

Irmgard Horn

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Cologne in 1909.

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

A: I went to high school. I didn't study. I went to the University and heard Gastvortregen and played piano, went to my father's business and worked there a little bit and married fairly young to Hamburg.

Q: What type of business was your father in?

A: He had a factory for calenders and other stuff – stationery and reclame, advertisements (she showed me a pencil with the name of the business on it)

Q: Let's just go back a little bit, while you were going to school, how would you describe the relationship between the Jewish children and the non – Jewish children?

A: Perfect because there were only two Jewish children and all the others were my good friends. This was different at this time.

Q: You say only two Jewish children, was that usual in a city like Cologne?

A: In a regular school, yes. There were not too many Jewish children. We were not religious so I didn't go to a Jewish school. As a matter of fact, I didn't ever learn Hebrew.

Q: Did you belong to a congregation?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: What type of congregation was it?

A: It was a congregation in the Rohnstrasse, Dr. Kober, whose wife still lives here. No, it was more or less like the Tabernacle.

Q: When you started to work in your father's business, in what capacity were you working?

A: As a bookkeeper.

Q: You mentioned also that you got married young, what type of business was your husband in in Hamburg?

A: He happened to be in the same type of business strangely enough than my second husband. He was a salesman for all the same articles he had that means buttons and all these – funny enough, they never knew each other.

Q: Was life different for you in Hamburg than in Koln?

A: It was beautiful. We had a gorgeous apartment and as a matter of fact, something funny, I had a built in maid. She was two months already in my parent's house before I married to learn exactly how to do everything that the poor little girl didn't have to work. And when I came back from my honeymoon, she came the same day and that was it – she stayed with us in Hamburg.

Q: Did you work at all in Hamburg?

A: No. I never worked. I did help my husband by taking phone calls and so on but I never worked until about four months before we emigrated to South Africa. Then I started to learn how to make hats but four months is not exactly a long time and I worked at a very nice lady who happened to be not Jewish and I had to go through the back door in and in a little room where nobody saw me, she showed me everything. It was impossible at this time to be anywhere especially with non – Jews.

Q: Let me go back just for a moment. When did you get married?

A: I married Christmas, 1932 and came the beginning of 1933 to Hamburg and I was only in Hamburg three weeks before Hitler came and it was very very nice. I had nice friends. We met nice people. I didn't know anybody in Hamburg. But for my part, I would have left in April, 1933. I begged my husband let's go to South Africa or anywhere. It's no good. We just married. We are just starting here. Let's go out of Germany because I don't like what I see here.

Q: What was it that you saw that you didn't like?

A: That I thought Hitler was there for good and that we Jews after the 1st of April 1933, after the stores were marked, I didn't think it was good to stay there and for us as a young couple, it would have been much better to leave like I wanted but my husband wouldn't think of it. My parents in law lived in the Saarland and they went in 1935 after the plebiscite when the Saar voted, they went the same evening to Luxemburg where they already had an apartment and that was a clever thing to do for them. They could or they did take all their money along at this time and my two sisters in law with their husbands also followed to Luxemburg and they wanted us to come and my husband didn't want to.

Q: Why didn't your husband want to leave?

A: Because he made a good living in Germany and he didn't think that it would become bad and being that I tried all the time, Let's go, let's go, there is an interesting thing to say. We had one Jewish girl friend and she was married to an Artling von so and so and he wasn't Jewish and he lived with her together and they had a baby. She was my best friend. He sent her to America – he wanted her to go to America with the child and she came back and said no and I will never forget it. On the 2nd of January, 1938, he asked all their friends and they all were Jewish – at this time, he didn't live with her together anymore – he was one of the very first Nazis and he ordered us to her apartment and he came in and he said "I want to ask a favor of you. All of you are my very close friends, I can't help it that I don't live with Ruth anymore but it's impossible. Please leave Germany as fast as you can or you will not be able to leave it anymore." So from that time on, I begged my husband and finally I had him – went one day to the American Consulate and asked for two numbers and I came home and he had to sign and he didn't want it and that was actually my first fight I had. Finally he signed it and that was our luck. We went to South Africa because my mother is born in South Africa, went back with my grandmother and the other three children to Germany after my grandfather died but two of her sons went back to South Africa and the one was a very big man in tobacco and they were very well off. So naturally, it was understandable that we all wanted to go to South Africa. In August, we wrote to my uncle that we would like to go to South Africa and the answer came back that it was impossible for us because we were born in Germany to go to the Union of South Africa. He sends us affidavits to go to Swaziland for my sister, my brother in law and their two children and my husband and me. And my parents could go to South Africa because my mother was born there. My parents were in Cologne at this time and my grandmother from my mother's side lived with them and my parents didn't want to go. My father said nothing will happen to us and then came the 10th of November and in the meantime, we had already our passports with the visa for Swaziland. We had everything ready and at eight o'clock our phone rings and at the same time, the door rings. I open the door and there were the Nazis. "Herr Ehrman, sie sind verhaftet." I came out of the bathtub soaking wet with a towel around and I said "You cannot take him because here is our passport, we are going to Luxemburg. We can leave today. You can bring us over the border. We are ready to leave today. We will leave everything here." No, we take him. And they took him and I stood there all by myself. Now, I must have been quite clever because at 9 o'clock the Jewish girl came who helped me at this time because we were ready to leave Germany and I first made a check out for the complete amount I had in the bank and I had all our jewelry at the jeweler to have fixed and I sent her out.

Q: When you say a Jewish girl...

A: At this time you had to have a Jewish girl. My original maid had to leave. (Rassenschande) So then I called five friends and told them to come over to my

house as fast as they can because they just took Max and if you stay home, they will take you too. They will not come back to my apartment. I don't know how I had the insight. When they said, where's your girl and I said I sent her to get all the money we had and to get the jewelry. Are you crazy, that's much to much for anybody. I said she will be back and she came back and you wouldn't believe what happened with this money. I really fed about 30 people who didn't have a penny and didn't think of it. At 10 o'clock that morning, all the money was stopped to be taken out of Jewish accounts. Then the first thing I tried to call the Jewish agencies and I couldn't get through.

Q: What organizations?

A: The Judischer Hilfsverein. I couldn't get through and my husband was gone. I do not know how I survived but I survived and I tried every day something else. Five days later, I went to the Nazi headquarters in Hamburg. I went in and they looked at me and stopped me in the same moment because I looked Jewish and I said I want to talk to somebody in charge of the concentration camps.

Q: Did you know where they had taken your husband?

A: No. I had no idea. So I go in there with my two passports and the man said "are you Jewish" and I said "Yes, I am Jewish. He said what do you want here, go home. I said now I want to tell you one thing – if you would be in the concentration camp and your wife wouldn't try to get you out...and he looked at me and he said you are right and he gave me the address of the police department where I should go and I went right there over and there was a man who was a human being and he told me what do you want. I told him my husband is in the concentration camp – there is no reason why he is there because we have our passports, we have our visas, we can leave today, you can send us out of the country, you can keep what we have here – that's quite a bit but let him out. He said there's nothing I can do. But evidently there was something that he did because after thirteen days, I heard he would be out the next day.

Q: How did you hear?

A: Through the Jewish organization where I went every day and every night I had six different friends of ours sleeping in our two beds until one said, you know you have already 12 pajamas in the beds. What if somebody comes again? But you know, where they were once, they didn't come a second time. They were saved. The Nazis came to their homes. So, by now, I didn't have any furniture anymore because I had my lift packed to South Africa. I had the tickets for South Africa for the 15th of January. Everything was ready – only my husband was missing. I think I sent 6 times money and my mother got the money back later on because he never got the money in the concentration camp. Then I knew where he was – he was in Oranienburg. And I went to the station with one of my good friends in his

car – my car was sold by then – and there came my husband. I never saw anybody in two weeks looking like that. Thin like a stick, no hair on his head and actually mentally somehow not right. We took him in the car and he asked how come this car and not our car. I said it was at home, I was afraid to drive. Then we took him to our apartment and in our apartment was one bed which wasn't our bed and slowly but surely we told him everything and then he had about fifty names. Our friend wrote the names down and we called – he had them all in his head.

Q: To tell them...

A: To tell them that the men are alive and okay.

Q: When your husband came home, did he tell you what had happened?

A: Till today I don't know it. We never talked about it. I put him in the bathtub and you have no idea how he looked. They had beaten him and everything. And then I put him to bed and I was sitting in front of the bed and he was screaming during the night. For days, I didn't go to bed and was sitting in front of the bed. But, this was the 23rd of November. On the 25th of November, we went to Cologne to my parents. He wanted to go to visit friends from business and to one I took him and then he had enough. He would not listen to me. He had to do what he wanted. We tried to calm him down. We were one night in Cologne and went the next day to Luxemburg. When we came to the border, this is one thing I will never forget. When the Nazis came in, how he jumped and stood straight. Things which you never can forget. How he looked at them and I just said very quietly he just comes from the concentration camp. It took months and months until he was his old self again. We stayed until the 15th of January in Luxemburg because our steamer went one month later and I called from Luxemburg my parents and said will you please go today and buy tickets for the 15th of February. They said no, we are not going. I said you are coming, without your furniture. We have our furniture in South Africa and that is it and mother, not no but yes. But Uncle Max, that was my uncle in South Africa, just wrote us a letter that it is not so important for us, old people to come. I said let Uncle Max say what he wants, you are coming with us, otherwise I am coming back to call for you.

Q: Were you an only child?

A: No.

Q: Right. You mentioned you had a sister.

A: I have one sister and had one brother who died a few months ago.

Q: Were they still in Germany at this time?

- A: My sister left in December, 1938. She had two children and she lived in Bochohl in Westphalen and they had a big factory and on the 10th of November, the Nazis came, all old friends of my brother in law and threw everything they could get their hands on on the floor and they had a gorgeous house and there wasn't much left and all of a sudden my sister said it smells like gas and my brother in law ran to the basement and they had cut the pipe. And my little niece who was 7 years old at this time didn't talk for four weeks. They went to a doctor and he said he can't do anything – maybe it comes back naturally. And when they went to Holland by car, their old chauffeur drove them with their car which was a big risk, she started to cry for the first time and started to talk again. And we were in Luxemburg and we didn't want to go back to Germany to get the steamer in Rotterdam so we had to get the visas to go through all the countries. And I tell you until we got to Rotterdam, I was half – dead, honestly half – dead.
- Q: How did you get the visas to go through?
- A: Through money – only through money. False visas – only through money.
- Q: When you had taken your money out of the bank that morning, were you able to take it with you?
- A: No. I used it all. I told you I really saved the lives of friends and what was left I gave to friends.
- Q: You left with the 10 RM?
- A: Yes, with 10 marks and then when we were in Rotterdam and the steamer came – and to know are my parents and my grandmother on there – this was also one of the tense moments but when I saw them, you have no idea how we were crying.
- Q: They had gone from Koln to...
- A: To Hamburg. It was A German steamer and from there, we went to South Africa. My grandmother was very sick at this time – she was a diabetic and my parents left the boat in Cape Town and we went to Durban because we had to go to Swaziland. But we went to Durban and from Durban, we went for one week to Johannesburg – for that we got the permit and my uncle told us you are not going to Swaziland, I will try to get you to Bulawayo, Rhodesia. And he gave us a tremendous big letter of credit to go there and we were there for four weeks and on Easter Saturday morning, they came at 10 o'clock and said at 11 o'clock your train is leaving and you have to leave Bulawayo. In the running train, they threw our passports. I went through quite a bit. Then we were for another week in Johannesburg and then we went to Swaziland where my sister and brother in law and the two children were already.

Q: Before we go on, I would like to go back for a minute so that I have it all straight. When you were still in Germany, before Kristallnacht, did you ever see signs Juden Unerwünscht?

A: All over. For instance, one evening we went to visit friends. They happened to live in a very Jewish neighborhood and there still lived quite a few Jews at that time and when we were in the bus going down there, we heard they were running outside and singing “wenn das Juden blut vim messer spritzt” and we went already two stations further and went as fast as we could to the house of our friends and we see them coming there and we rang the bell without letting off. In Germany at this time, there was only light for thirty seconds, then the light in the hallways went out and they knew that something was wrong and we were screaming from downstairs open the door and hold the light and we were running like crazy and they behind us till to the third floor and then our friend called from upstairs “the police is coming, we called the police” and then they turned around. They had knives in their hands and after that, I fainted.

Q: When your husband saw incidents like this, did he then...

A: He still didn't want to leave, no.

Q: Why didn't he...

A: He was afraid to start anew, I think. That was it. And then we went to Swaziland and we stayed there from April, 1939 until August, 1940 because we had our visa for America. I started to make hats there. They still wear them most probably today. There is a residence commissioner and all the employees at this time wore my hats.

Q: You mentioned that you went to this woman in Hamburg to learn to make hats. Did you go specifically because you knew you were going to emigrate?

A: Yes. Because I didn't learn anything, I couldn't do anything, I never worked in Germany. And for the three months we were in Luxemburg, I went every day too to a very good person but this isn't enough to learn a profession properly. I only knew half the things I had to know. I took all the gadgets you need for making hats along.

Q: How did you get the idea to do this?

A: We all had ideas. The one learned cooking, the other did this. Most of the women did try to learn something if they didn't work before. And in Swaziland were sixty (60) Jewish refugees. In Mbabane, Swaziland and one of these, were one Dr. Mastbaum and his wife and their daughter. He is one of the biggest men for malaria now. My brother in law who was a big manufacturer in Germany and

my husband and I who came with our own money because my parents in law lived in Luxemburg and gave us a certain amount.

Q: Did you also use this money to pay for the visas through the other countries to Rotterdam?

A: Yes. And all the others were people from little towns and the residence commissioner and his family never looked at one of them but we three families were always invited for everything and we always talked as liaison with all the other people. Whatever came up, we were the liaison.

Q: Let me just recap. Your parents got off in Cape Town and went on to Johannesburg...

A: And my uncle looked after them beautifully. There are not many people who had such a nice life and it was through my uncle. We went further because we were not allowed to stay there. Swaziland is a very wild country. We lived first in a hotel for a few weeks but this became too expensive so my brother – in – law, my sister and we moved in one house which was empty at this time. It belonged to the police commissioner who was away for one year and we stayed there.

Q: What was your impression when you came to Mbabane?

A: That it is very primitive. You have no idea how primitive. This is unbelievable. Whatever I tell you is not enough. We were really in the wildest Africa. My brother in law came over with a car so we could drive a little bit around but on the 1st of September, we only were allowed to go approximately two miles in every direction.

Q: Why?

A: Because we were enemies of the English – we were still Germans. German – Jews didn't make a difference, we were German and this was England.

(tape turned)

A: Then my husband got a job in Esureni, that was seven miles from Mbabane as a manager of a hotel. He had as much idea as I would have as a manager of a hotel but it was quite interesting and it paid well but it was very soon over on account of the war. And we lived there – we moved into our own house. This own house was one room. The cockroaches and mice were just walking around – that's why I will never be afraid of anything. I sewed little things to put on the window – you should have seen the furniture – mostly orange crates where I put a little bit material on.

Q: What happened to your lift?

A: The lift was in Mozambique and certainly we couldn't take it to Swaziland. There wouldn't have been any room for it. My brother in law built the house in Swaziland, had his life there and it was a very nice little house, and we left in August, 1940 and in October, 1940, they started a factory in Swaziland – the Jewish organizations from Johannesburg because the people were moneyless and didn't know what to do and my brother in law became the manager of the place. Nobody made much money but they were occupied and had enough money to live on and we went in August to Cape Town and left from there. A little thing typical for refugees, we stand on the steamer, a Japanese boat and I said there is the brother of a very close friend of ours of Willy Hesse. It must be his brother because the little girl which he has on his arm has a jacket on which belonged to Helen Hesse. My husband said are you crazy. I said no, I saw when Ruth made it, it's hers. So we go on the steamer and went over to him and asked are you Mr. Hesse? And he started to cry just like we cried. Yes, it was him. They went to South America. We were on a Japanese boat. My husband was supposed to sleep with four men and I with four women and with money, you can do anything and we were able to get a room for ourselves. But in the next room were some Japanese and they were smoking marijuana or something the whole day and we couldn't sleep because it was awful. I didn't go in the bathroom because the bath is one tub where fifty people can go in. So every morning at 4 o'clock, I set my alarm clock and I went up to the first class and I went into the bathroom. Nobody saw me and I took my bath and I went very quietly down again. The food was awful. You have no idea how the food was – the most awful food I ever had but I am a fresser by nature and I took two hard wurst along from Cape Town and from that we ate the 10 days we were on the boat and I had two or three lbs of chocolate which I got as farewell gifts. You have no idea how the food was. There were people who were on first class who brought me quietly food down because we simply couldn't eat it – raw fish. Or when we had cereal in the morning, we saw the worms swimming in it and we paid a lot of money.

Q: Who paid for the passage?

A: As I told you we had our own money and we even came to America with our own money without an affidavit which was very rare then. I don't want to exaggerate it but it just happened that my parents in law gave us the money. Then we were for three days in Rio de Janeiro and in Rio I said to my husband there is a man sitting – I had dancing lessons with him in Cologne. My husband said you cannot go in a strange town where you don't even speak the language and talk to him. He came here in 1951(?) and the first thing I said to him was Walter, where were you in August, 1940? He said in Rio de Janeiro so it was him. We went on the boat, it was an American boat, beautiful, Moore – McCormick line and we were there five minutes and I said to my husband there is my uncle Carl Daniel from Wiesbaden. He said Irmgard, stop it. I said it's him and I went to the purser and asked if he had a Mr. Carl Daniel – he said no but we have a Mr. Charles Daniel. We didn't go to him until dinner time, looked where he sat down went over and I

stood in front of him without saying a word. He looked up and we both started to cry. We were together from morning till night. We celebrated his 74th birthday onboard and we came to New York and there is my brother and sister in law and his daughter and son in law. My brother went over to his cousin and said Anne, are you calling for Irmgard too? She said no. I'm calling for my father and they were all waiting there until the three of us came down.

Q: She had left Germany for Rio?

A: He went to Buenos Aires where he lived with his son and was coming to visit his daughter. I especially say this because it was so typical of the world we live in. And then we came to New York and stayed for one night with my brother – one night because my sister in law was making her doctorate two days later and we didn't want to make anything wrong for her and we took one room in 87th Street and stayed there until 1948 until we took our own apartment and eight days later, my husband was dead. I started to work after four days in America making hats and earned very little money but I did it.

Q: How did you find the job?

A: This was a friend of mine in Hamburg and she had a store here on Pitkin Avenue – two hours ride one way and then the other. And my husband had the same what he did in Germany – he bought stuff here and sold it to stores. We were not well off but we had a little bit of our own money.

Q: Is that what he used to buy the things he started to sell?

A: Yes. And then we wanted to try to get his family out of Marseilles. They were in Luxemburg and were then in Marseilles. They had the possibility and wanted to come here but the idiots gave the last day somebody 1,000 dollars which they had and this man was captured that night and gave the name of the people and that was the end of their coming over and they all went to Gurs and were deported further from there – end of story.

Q: When you say all, who do you mean?

A: His parents were dead in the meantime. His two sisters and two brothers in law.

Q: And your parents stayed in South Africa?

A: My parents stayed in South Africa and I never saw them again. My father died in 1950 and my mother in 1957. I wanted to go to see my mother but then I got the telegram and it was too late so I never saw them again.

Q: When you decided to leave South Africa, was that a difficult decision for you?

- A: It was awfully difficult. I never forget how my father was running next to the train and screaming "I'll never see my baby again." It was true. It was terrible hard but there was no other way.
- Q: Did you consider staying?
- A: In Swaziland! No. We couldn't do anything. Impossible. And there was no way – my sister and brother in law only could come to Johannesburg after their two daughters married to Johannesburg and then they could go there. Otherwise, they would have had to stay there. My brother in law died in 1959 and in 1962, my sister came here because it got bad there and in 1963 her one daughter came and in 1964 the other daughter came and they live in Massachusetts.
- Q: Would it have been possible for you to go to South Africa after the war was over?
- A: I guess so but by then. I don't know. I don't think so because they were only able to go because their children were there.
- Q: You mentioned that when you left Cape Town, you went to Rhodesia and you wanted...
- A: We wanted to go to Rhodesia to stay there because we had more opportunity in Bualwayo but they rejected us, they didn't want us there.
- Q: How did they reject you?
- A: We had the permit to go there for four weeks and we stayed in a hotel and we had to go every day to the police department to show that we still were there and the last day, the day before Easter, they told us we had to leave within one hour and that was it and then we took the train back to Johannesburg.
- Q: And from there you took the train to Swaziland?
- A: No train to Swaziland, no. My uncle gave his car and his chauffeur and he drove us there – that was seven hours. There was a train leaving from the border of the South Africa to Swaziland but we had to take the bus for three hours to go there and then for twelve hours on the train. It was – South Africa was the most interesting country I ever was or ever will be in.
- Q: How did you manage every day living in Swaziland?
- A: There was one thing – we had a little bit of money and we were very careful but the other people suffered. There was one thing – meat is killed in the morning about 4 A. M. It has to be eaten the same day so when I went at 9 o'clock in the morning to buy for instance soup meat, I cooked it until 7 o'clock at night and you still could hardly eat it.

Q: Where did you buy it?

A: There were two stores wherever you went. Half of the store for the colored people and half of the store for the white people. The toilets – half for the colored people, half for white. On the street, we could walk up on the sidewalk, the colored down on the street. Any department store, completely divided at the time we were there and it was hard to get accustomed to. But you had to be careful, the first evening when I had my own home, I had food left and I gave it to my boy. To save your face, you had to have a boy. Now we belonged to the upper class what they said, ridiculous. I had to have a boy. So the boy cleaned. What did he clean? He was there. I gave him the food that was left and the next morning I looked for my scissors for my work, a terrific, very expensive scissors – it was gone. So, we had a very close friend, an African born lawyer and we went to him and said Mr. Lapidus, this and this happened, can you tell us where that scissors could be. He said Mrs. Ehrman, did you give your boy anything of what was left to eat? I said yes, everything. He said you did it once, now you learned your lesson. Whatever belongs to you, belongs to him if you feed him. So everyday they got three pounds of mealy meal, that mealy meal is corn meal and they got once a week, one pound of salt and once a week, they got two pounds of meat. That's how they ate and that was it but he never got anything from me to eat again.

Q: When you went shopping, were you able to buy items that you knew or...

A: No. My mother sent me every two weeks a package with good things to eat. There was a market. But unfortunately, our Jewish refugees were terrible. They went two hours – the people came from the outside. They knew from where they came. There were two bunches of radishes, there were two pineapples so when they came to the market, there was nothing left. They walked two hours, they bought it and they went back. We couldn't get everything but we could get cans of soup and such but very little and we ate very primitive – only when the good packages from Johannesburg came, then we had something decent.

Q: Did the sixty Jewish families stay together, live in the same area?

A: More or less, there were fights all over, as you can imagine. For instance, oh, what I forgot to tell you. We had one room and one room we made into a kitchen. My kitchen, I had one electric cooker and my icebox was – we made it ourselves – was made out of wood and had corrugated stuff around – that was the icebox. You couldn't keep anything! The foot of my bed was in little cans filled with gas because in there, the animals went. You have no idea how we lived there. Nobody ever will have an idea.

Q: You put gasoline in little cans to...

A: In little cans where we took the top off that the animals wouldn't come into the bed. And everyday twice a day we had to wash the floor with Lysol and with gas that we wouldn't be overrun with animals. Then, our toilet was outside. It was a hole and every afternoon the prisoners in black and white pajamas came and took the bucket out from under us. Once I was there and they came and took the bucket right out from under me.

Q: You mentioned the house that you owned was shared by yourselves and your sister, brother in law and their children...

A: No. The house that they built, they were in alone not with us. We had for instance a very beautiful bathtub in the house where we stayed together. Outside, there was a petrol drum so when it was raining the water came in and then one of us could take a bath and the water was beautiful black all the time. It was very primitive.

Q: Did you need heating?

A: We had a little gas oven which we once in a while used but very rarely

Q: You mentioned that you went to work.

A: I worked in my own house. They came to me and I made hats. But don't ask me how they looked. If I think about it, my sister wrote my name "Ehrman" and that was very elegant. They asked me where I learned and I said in Paris – they should contradict me. I had two books from Paris of hats which I took along when we left Luxemburg and these served me well for the two years I was there.

Q: Who did you make these hats for?

A: For the people of the government. For these English people.

Q: How did you get the contract to do it?

A: They came to my house and said could you make a nice hat and I said yes. I will never forget, one came the very first day with material – she wanted a turban – I never made a turban. My husband, my brother in law, my sister, we were four people sitting the whole night up trying to make this hat because alone I couldn't figure it out and do it.

Q: Did your husband work?

A: No. He couldn't work because there was nothing to work not because he didn't want to work – there was nothing.

Q: How did he feel after having come from his own business?

- A: He felt like all of us – we all felt kind of lost. But when the Jewish holidays came, there was one bigger house where we all met and made our own gottesdienst. It was so primitive – whatever I tell you is too little. One day we went to our friends, Dr. Mastbaum, and all of a sudden I said look, isn't that funny how the sky looks and all of a sudden everything starts to shake. We were running out – it was an earthquake. Another day, my sister and I when we lived together, we looked out of the window and called our husbands and said look, what is that? The whole sky is black. And we said, our girl who we had come running in – Cochukas, cochukas – that means Mrs. And she gives us a cup and a spoon and goes like that and we should put something over our heads. We didn't have any idea and these were locusts. Within half an hour, we didn't have a leaf left with all our noise which we made with the cups and spoons. Then we ran into the house and closed it as good as we could. We had the most beautiful mimosa trees and there was nothing left. Everything was empty. And then they went further. Until you see them, you can't imagine. So, we lived really in the wilderness of Africa.
- Q: You mentioned that you came with some money but that most of the refugees didn't...
- A: Not a penny.
- Q: How did they manage?
- A: From relatives in Johannesburg who had some money and other ones, they got money from the Jewish organizations.
- Q: Did most of them come because they couldn't go to South Africa?
- A: They all came that way. There was one couple, he was a tailor and he worked. There was one woman who altered dresses, she worked. They all couldn't do much. When we got our own house, there was an engineer and he couldn't work as an engineer even so they could have used him very well. So he started to cut hair. We gave him a little room and he closed the room off and he was cutting hair there. But I'm telling you, I will never forget it – one day, one of the women came into my room, can I come in? I said yes, what's the matter? And she looked – I never saw anything like it! I said what did he do? She said he cut my hair! Look at me! I said don't worry, it will grow again.
- Q: Did all of the sixty families have plans to re – emigrate?
- A: Yes. As soon as possible. We knew it was only an interim. One was a butcher – he had a job. That was about the only one who had a job. One worked in a little department store – department store! – it was a little store. But otherwise, they

couldn't work. They were running around and talking nonsense and it was not very pleasant.

Q: What do you mean running around talking nonsense?

A: They didn't know what to do. The whole day running around with nothing to do isn't good for anybody. And then they sat in our apartment – we rented a radio and that was the biggest radio there and it was much cheaper to rent it than to buy it. And there they came in and were sitting around and listening to our radio. And I was very sorry that I didn't rent a small one because I always had all the people.

Q: Did you know what was going on in Europe at that time?

A: Yes. Because we always listened and I never will forget the fifteenth of May, 1940 when we heard over the radio that they invaded Luxemburg. I really collapsed – I was two weeks in bed when I heard it. The whole family was there.

Q: After you were in Swaziland and after your husband had been released from Oranienburg, how did he feel about leaving Germany?

A: Very happy. But I will tell you one thing. I didn't want to tell it but I do say it. When my husband heard in July, 1948, he got a letter from the Quakers that his whole family was dead – eight days later, he was dead – gas! He never got over it. So you see that I went through a lot. And if I wouldn't have found him (second husband) I don't think I would be alive. But he went through so much, I went through so much and ours is the most perfect marriage. Because we both went through so much.

Q: You mentioned that when you first came to the United States, you started to work in the hat business on Pitkin Avenue. How did you find the job?

A: It was a friend of ours from Hamburg.

Q: Did your husband also start to work?

A: Yes.

Q: How did he feel about working in America?

A: He liked it very much because he had nice customers and he liked to work here. And also, I had here five girlfriends with whom I grew up – all married in New York, that was very rare and unfortunately one died already but we are still a very close group.

- Q: Your husband worked here for about eight years. How did he feel about having to start all over again?
- A: It was hard for us, very hard. I as a matter of fact worked until two years ago without ever letting off – once I was eight weeks without a job. I worked very very hard here and I never minded it a bit.
- Q: Did your husband mind your working?
- A: No. I had to work because I had to make money.
- Q: I meant because in Germany...
- A: No. He never thought of it and we never talked about it. And I'm one of the people who don't complain. I took everything laughingly.
- Q: Was your husband in contact with his family at all during the war?
- A: No, he couldn't. He never heard anything again until he found out from the Quakers. They were the last ones who talked to them.
- Q: In your life now, are most of your friends German – Jewish refugees?
- A: All German – Jewish refugees.
- Q: Did you have any opportunity to meet American Jews?
- A: Yes. I met American Jews and I always had the feeling that they still look at us as refugees. I have never unfortunately found people who take us for what we are. I worked with American people here most of the time and they were very friendly to me but this was as far as it went. We invited each other home but we never got close. Never.
- Q: When you say they looked at you as refugees, what do you mean by that?
- A: They did not like that we were at first better educated than they were and secondly, we were well off. The first question was always – did you work in Germany? And I said yes, for my father. Then, but you were married. No, I didn't work. You didn't need to work? No. Did you ever have a maid in your house? Yes. A sleep – in maid? Yes. And then it was finished. They really hated that we were better educated and we couldn't help it. I couldn't lie for them. None of them ever knew that we came with our own money, none of them ever knew that, because then it would have been out altogether because unfortunately not many people were able to say that.

Q: In having worked in Europe but you really only worked for your father, could you see any difference in working there and working here?

A: That I really couldn't say because if you work for your own father, it is different.

Q: Have you ever been back to Germany?

A: I would never go. You heard how my husband died. His death certificate says – one also of Hitler's victims. That is his death certificate. So why should I go back to Germany – no. They could offer me a million and I wouldn't go back. I rather would work 24 hours a day. By the way, I don't get a penny from Germany

Q: When you first came to New York, what would you say the biggest adjustment was for you?

A: To go in the subway to the right place. I left the house in the morning a quarter past seven (87th St.). I came home around 11 o'clock at night. I did my cooking then, I did my washing then. My husband did the shopping because there was no time for me to do the shopping. I usually went to bed around 2 o'clock and I got up at 5:30.

Q: How did you feel about life in America?

A: (laughs) I didn't have any time to think about it. It was surviving. It was living to make your life better, to make it easier and the one thing that helped a lot were our good friends. We always were together on our Sunday – not on Saturday because we all worked six days. I was only an exception in that I did not work in the household. Practically, everyone else I knew did. This I never did because I started to work right away. But imagine how many hours I was on the go. Then, after four months, I went to my friend and said this is it. I stop working as of tonight. She asked don't you like it. I said no. It's too hard. Then I went into a factory on 38th Street and the first few days I started to cry all the time. They were the first Puerto Ricans I saw and when I started to put my thread through the needle, they had already two ready(?) hats. But it was nice and I worked and after five more months, somebody offered me a job and I took the job and worked there for one and a half years and then I got a better job and in this job, after a few months, I had to have a hysterectomy and the first one who came to the hospital with my husband was my boss. He puts his hand on my stomach which wasn't very clever and put 25 dollars down and said this is for you. And the second thing I do for you, I took you in the union. You don't know how good that it is for you. But you are in the union as of now and as long as you want to work. But he got sick and he died in 1946 and I stayed with his son until the end of 1948. In the meantime my husband died in July, 1948 and end of 1948, he said 3 days before Christmas, you don't need to work now until the first of January. And I needed every penny and I said what is the reason and he said because he wants to try

somebody else out. I went to friends on Columbus Ave. who had a store and told them what happened. They said you start with us and you don't go back. And I stayed in their place until it burned down in 1963 and they introduced me to my husband...

Q: Did you ever have a problem with the language?

A: Not at all. Don't forget, my mother was English born. We knew English very well in Germany but unfortunately we always have our hard accent. But this was a big big difference because my mother always taught us English. We talked English before we went to school – only our accent and we will never lose it.

Q: I remember you telling me that your mother was born in South Africa. Was her family...

A: My grandfather went to South Africa and you know how it was in the 1860's and 70's and my grandfather was engaged and they came there and had their children there. My mother was born in 1881 and he died when she was twelve so in 1893, they moved back to Germany. One thing, my grandmother didn't speak English for 50 years, we didn't even know she still would speak English and she was 80 and very sick and we came to Cape Town and there were two of her sisters in law and from the first moment on, they spoke English and you never thought my grandmother spoke German.

Her sister came in – lives in Forest Hills. Sounds very English – this is one who lived in Mbabane, went to Johannesburg – then here. Interesting because had children when she went to S.A.