give you an honest figure, but I would say, between 30 and 50 people but this is so far back that…

Q. Were his salesmen Jewish or non-Jewish?

A. My father and my uncle, who were co-owners, traveled nation-wide. They were the salesmen.

Q. Do you remember any discussions when they came home in the beginning?

A. No, I do not. Because I was young and, like many German families, anything of importance was not discussed in front of the children.

Q. Do you remember any discussions of immigration?

A. Most vivid discussion I remember is between my father and my brother…my father feeling so very German, having fought during the World War, having got the Iron Cross…that anything could ever happen to anybody who was…uh, that all German Jews in one way or the other had…that this could last any length of time…that this was a passing phase and that it would straighten out very rapidly.

Q. But you mentioned that your brother was of different opinion.

A. My brother, being older than I. He graduated school, he went to a trade school wanting to be an interior architect and eventually coming into the company. My father also had insisted on him getting a business training in a company so that he would know it from all angles…

Q. By business training you mean like a laeling?

A. Yes. Right. He was an apprentice in a Jewish firm who were selling houseware, ironware, items like that.

Q. From your point of view, as a teenager, did you notice and difference in your own standard of living as business began to fall off?

A. No, I cannot say that I noticed a different standard of living. My parents didn't travel as much anymore outside the country. But I didn't really…I was a child. I was never taken along on these travels anyway. I was sent to my grandmother's…but the fear my grandparents lived in Trier, which was in Hessen, which was also very strong territory of the Nazis. They moved into Eisenach. They sold their business because that was a retail business and they, their business went down completely. Anti-Semitism was very great there. My

mother's brother left Germany, who was in the business. My parents didn't go to outside home parties anymore like they used to do… They did not go to the theater anymore. That also came bit by bit. They went out to friends' houses and the social life took place in the houses rather than anywhere else.

Q. Were you ever stopped from going to a movie, stopped from shopping in a particular place?

A. There were signs on…in later years, after I was…After I refused to go back to school I went to *werfreithausen* which was called a training school, was called a *frauschule* for…I originally wanted to become a domestic science teacher and this was the school to train you for this. This school also had a *housheracher* connected with it. It was Jewish. It was run by the *logea*, by the neighborhood. I was there for a year and a half and then I went to Frankfurt and took a course in sewing…all to prepare myself to leave Germany. And when it came to the point of buying things to leave Germany and to so on…by then the signs had appeared in the stores *udenavernsh.* I very vividly remember one day that I wanted to go into a store and I come to the door and I see the sign and the owner had known me since I was born and I turned around and she came running after and and she said, "But that's not meant for you." So I told her, "Whether it's meant for me or not, I'm a Jew and I'm not welcome here." There are other stores will still welcome me. But—we have to do it. There are still some other stores, maybe not right around here but I will go and travel to a store which does not have it on it.

Q. I would suspect just knowing from the last few years that you didn't look very Jewish at all.

A. Definitely not. As a matter of fact, when we were in elementary school, no it was *lyceum*, in the schools you were examined by a doctor once a year and the doctor put me in front of the class and said, "Now look at her. This is how a good German girls should look."

Q. This—was before the Hitler?

A. No, it was at the beginning. His face turned red, I'm sure.

Q. The reason I asked you that was that in terms of not going into various stores or being restricted in any way, did you find that you were able to go simply because you didn't look Jewish?

A. I could've gone in, but I wouldn't. I mean I also walked around with a *Mogen Dovid* (Star of David or Jewish Star). I was a Jew. I am a Jew and always have been a Jew. I wasn't going to hide it and wherever I wasn't wanted, I certainly wasn't going to spend my money there.

Q. Speaking of your feelings of being Jewish, did you come from an Orthodox or a liberal home?

A. I came…my grandparents, especially my mother's parents, were Orthodox. We had a kosher home. We were, I would say, conservative.

Q. How did the Nazis coming to power affect your feeling of being Jewish?

A. It certainly did not diminish it…not make me feel "Gee, why was I born a Jew?" I was born a Jew. **It's a fact.** I'm proud of it. We fought for Judaism all through our history, but at the same time I was afraid.

Q. You mentioned before the idea of this terror constantly being there. In what ways did you feel that kind of terror?

A. The insecurity. You are insecure as a teenager, as a young child anyway. You don't know, am I doing the right, am I doing the wrong thing? On top of it you see the *Sturmer* showcases all over. You see the SS are all over. You hear it on the radio. You hear it all over. You hear continuously what terrible people the Jews are, you hear your peers talking of the miserable Jews. It doesn't help a young person to grow up and to be secure. It's a lot of fear in it.

Q. You mentioned that your brother talked about emigrating. When did your parents think seriously about emigration?

A. My father died of natural causes in '37 and after that my mother went to visit my brother in Israel and then decided to apply for immigration to Israel. When she came back she said, "I don't know how long it will take for us to get to Israel, but I want you out." She wrote to a cousin of our father's in England, would they vouch for me? They did, they got me a job as a maid with an English family. I got out in April '39.

Q. Would your father have left had he not died? Was your father of the opinion then that he would leave?

A. When he died, I don't think he was of the opinion to leave. I'd like to interject here that it was about the 25th wedding anniversary of my parents and they had planned and applied for a currency to visit my brother in Israel. But unfortunately my father was very sick beforehand and I could imagine, since my father was a very intelligent man that he would have more or less maybe been talked into it or heard a little something how the outside world felt about it. He was not alive anymore when the *Kristallnacht* happened, etc.

Q. Your mother, I take it, was not of the same mind? That it was a passing phase…In the earlier years?

A. My mother was not as strong-minded a woman as my mother-in-law and was, I think, easier influenced by her husband, and also could not visualize that something that terrible could happen in Germany. My mother then finally wanted to go to Israel but unfortunately did not make it out of Germany. My mother died in a concentration camp.

Q. When she told you that you were to go to England as a maid, how did you feel about that?

A. Which part do you mean?

Q. The thought of going alone…

A. The thought of going alone did not worry me. I was, by '39, 18 years old and life had made me more independent. I had been away from home various times. I supposed this is what it had to be and hopefully my mother would get out very soon and we had, we were all going to go to Israel…from England. My mother was going straight from Germany and when my mother was there then I would go there…because there were visas put in for both of us. So my stay in England should have really only been temporary and eventually I would join my mother and brother in Israel.

Q. How did you feel about going as a maid?

A. Um…I was young. It had to be done. There wasn't a big choice of jobs to be had. There was no other way to get out. So go. I do it. But I think where I made my big mistake was I hated the family I was with…not a very nice family and it went through my minds various times, I hope my mother will get out very soon, but how could I…should I try to get a maid's job for my mother to get to England? But the thought of my mother having to do what I had to do, having had maids herself before…I just couldn't get myself to expose my mother to treatment like that…which today I know was wrong.

Q. What kind of treatment were you exposed to?

A. I had to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and scrub the stairs before breakfast. There was another German girl and we were given different food than the family had. We were treated strictly as the "Colonial maids."

Q. Were you in London?

A. It was outside London.

Q. The day that you left Germany, that must have been very difficult for you…?

A. As I said before, I was a teenager…18. It was partly difficult to leave my mother and to go. I didn't really know what was meeting me at the other end. It was partly also, I suppose, adventure. I mean, what is it to a teenager?

Q. Did you have the hope that your mother would follow you?

A. I had the hope that my mother would go to Israel. And, of course, nobody figured on this war coming this fast. At least I didn't. My cousins over there didn't. And I thought well, if it's not this month, the month after my mother will go to Israel. 2 or 3 months after, what's the difference?

Q. Did your grandparents still live in Eisenach?

A. My grandparents had died. My grandfather first and my grandmother, too, of natural causes.

Q. When you said 2 or 3 months didn't make a difference…were you still in Eisenach on *Kristallnacht*? What happened on *Kristallnacht?*

A. I was not in Eisenach, I was in Frankfurt. Taking this sewing course. I'm sure you heard what happened in Frankfurt many times over. The temples were burned, people were taken away. I lived at the time with…this was a lady who had a small pension and I helped her. I took the sewing course and partly helped her take care of the people. So I lived free with her.

Q. Was this a Jewish lady?

A. A Jewish lady, yes. There were mainly elderly people. One day, shortly after the *Kristallnacht*, the doorbell rings and there stands a man all beaten up and, as it happened to be, he was a friend of my parents who came from Eschweger and we took him in. This was awful to see this man so beaten up, was really a very dramatic thing. And I tried to contact my mother in Eisenach, which was impossible for…days. After the *Kristallnacht* I just went on a train and I went home to see what was what. Nothing had happened to our house because they came and wanted to arrest my father. My father was dead. They went through the house, they did not ransack it or throw anything out the window or anything. Our temple of course was burned. The Jewish men were all gone.

Q. How did things progress from *Kristallnacht* until, you mentioned, April 1939, when you left?

A. After *Kristallnacht* my mother said, "It is time that you get out." That started the arrangements my mother did, I did, to get out. (The arrangements were through relatives.) Right in the meantime came the edict that all valuables, all jewelry, silver and so on, had to be handed in, which I did for my mother. Whatever had

to be done was done. We did it…we are blamed for it at this point. I don't think we had any other choice. Whatever had to be done, we did…very meekly.

Q. When you say, "we are blamed for it" at this time, that's hindsight.

A. It's hindsight. It's a moot point to discuss. What could we have done? Nobody had a gun because nobody ever thought of there being a necessity for it.

Q. Well, nobody knew even what would follow that.

A. Right. Even if some people would have said, "Well, we can fight for it" where could we get a weapon from to fight for it? You were a German like anybody else. There were were Catholics, Protestants and Jews, but we were Germans.

Q. Except you weren't being treated like a German.

A. I meant before Hitler. (Yes) So nobody…There was no need to have any kind of weapon in the house. What for?

Q. The only question that comes up there is in terms of like *silga upgava (?)* or jewelry whatever it is, the announcement was made. Why comply with the announcement?

A. What would happen then, if you don't? It was too late. People were mellow at that time. Don't forget people were frightened already. A lot of the young people were gone.

Q. When you say people were frightened, was it a air of fear in terms of physical harm?

A. Yes…of physical harm…of just plain fear.

Q. When you left in April of '39 did you leave Eisenach via Berlin?

A. No, I left Eisenach by Holland and stayed a few days in Holland. Mother had her best friend in Holland. I spent a few days there and went to England from Holland.

Q. In England you mentioned this was the first position you had (yes). Did you stay there?

A. I did not stay there too long because, as I said, these people were not the nicest people and the woman especially was not the most honest person. She had…a friend of hers had died and she was the executor of the will. In the will there was some money left to the maid of the other one and she said she would only get part of the money but that she has to come work for her. So I was out of a job and I

went to my cousins who lived in Lancashire. They were expecting a baby. I lived with them. They became my second parents. I lived with them and they intended to come to this country. Somehow I got my visa earlier. I came here first.

Q. When did you become aware that your mother couldn't go to Israel?

A. When the war broke out. Nobody was allowed out. I sent Red Cross messages back to Germany. I got a message back that my mother and friends had left b*enenbenaasdfg-kl (?):*…and some friends had left earlier, some later.

Q. By the time they had left, this must have been in 1940 something like that (yes). Were you in contact with her between '39 and the time you got that message?

A. Yes. Before the war, regularly and after the war via the Red Cross.

Q. When you got the message from the Red Cross did you understand what it meant?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. When you said you got the visa to come to the United States how were you able to get it? Did you apply earlier? Or what?

A. I also came on the German quota, of course. Two other cousins who lived here in those days, they gave me the affidavit.

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Q. You stayed in England for the 8 years during the war until 1946. Did you stay with your cousins after that first domestic job?

A. I stayed with them for a number of years until I was called up for war work. I took a training course in catering and through this I got a job with the Land army. The Land army consisted of girls being called up to work on the land to replace the men. I was in charge of one of the hostels in which they lived. I went to different hostels.

Q. So you were assigned to different places then?

A. I was assigned to different places in England. I was also assigned to the Land Army Club in London but this had to be closed because of the large-scale bombing.

Q. Was everybody called up for war work or only aliens?

A. Everybody was called up for war work. Some aliens were also sent to camps…internment camps. I almost got there too because the judge in front of whom I appeared also had a German girl and he was very dissatisfied with her.

Every girl almost automatically was put into internment camp. The police chief of Nelson, where I lived, went to the judge and said, "Look, you are really making a mistake in this case. I know this person personally." The priest, who was a friend of my cousins in England, he also said, "This girl is beyond reproach. She really doesn't belong in an internment camp. She's no danger to England." So they changed my status.

Q. What made you decide to come to the United States?

A. Well, as I said before, this second cousin of mine, cousin of my mother's who became my second parents…they felt that, at the time, their little boy would have a better future in America. Which he certainly has and they wanted to come here and, since I was more or less their daughter, I was to go with them.

Q. The reason I asked was because in terms of going to Israel instead?

A. Yah. I hadn't seen my brother for 14 years. It was a long time and I'll never forget before I left for America they came to England. I'll never forget the emotions before and while I was on the bus going to the airport to pick him up. The tears were running down. And I was joyful. It was…emotion you only experience.

Q. Right. That was before you saw him?

A. Yes.

Q. Was there any strangeness after you saw him?

A. None. I didn't know my sister-in-law and everything was fine from the first second.

Q. Also I would guess that a lot had happened in between. Your father had passed away? And your mother?

A. Yes. And I had grown up.

Q. How did you feel about coming to the U.S.?

A. That was another thing to be done. Since my second parents were leaving I was coming here too. I got the visa first. I came first. And I stayed with my real cousins for a short time until I found a job.

Q. How did you find a job?

A. Through one of the Jewish agencies. I worked in a home for the Jewish orphans on the teenage level. But I wasn't particularly…it was an apartment project up here in 167th street.

Q. Were you living in Washington Heights?

A. Yes. But I really wanted to go more into a larger scale operation and I found a job, don't ask me anymore how, as a housekeeper at the Home for Infirm and Aged Hebrews. It was all the way down on the lower east side.

Q. That too, in connection with what we were talking about before, was that a very different experience for you?

A. Yes. Very different. Very educational. Because, as I said before, I don't look Jewish. And they couldn't really believe, the old people, that I was Jewish. And on top of it, I didn't speak Jewish. I mean, I was on the elevator once and they discussed me and they were absolutely sure. "How can she be a *Yiddener?* She doesn't speak Yiddish." So I turned around, "I don't speak Yiddish, but I assure you I am a *Yiddener."* They were mostly Eastern Jews. The Board of Directors, of course, consisted mostly of Eastern Jews. A very lovely old gentleman, with whom I had lunch one day said, "Please don't misunderstand me, but now I think for once you know, with the shoe being on the other foot, how it feels the poor Jew who is coming." And I said I do understand and believe me I can understand how you felt. Right, it certainly was not.

Q. Did you know he was referring to them coming to Germany…

A. Of course. And of course it wasn't right.

Q. That has an interesting… What did you do for recreation? …you lived with these cousins when you first came?

A. No, I lived in. I lived at the home the aged and…no, the first job as a housekeeper was the Home of Israel on the lower east side. I'm sorry…after a few years I got a job as assistant dietician, which was really my field at the Home for the Aged and Infirmed Hebrews at 106th Street.

Q. So, in other words, in both jobs you lived in?

A. No, the downtown I lived in and I changed to the other job…yes I lived in.

Q. Were most of your friends of the German-Jewish community?

A. Yes, as I mentioned before, we met pretty soon after Bosetter came back to New York and I came into New York. I had some friends here. I had relatives. I was terribly miserable.

Q. Why were you so miserable?

A. It's a mixed job. A whole lot of different point. One point is I had come out of England and everyone was so tightly rationed and everybody tried to make do with what they had and you come here and everybody was so proud of what they all bought on the black market and everybody told us what they all had and they complained about little trivial things they couldn't have. I just thought it was absolutely wrong to feel this way. That was one point. Second point was that everybody who I met and were friendly with were established already, were on the way up and I was again all the way down here being a new immigrant. And the whole lifestyle of America was so different. I was unhappy.

Q. You mentioned the lifestyle was different. Different from England?

A. Yes, from England. In England I was with (due to my job) I had become friendly mostly non-Jews. They didn't have the rush and the push of New York. I lived more in England in the small towns and villages, in the green. You left your door open, you walked to anywhere, any time. One of the first things somebody said, "Oh, you don't go to Central Park in the evening." Everything was so different. You lived in great big houses which were just bricks and stone and so on and this needed a lot of adjusting.

Q. When you came to England, did you speak English?

A. A certain amount. Not fluently.

Q. Was that a difficult thing for you there?

A. I picked it up pretty rapidly.

Q. But that was not a problem for you when you came to America?

A. No.

Q. Do you feel you were a different parent than other parents of your children's contemporaries?

A. You mean the non-refugees? (Yes) I can imagine so. I think we were stricter. We were not as easy-going.

Q. When you say you could imagine so, did anything point itself up or—what? Did your son point it up?

A. Our son has pointed it up at various points…

Q. It's all right. I'm one of them, too.

A. We had grown. I think you're apt to bring up your son on the values you are brought up with. Of course, if you are born in Germany of German-Jewish parents you have different values from an American parent. Of course, your values by now have also mixed in with your contemporaries who grew up here, both of refugee parents and of others, the same as Strawns (?) have by now.

Q. That's right. I was just curious as to whether he pointed up something. You're saying yes.

A. Right. Absolutely. And I can remember myself saying many more times "no" to him than the other parents.

Q. You knew that the other parents said "yes"?

A. I sometimes felt no was in place.

Q. When you were living in the small towns in England, how did the blitz affect you?

A. Well, I did my duty as anybody else. I was a fire warden…I walked around with a helmet same as anybody else.

Q. But you didn't have to be evacuated?

A. Well, when we closed the Land Army Club in London. That was a kind of evacuation.

Q. That was the last place that you were?

A. No. From then on, we went to the hostels…mainly to the south of London.

Q. Southern portion of England, you mean?

A. Yes.

Q. O.K.