Vera Oppenheim 12/08/1977.

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Berlin in 1924 and I lived there until 1939.

Q: Could you tell me something about your education in Berlin?

A: My education was not so great. I just went to public school and I went two years to a Jewish school until 1938 and then I wasn't able to go to school any more.

Q: Why did you go to a Jewish school at that point?

A: Because I couldn't go to another school – they threw you out of the other schools.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in 1936.

Q: Already?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember not being able to go back to the school which you had gone to?

A: Not too much. That time it didn't make a difference to me. I mean you knew you weren't able to go but I was a kid so it didn't make a difference. So you were in a Jewish school with all Jewish children and I think you were happy that way. At least they didn't throw stones at you and they didn't hurt you so I think in a way I was happy.

Q: Was that the case that they hurt you in the other schools?

A: Yes, they did. They did hurt you in the other schools. They threw stones and things. You were not able to go there any more. I mean, my mother never let me go home by myself from school and so because she was afraid the other children did something to me. So, I think in a way I was very happy to go to a Jewish school. Later on.

Q: As a kid, you know all children like to be accepted, like to belong. How did you feel about all this?

A: All my friends were Jewish by this time.

Q: How about in the other school?

A: I really don't remember too well. You see I started school later because I was sick as a child. I had a lot of operations and the normal age to start school in Europe was six years and I think I was seven, almost eight when I started school. So, I don't think that time it affected me very much. Children adjust, you know. I think I never had non – Jewish friends, also in the other school but I don't remember. It was so short years – I don't even think it was four years that I was in public school.

Q: Where you lived, you know like here, the kids play on the street or in each other's houses, did you have any non – Jewish friends there?

A: I don't remember that. My friends were mostly Jewish and we played like all other children – in the back yard and on bicycles and things.

Q: When you were in the Jewish school, do you remember any conversations about the problems of the Nazis?

A: You see we were too young. Nothing was discussed in Germany with children. No parents discussed anything with you because you were afraid if anything – if the Gestapo comes and children knew anything – so nothing was discussed in front of children. It was nothing unusual that you had to go to another school. You took it – you were small and if they put you as a child somewhere else, you didn't know the difference. You were happy in the surroundings there, you know.

Q: During this time, you were in the Jewish school until?

A: Until November 1938.

Q: Did you ever see parades in Berlin?

A: Yes. What I remember is 1933. I was very small and it was when Hitler came to power and I remember that my brother - I had a half – brother who was thirteen years older and he went to University in Berlin and he had a very good friend. And they came one day in 1933, they were thrown out of the University – they hit them and threw them out. He came to our house – I think he didn't have any relatives – and we left that night – I left with my parents and this brother and this friend of his – and we went to Switzerland.

Q: You said 1933?

A: Yes, 1933 I don't know what month – I think it was April when he came to power.

Q: Yes, the end of March.

Q: We just left that night – that I remember. I was just coming out of the hospital and they took me and we went to Switzerland.

Q: Why did you go to Switzerland?

A: I think it was the closest place. I think my father wanted us safe – the children. He might have seen what was coming. If I think later about it – that was probably the reason he took us – he didn't know what was going on and look, they threw Jews out of the store and really in Berlin it was going on very badly. But as a child, you know, I enjoyed that. I had a trip to Switzerland – I didn't have any feeling about it.

Q: How long did you stay in Switzerland?

A: I think we stayed about four weeks. And I know that the partner of my father – they had a big business in Berlin – he said let's stay in Switzerland, let's not go back to Germany. My father said I wouldn't leave all my people there and we went back. But at that time they had all the money out of the country. That time was a time when they said they had all the money on business out here, let's not go back but my father said no – he wouldn't do that.

Q: What kind of business did your father have?

A: He was a manufacturer of ladies coats.

Q: Did he have mostly Jewish trade or?

A: No. He mostly dealt with foreign counties – mostly with export.

Q: After the four weeks in Switzerland, you went back to Berlin?

A: Yes. We went back to Berlin and everything was the same until in 1937, my father died suddenly.

Q: Until, 1937, did your father think of emigrating?

A: No, he didn't. I don't think so. They had decided, they had for me a visa going to England with a children's transport going to England. I had all the papers ready to go and I didn't want to go. I was crying so much and I was never away from home and they finally said if you don't want to go, okay. But I had all the papers ready to go to England.

Q: Did you notice things getting worse?

A: Oh yes, things got worse. We were not allowed to go to any movies as children. You had to wear the star, the yellow star but this was in 1938. You were actually

not allowed anything. You had to be a certain time coming home in the evening I think seven or 8 o'clock and you noticed it – that it got worse. I mean you didn't have the freedom as other children had.

Q: Did you ever see any signs "Juden Unerwunscht"?

A: Ja. You saw it everywhere.

Q: Did you ever try to go into a store with such a sign?

A: No. Only in a movie house. We tried – we covered our star and we went into a movie house.

Q: How did this feel as a child to have to cover a star and

A: You see it was something – I grew up with it. If I would have been a grown person, I might have thought about it but as children, you don't think about it much. That was the way it was, you had to wear it and you didn't know a different life. I had a good life when I was very small but mostly I forgot about it – what really was before – before 1933. Some of the things I remember and some of the things I only heard later from my brother here because from home, I forgot everything.

Q: When your father fell ill in 1937 –

A: My father died from one minute to another. I don't even know – I never really – sometimes now, I even think maybe he even took his own life. I really don't know. I know in the evening that we were all together and in the morning he was dead. So how – that time they said he had a heart attack but look I was twelve years old and they never told me. I have no idea, I never could find out later on from my mother because I was still young and she wouldn't tell me. I don't know for what reason.

Q: Hoe did your family manage after this?

A: After my father died, my mother had parents in Hanover and they were very well off. They had a house there and they were forced to take people in too. Every Jew in Hanover was allowed to have only one or two rooms and my grandparents wanted us to come to Hanover. I first didn't want to go because I had all my friends in Berlin so my mother went for a year by herself and I stayed in an old age home in Berlin and I was helping there because I couldn't go to school anymore and I was helping them in the kitchen.

Q: When you say you couldn't go to school anymore.

A: After 1938, the schools were completely closed to Jewish children. I took a course – I mean my mother sent me to private – to take Steno and typing but that was all. I mean the education was – you didn't have any education anymore. And I worked in that old age home and I was terrible unhappy because I was alone away from my mother and I never was so after three months, I went to Hanover and stayed till 1941. In Sept. 1941 we had to leave the house – they threw us out of the house. We came like into a prison – that was one building in Hanover.

Q: Were you in Hanover on Kristallnacht?

A: No. I was still in Berlin.

Q: What happened to you on Kristallnacht?

A: On Kristallnacht – we only had a furnished room then, my mother and I because we had given up the apartment but I know the family that lived there, they took the men out and brought them to a concentration camp and they – everything that was in the apartment they threw over and we saw all the synagogues burning – that I will never forget, you know. From that time on we really more or less couldn't go on the street anymore.

Q: Did you know anybody at this point that belonged to the Hitler Youth or the BDM?

A: No. Because I really didn't have connection with them. Since for years already, I had only gone to a Jewish school, I didn't have any connection with these people.

Q: Did you see a lot of your friends emigrating?

A: I did yes, a lot of my friends went.

Q: How did you feel when you saw them going? Were you at all fearful for yourself?

A: No. I wouldn't say so. I didn't think much about it. But after 1938, I was fearful to go on the street and I wouldn't stay alone in a room at night. My mother had to sleep with me because I was scared each time the door bell would ring. I was scared and I remember we visited, shortly after my father died, my brother was in Sweden, he lived in Sweden already.

Q: Your brother had already emigrated?

A: After 1933, he left Germany. He studied first in Switzerland where he made his Doctor and from Switzerland, he went to Sweden, and he worked there for a film company. And when my father died, my mother and I went to Sweden to visit

him and that time I said to my mother, let's stay here and let's not go back. But it was very hard for my mother. I was very small, she didn't have any money and so we went back and on the way back, at the border, the Gestapo took us into prison. They thought we were spies. There were children with the boat going over – like a ferry from Sweden and they took us from the boat and they put us in prison for a night.

Q: Where did they put you in prison?

A: Near the border – where you cross the German border. But then after one day, they released us. Then my mother decided maybe she wanted to get out but the only place where we were able to go was Shanghai. And Shanghai again she was scared to go with me because I was very young. That was in 1938. So Shanghai was really the only country to which we could go.

Q: You couldn't go back to Sweden at that point?

A: No. We couldn't go back to Sweden. We had nobody in America so there was no way out. But at that point we really thought seriously about getting out somehow – getting out of Germany.

Q: How about your grandparents?

A: My grandparents were very old – they were over 80 years old, they also had a business and they burned it in 1938 during the Kristallnacht. My uncle they sent to concentration camp and from there to Auschwitz – he ran the business with them, this brother of my mother and he never returned. And actually these events of 1938 really went to my grandmother's head. She never could forget that and she was never the same anymore. So we lived with them until September 1941 when we had to get out of the house and we all came to one big building. But in the meantime, I had to work in Hanover – they called it "twangsarbeit"? Every Jew had to work –I worked in a "Cartonage Fabrick" where they made bandages and all kinds – you didn't get paid for it but you had to work. And every evening you came back to the house where you lived – it was not a prison but it was a big – it used to be a Jewish Community House – they put all the Jews in Hanover in there. So we were in one room. I think we slept with 40 or 50 people.

Q: And your grandparents too?

A: My grandparents too.

Q: And this decision about Shanghai?

A: I couldn't decide anything – my mother decided. She was afraid to go alone with me. If I would have been a little older, I think she would have done it. But I wasn't old enough to work and she was somehow scared, you know. My mother

was never alone in her life either and always had my father or her parents with her. I think it is a hard – and you cannot take my grandparents who were over 80 years old – you cannot say come to Shanghai. So it was a hard decision for her to make.

Q: That's right. You said you stayed in this community building until Sept. 1941, what happened then?

A: In December, 1941, we were sent to Riga, to the Riga ghetto and I was there together with my mother for a year about.

Q: How did they send you to the Riga ghetto?

A: By transport. We were a transport of about 1,000 Jews from Hanover. We were already in this one big building so it was not hard to get us all. They put us on a train and we went to Riga.

Q: Did they tell you where you were going?

A: They didn't tell us where we are going and the same was – they took me – I was even in the hospital. I had the appendix taken out and they took me from the hospital room out they took me in the train to Riga.

Q: When you say you had your appendix taken out –

A: In 1941, just two weeks, a week and a half before they sent me to Riga.

Q: How were you treated in the hospital?

A: In the hospital, it was a Jewish hospital still.

Q: Still? With Jewish doctors?

A: Yes, Jewish doctors and Jewish nurses. That time it was still a Jewish hospital, but I had to go with an all open – not even healed. That time we were long in the hospital and I remember in the train they had to bandage...So it was not so easy – you only could take along only what you could carry – that's all you could take along.

Q: Was there any hysteria among those people who had stayed in the Community House when they told you you were going?

A: No. I don't remember that. The hysteria was when people were separated, you know. You see, my grandfather died the same day when we were deported to Riga. He died and my mother left her old mother back there. The old people they didn't take – they took the younger people. The older people they sent with the

second transport to Theresienstadt so for them it was – I think for my mother it was very hard. I didn't – you see I had all my friends with me – that's the funny part. It was my best time – I always said my best time I had in Hanover because we were all inside – you never could go on the street after a certain time and we were all inside in the evening and we were all together all the friends and you know, I personally didn't realize what was happening and I was happy to be together with all my friends. During the day, we could only be together maybe an hour or two but at 6 or 7 o'clock we had to be home and that was it.

Q: I just want to go back a moment. When you were working at this "twangsarbeit" were you strictly supervised?

A: Yes. Strictly supervised by Germans.

Q: Did they give you food?

A: No. No food. That time you still could buy food. You got ration cards and you still could buy food.

Q: What happened when you got to Riga? What did you find there?

A: When we got to Riga – terrible. First of all, we went in the trains where you put actually animals – not passenger trains.

Q: Viehwagen?

A: Yes, viehwagen and when we came to Riga, that was the most horrible experience actually because the day before we came they killed about 27,000 Latvian Jews to make room for us and all the blood and everything was still on the street.

Q: Was that Einsatzkommando that were in Riga at the time?

A: The S.S. The Latvians too. That was the most horrible experience to know that the day before – you found food still on the table in the houses where you went, you know where they just killed all the people.

Q: When you were in the cattle cars going to Riga, did they provide any food?

A: No. I don't think so.

Q: What about sanitary conditions?

A: None, nothing.

Q: What was the reaction in the cattle car?

A: You were like numb. Everything happened – they threw you in, they hit you with sticks, you were scared – you were terrible, terrible scared. You didn't know what would happen. I mean that time you didn't know that they killed all the people – you just thought maybe they transport you someplace else where more Jews live and you didn't know what was before you – actually what was awaiting you.

Q: When you came to Riga?

A: When we came to Riga, it was bitter, bitter cold. I mean extreme – it was about 30 or 40 below zero and we had to walk a long time to get to the Riga ghetto in the snow and who could not walk – was not able to walk, they shot right away. From us it was only 1,000 from Hanover but then they had put other cars onto the train – from Hamburg, from Helefeld and so on, you know it was a big – it was a couple of thousand people who arrived at the same time. There were elderly people too who were not able to walk and they shot them right away.

Q: When you came into Riga, it was already ghettoized wasn't it?

A: It was a Latvian ghetto and they made one part where they killed all the other people, where the women – I think originally the men and the women, the Latvian Jews, they were separated and I think they killed all the women and children, the Latvians and this was still the Latvian ghetto where the men were living – a couple of thousands of men.

Q: What conditions did you find in Riga?

A: In the ghetto, they let you go into the houses. I mean each transport got certain buildings and you found there still things from the Latvian Jews, clothing because they lived there for quite some time. And whatever you found, because you yourself didn't have much – only what you carried and that was all and so we used what we found. And then we had to go to work right away. Each morning we had to go out to work – we had to shovel snow in the city for eight or ten hours under supervision. I think the first commando I had was to go somewhere and peel potatoes, you know it was different kind of work commandos what they sent out but if they found something – that you were stealing something, they shot you right away, too but you took the chance because you didn't get anything to eat.

Q: What did you get to eat?

A: We got fish heads – once a week they gave us fish heads and rhubarb leaves. I know that my mother made the fish heads and we had another girl there she liked to eat the eyes, she got from everybody the eyes to eat from the fish head. My mother cooked the fish heads and she made it like hamburgers and it seemed that time delicious and the rhubarb things, everybody got diarrhea so we didn't eat it

then. We tried to cook it but we didn't eat it then and when we went to work, we got every morning one slice of bread.

Q: When you say she cooked the fish heads, were there facilities to cook?

A: Yes. We were in a room in the ghetto was in one room we were with maybe ten people. The room was as big as this and there was a big stove – like the Russian stoves, an iron stove that you could cook on.

Q: How did you get?

A: And we got wood, you found outside and you could cook. That was only the beginning though.

Q: What did you do for beds?

A: We were on the floor, we slept on the floor.

Q: No straw mattresses or something?

A: No mattresses. One or two maybe you found but then elderly people were sleeping on it but the rest, we slept on the floor.

Q: Was there any Jewish organization in the ghetto?

A: Yes. There was the Jewish police, kapos and arbeitseinsatz but they were the worst, they were as bad as the Germans. They were the same as the Germans. They hit you the same way they did. Whoever took a job like this you know – they were selected from the Gestapo and they had a better life. They got to eat and everything but they treated you as bad as the Gestapo.

Q: Was there a Judenrat or Altesenrad in Riga?

A: No. Arbeitseinsatz, we had.

Q: Who was responsible for distributing ration card or anything like this?

A: There were no ration cards. The food was distributed once or twice a week. You got bread distributed also once or twice a week. We had to go someplace and pick it up and that was all.

Q: Who gave you your job assignments?

A: The arbeitseinsatz.

Q: And these were Jews?

A: Yes, these were Jews. Mostly they gave the younger people, the younger girls, they gave a little better job. The better jobs were considered where you could steal something to eat or could get something to eat – that was considered a better job. Where you were able to steal something

Q: Were these jobs outside the ghetto?

A: Yes. They were outside. You had to walk there and the S.S. with the guns, with the machine guns were next to you and all the jobs – some of them were also run by the Army. You see the German Army the jobs – when you had them outside, you were lucky when you got them. Because they were not – under them you found some nice ones.

Q: That was the old Wehrmacht?

A: Yes. The old Wehrmacht who were really helping us people. But as soon as you got a work commitment with the S.S. or the Gestapo then it was out. But with the Wehrmacht, they helped a lot of our girls – food sometimes they brought us, sandwiches they brought us. I mean otherwise, nobody of us would be alive, if they wouldn't have helped a little.

Q: I was going to ask, when you left the ghetto, even though you were under supervision, in some of these jobs, could you steal?

A: You were able to steal sometimes but you had to be very scared that you got caught.

Q: How did you hide what you stole?

A: I hide – I was in the potato commando – and in my pants on the bottom, I put string and my whole legs full I stuffed with potatoes and I walked for miles this way into the ghetto this way with the potatoes. They were big pants and I was small and I was lucky, nobody saw it, that they were stuffed until on the top. But it was not so easy to walk. You walked in the snow and maybe in each leg was about 10 or 15 pounds of potatoes.

Q: Was it usual or not to search when you returned from your job?

A: They searched all the time when you came back but they made a little exceptions you know it depends with younger girls sometimes they – they figured maybe you had something but they let you go through. You took a chance but you know you were so hungry. I was so hungry all the time I just couldn't stand it, really. My mother, you know in the beginning we were in the same commando, we had to go shoveling snow on the outside, we got one slice of bread. I ate it up on my way going already and then I didn't have several days anything. So usually my mother

gave me part of her slice still but for me personally the hunger was the worst what I experienced. My girlfriend with whom I was always together, she didn't feel it as much. She could take her bread and put it in four parts – divided so that she had each time something. If I got my portion, I had it at one time and then for three days, I was hungry

Q: Did you trade a lot amongst yourselves – since there was some food stolen?

A: We traded, we were trading too. You see the things which found in the houses. We used to like to shovel snow in the center of the city. A lot of times I had to shovel in front of the opera house in Riga, snow and down there was, when one had to go to the bathroom, you had to go downstairs in the middle of the place and there people came, they knew already we were and then we traded some clothes what we had for bread or food or whatever it was.

Q: These were people who lived in the city of Riga?

A: Yes, people from the city. You found sometimes that when you were shoveling that some well dressed people from Riga, Russian people went by and just dropped a sandwich or something on the floor – that you found too. I mean they would have gotten into concentration camp too if the S.S. would have seen it but they came – I mean that was actually the only way we survived – with stealing and that sometimes that people really helped you.

Q: During this time, were a lot of people sent –

A: A lot of people. Every week we had to appear on a big place (platz) and then they were assorted. First they sent the older people away, then the children, they separated.

Q: Was there a question of –

A: What you knew, you knew. With the first transport they sent away, you knew there were some men sent away too – some younger men and when they came back, they told us that they had to bury all the people. The first time when it happened then it came around that you knew when you were sent away that you were killed.

Q: Were these people sent to other camps?

A: They told them they send them to other camps but they didn't they sent them to – that was near Riga that was like woods and over there they had already shoveled the mass graves and they just threw them in and the clothing came back and then we had to assort the clothing.

Q: These younger men then were taken specifically for the purpose of burying these people?

A: Yes, to bury them.

Q: What was the best way to insure that you would remain in Riga?

A: No way. It was just a miracle. It was just not – I remember we were once standing at appeal, I was standing – my mother they had sent away already, after a year already, my mother was sent away.

Q: 1942?

A: Yes. In 1942 and then they assorted out the younger kids under 15 or 16 they were supposed to be shot. Only a certain age range they wanted to keep alive - I think between 17 and 30 or something like this and I used to look very young – that time and we were standing and one S.S. man came to me and said How old are you? So I said 16. So he gave me one right and left and said ":you are lying" – go over there" and it was to the part where the people were to be killed. I don't know how I did it but I ran back to the other side and they never noticed.

Q: When your mother was taken, you had been together up to that time?

A: Yes. We were together up until then.

Q: That must have been a very difficult moment. When they (cut off for a moment). This is probably the most difficult experience a person can go through.

A: It is and it is one that you can never forget.

Q: How did you cope with this?

A: Very badly in the beginning. Very badly because I never was alone, you know. My mother was always, she always did everything for me and I was very close with my mother. You see I could forget about my father easily, you know but we were like sisters, more or less so it was very hard. I think the other part what helped you over it was that you were very close with your friends there. You stuck very much together. All the young people, we were very very close with each other.

Q: You had to.

A: Yes. We were very – there was nothing – and really, I had a girlfriend here, we never later on were separated, we always stuck together. I have another friend, she lives in Florida, I know her since I'm three years old and she also comes from Hanover and we always worked together. We tried to stand together that we were

not separated. We were in the same barracken together and later on we came to the concentration camp – as soon they closed the ghetto, we came into the concentration camp and from there, we were not there too long in Riga in the concentration camp. They sent us to a farm where we had to do farm work.

Q: From Riga, they sent you to a farm?

A: To a farm. There were about 100 people there – Riga Jungfernhofst it was called. We had to do farm work.

Q: Was the Riga ghetto liquidated at that point?

A: It was not completely liquidated but we got away and we never saw it again. I think it was more or less liquidated because they sent later all the other people to different places – (unable to transcribe from original transcription) they called it

Q: What was morale like in Riga at the end?

A: Very bad. I mean all of the people lost already parents, brothers, things. We saw every day people shot, had to look at it. We had to look when they were hanging the people. We had to go by and look at this. The morale was very very low. First of all, you were hungry, you were frozen, you didn't have the clothes and they shaved your hair – that was for us young girls – I think we took it very hard, we all had beautiful long hair, curly hair and they shaved our heads and we were heartbroken about that. There was one bad thing after the other – you hardly had time to think about it. You tried to survive you know. Sometimes you didn't know is it worth it or is it not. We got sick, we didn't get any treatments. They had a hospital in the ghetto, they could put you in and I know I had diphtheria – they put me in the hospital and then the next day in the room I went around they come, take everybody out of the hospital. They will shoot them so they sent me to work with it.

Q: With the diphtheria?

A: Then in the evening, I could go back for the night in the hospital and the next morning I had to go out to work again. We had to do very hard work.

Q: Going to the hospital then meant.

A: You couldn't go to the hospital because that was the end of you. But this way you infected all the other people too.

Q: Who treated you in the hospital?

A: That was a Latvian Jewish doctor who was also in the ghetto. They killed him later on too.

Q: Did they provide him with any medication?

A: He had some medication. I don't know from where but there was some medication.

Q: When you left Riga for the farm, were you sent with your friends?

A: I was sent with one of my friends. We were 100 people there. We were all – men and women together on one barracks and I mean I never did farm work in my whole life. My girlfriend and I – there were a lot of people who used to come from small towns from farm towns, they knew about it and we two were the dopes. I remember my girlfriend – this arbeitseinsatz there said to us "you two are only good to carry away the dirt" So we had a little horse and wagon and this mist (shit) we had to shovel away – that was our work.

Q: Going back to Riga for a moment, what were the sanitary conditions like?

A: Over there, they were not too bad but on the farm it was outhouses and you had terrible lice and bedbugs.

Q: What about the food?

A: The food on the farm was a little bit better because you got a hot meal. There was a kitchen and they cooked a hot meal. The hot meal was mostly soup – you didn't find much in the soup but it was still a little bit better but you could also steal some potatoes outside and we had also a little stove inside where my girl friend was always trying to cook – I didn't know how to cook that time – she was a couple of years older so she was cooking. One day she wanted to make potato salad and she sent me out to get some scallions and I brought her grass. Till today she doesn't forget it. She's very sick now – she got from the camp muscular dystrophy but when I visit her she always reminds me and says 'you dummy, do you remember when you brought me the grass"? She had a boyfriend there and he worked with the cows so we got milk from him – he brought her always in the evening some milk so over there the food – we were not as hungry. We always had something what we could take and especially since there were a lot of cows, we always had milk which we could steal and use. There was also only one S.S. man who watched us and the boys, I don't know where they got it but they would stand with binoculars and we were just standing on the field, we didn't work hard – we tried always not to work hard. He was standing always with binoculars and when he saw the S.S. coming out of the building then it was "22" and everybody started working.

Q: How long were you on this farm?

A: Maybe three quarters of a year and then we came back to the Kaiserwald – Riga Kaiserwald they called the concentration camp. And from there they sent me to Armee Bekleitungslager. You know they had the army from the front – the soldiers who were killed, the uniforms came back. We had to separate it and things but over there we had it a little better too. We had a little better food because it was for the army that we worked there – for the Wehrmacht. So they didn't treat – it depends, they had different barracks, ones where shoes were assorted, ones where pants were assorted. It depends to whom you were – a couple of them, the guys from the Germans were very, very nice. I used to work for one – I worked where the pants and jackets were – he always let us sleep. He was standing on the door and watching if somebody came and we crawled into the things and we slept there sometimes for hours.

Q: I take it you also took whatever you could use.

A: Yes. We took what we needed and what we could find. And blankets you know we tore them up and we wrapped them around on the bottom that they didn't see it, that it was a little warmer because we didn't have much clothes anymore. So whatever we could find and use, we tried. Officially on top you couldn't wear it, but underneath you could put things.

Q: What were the living conditions like in this lager?

A: Bad. It was about three or four bunks on top of each other. Wood with some straw. You also had to watch from the own people they stole too. So whatever you had, whatever you had for yourself – we always slept in our shoes because if you left them down – the next morning you wouldn't find your shoes. Or if you had a piece of bread, you put it under you and you slept on it because it would have disappeared.

Q: After you were in this lager?

A: Then it was very close that the Russians were very close. The rumors were going around – the boys had to make deliveries and they said they saw the Russians not far away from Riga. This was in 1944. We heard the shooting already and then they sent us – we heard the shooting already and we were hoping they would come but then in the meantime they sent us back on a boat to Stutthof – near Danzig – it was a very big concentration camp and it was affiliated with Auschwitz. They sent us there on tiny boats and I don't know how many days it took. It took a lot of days – we were a couple of hundred people all the way down in the boat (steerage). Nobody could even sit. One was laying on top of the other and it was just about Yom Kippur and we had one of the Latvian Jews who used to be in the opera house in Riga. That I never forget – each year when Yom Kippur comes – he (illegible in original transcription) was singing down there in the boat the Kol Nidre.

Q: You were in Stutthof and

A: It was a terrible concentration camp – they had their own gas chambers there and we had to stand for appeal every morning for two or three hours and it was bitter cold. It was winter time. You were hit – I was so often hit over the head where I was unconscious and they had to bring me in again for no reason. You see you could not go out of the doors there – you were not allowed to wash yourself in that camp. If you had to go to the toilet, you were hit over the head. You had also already to wear the striped dresses. They took everything away from you – you just had the striped dresses and only wooden shoes, no stockings or anything. Later on, we got a little smarter, we didn't go through the door anymore – we jumped out for the appeal through the window so then we weren't hit over the head. Because they were standing at the door and each one who came out got hit over the head. We were not too long in Stutthof maybe three or four weeks and then they looked for 100 women and 100 women who wanted to go away. It was a chance you took, you didn't know would you be killed or not but it was so terrible there in Stutthof that we volunteered to go and somehow it was our luck – it was a small working commando – they brought you also – you had to walk for hours and hours but first they brought us with a small boat and then we had to walk and we first came, we couldn't believe it – they brought us into a French (illegible in original transcription, sentence incomplete) and they must have known we came and they cooked a meal. It was the first time in years that we could eat a meal and that we really could eat as much as we wanted.

Q: This was for French prisoners of war in Germany?

A: Yes. And then they brought us into one building with barbed wire around – 100 women and then we had to work – we had to fix the streets in Danzig – that was in Danzig near the harbor. And then with a pick – 12 hours a day we had to stand outside and fix the streets. In the evening we lived in the barracks but also the washing you could – they only had one wash room which was outside and it was about 30 below so you tried to keep yourself clean and you washed yourself with ice water – we could go down to a lake which was frozen and we used the picks to get to the water to wash ourselves a little bit.

Q: Was there any heat at all?

A: There was no heat. Sometimes they put on this little stove with wood. Then we burned the seams of our dresses because the lice was in them – that it didn't bother us so much. But washing things, you just could forget about. Then the Russians were very close to that part and they marched us for about three weeks and I don't know how many kilometers, maybe 300 or 400 kilometers for and back. You know the Germans were surrounded so they didn't get any more commandos from Berlin what to do with us. They didn't know whether to kill us or not so they marched us around from one place to another – Pommern, Danzig – you heard the shooting from the Russians. We slept in churches – there was not a

place where we didn't sleep overnight in barns. That went on for about three or four weeks.

Q: The S.S. marched with you?

A: The S.S. marched with us.

Q: Did you lose a lot of people?

A: We lost a lot of people. From my transport of 1,000 from Hanover, 6 came back.

Q: Were these people who were with you near Danzig still from the original transport from Hanover?

A: No, we were all separated.

Q: Were you in Danzig when the Russians came?

A: When the Russians came, we were marching all night through, until the next morning at ten o'clock. My feet – I had feet I had terrible frozen feet – they were open. You know the roads were icy because the Germans (illegible in original transcription) and everything. And the Germans were fleeing also with their horses and things and I could hardly walk. We all had the wooden shoes which was cut open and I only had paper around one foot and then that morning at 10 o'clock, it was a small place – Chinow in Pommern – they put us also in a barn and they said we can rest for two hours. We hadn't gotten anything to eat on the whole trip for these three weeks. We had some turnips which we stole and were carrying them around with us – I don't even know how we did it and we ate them raw in the churches and all over but we were pretty sick already at that time – everybody had diarrhea and everybody didn't feel good. I weighed about 80 pounds at that time so they said we could sleep for 2 hours and then we would have to go again. So I was laying down with my girlfriend and we were so tired and all of a sudden we heard that the barn door was opened and somebody said that the Russians were there. But we still were too tired to react. We thought if they are here, they are here, you know. But then we woke more or less up and everybody went out of the barn and it really was so. We both were the last ones who went out and really the Russians were there with their tanks and everyone of the Germans was shot.

Q: What was your reaction when you saw the Germans had been shot?

A: Beautiful. We looked at each of them and we just couldn't believe it. One thing I must say – within 15 or 20 minutes, the Russians had a big cars there with food for us. But a lot of people ate it and a lot of people died from it because we didn't have food for weeks and months and they gave us the real speck what the Russians eat (fatback) and they cut it on heavy black bread and the people were so

starved that they fell over it and ate it right away but my girlfriend and I, we had typhoid already so we couldn't eat anymore. In a way, it was our luck. The first officer we met was a Jew and he looked like my father and he came to my girlfriend and to me and he took us and he said I'll get you something to eat and he went and he grabbed a live chicken and he killed it and he said downstairs is a kitchen and you can cook it there. But I didn't know how to cook a chicken, nor did my girlfriend and I wanted to put it with all the feathers into the pot but there was an older woman who said we had to take out all the feathers and we have to take out the insides so she did it for us and we put it in a pot and it just got warm and all of a sudden the Russians came and said we have to leave, the Germans are coming back. So we saw outside a carriage with a horse and there was a Jewish boy and he said let's take the carriage and horse and go to the next village. So we took our chicken in the pot, it was not even warm anymore and we went to the next village – it was about three kilometers and it took us eight hours because the carriage because of all the ice – the carriage always slipped down and then we had to get down from the carriage and push the carriage up so it took us eight hours for about three kilometers. So when we came into the next village, we found out there were already other of our people there who the Russians had raped. We came in the room and they were hysterical so we all tried to dress as though we were old women – we looked horrible but we were very sick. They saw it right away. We only had to say we had typhoid and they were running. They brought us the next day a couple of hundred kilometers away to a small village and there we were laying for about two months. This was a German house – nobody was living in the village anymore – it was a small, very small village. We were laying there, we couldn't get up – we had about 105 temperature. We had a boy with us – he only had frozen feet and he brought us every day a pail of water and that's where we lived for about six more weeks.

Q: No medicine?

A: No medicine. They put signs on the door that nobody should enter, no doctor, no nothing. My girlfriend was the first one who was up. I had already from the diphtheria I had before, I had constantly from the heart – I got attacks already in the camp because it was not properly taken care of so my girlfriend went to the empty houses and she brought food then so we ate – she found a cellar with potatoes so we both eat 50 pounds of potatoes – the two of us together.

Q: But that gave you some strength back.

A: Some strength but I tell you I left, I didn't want her to go all by herself then, I couldn't stand – on all fours I was crawling all over. I just couldn't walk for many weeks, I only was crawling like children to get some food.

Q: You mentioned that the Russians had raped these girls, was there ever a problem with the Germans?

A: No. Not the Germans. I mean there were plenty of Jewish girls who I am sure did go with the Germans to get something but not that I know. Look that time we were young and we didn't know about anything anyway. We were not old enough to realize these things.

Q: I was going to ask you, all these things were happening to you at a time when you were really growing from a child into a woman.

A: Yes, I was fifteen years old. You see, I never had anybody...when I was fifteen and a half they took my mother away so I always had to go by myself. I never had anybody who took care of me. (Interruption)

Q: After you got out of this house...

A: After we left this house, we got into another house because this house was already so dirty, we couldn't live in there anymore. Because we were not able to get up for six weeks to go to the bathroom or anything so we got into another house and dirtied that up again. So, from there we went to another village. In the meantime we heard that the war was over in Germany. We were liberated from the Russians in March and it was already May and we heard that the war was over in Germany so we figured we try, my girlfriend and I – she was from Westphalen and I was from Berlin – I wanted to go to Berlin and to Hanover and see if somebody of my people were alive still – if I might find my mother or somebody.

Q: You weren't sure what happened to your mother?

A: We were but you kept on hoping. Like we were sent away to a commando, maybe she could have been also. You still were hoping that maybe somebody was alive. So we walked actually from Pomern to Berlin – we walked.

Q: How long did that take you?

A: It took us a couple of weeks – sometimes we got a ride for a short while. But in the meantime we got a little carriage with wheels and we took everything what we found in the empty houses from which the Germans fled, we took. The first thing we always looked for food. I mean that was the first thing. And then we took pots and they had flour and sometimes, they had sausages in the cellar. All of this went into the carriage. In the meantime, two boys and two girls joined us and then we were a group of six who walked. Two usually pushed in the back and we were usually Inge and I with a boy in the front and sometimes somebody wanted to take us along with the car, some Russian but they couldn't take our carriage, so we rather refused and we walked.

Q: Did you come across any Germans?

A: We didn't come across any Germans but we did find some Germans who were also in concentration camp who had the striped clothing on non – Jews. So when we met them on the street, it was a big hello and then the one guy said to us we went into a village that I will never forget – he said "there's a very rich German farmer who was very mean to all the people during the war, let's go in and rob his house." We had our little carriage and it was a big farmhouse with big wooden doors and a hill sloped down and we sat down in our little carriage and with the steering wheel we went right away through the wooden door into his living room. He almost had a fit. The boys had decided to say that we were Russian and you are Russian girls and you just translate. So they spoke some kind of language, the guy didn't understand it either so we translated that everything he had on food, he should bring out and give it to us. So we went down into the cellar and it was full – full with food. In the meantime Inge and I went all around the house and we found soap in the bathrooms, we took the soap. We found beautiful strawberries in the garden, we picked them right away and ate them. And that evening, we had a feast. We cooked the best meal with all the things which we found. And I forgot, in the first village we came to when we were so sick, we found plenty of money. There was a bank and all the German money was on the floor – on the street. But who thought that German money was worth anything. So it was very well – we had beautiful paper to heat the stoves. We burned thousands and thousands of marks and later on we could have used it. It was all money which was still worth something. We didn't keep a single thing of it – bundles and bundles we burned. We would have had millions if we had taken it – we would have gotten everything we wanted. But we didn't have anything. But then this farmer gave us some money because we didn't have anything. He said it's still good and you can use it. He must have stolen it from somewhere also. So we got to Berlin. From Neustettin to Berlin we took the train but we took our carriage with us. Shortly before Berlin, I said "I'm not pulling the cart anymore – I became very fine all of a sudden. In Berlin, we right away went to the Jewish hospital – Oranischestrasse – we found out that there was a Jewish hospital. Meant me, I could hardly walk with my feet and they took us right into the hospital. The first evening when we were there, a bunch of American Jewish soldiers visited us with big bags, they brought us presents and so on and one of them asked us where we came from. They heard we had come back from camp – that time it was just after the war in Berlin - that everything was still in disorder. They heard we had just come back from concentration camp and he used to have a sister in Riga. And so I asked him her name and I told him I knew that she was alive the day the Russians came. He was so happy that he came every night to visit us and brought us things and food. And then when we got a little better, we went out in Berlin. They had theaters going on again. We had no money – we went into the theater and sat in the first row. People had tickets but we didn't care. We went in and we said "I'm a (illegible in original transcription)" and we sat down and nobody could get us from the chair. We just walked in and they were scared and so they didn't say anything. And then we went from one district to another in Berlin to get from all over some food stamps and some clothing – they gave us clothing also. There were a lot of districts in Berlin – each part of

Berlin had like a Radhaus and if you went there and said we just arrived, so you got food stamps and clothing and so we went from one district to another for about three weeks and we wanted to get over to the American zone – we wanted to get away from the Russian part. During the time we were with the Russians, we had to work too. Then when we were better, the Russians took us to work.

Q: Now where was this?

A: That was while we were still in Pomern – we had to wash pigs.

Q: Just let me get it clear. You went from – when the Russians came to that barn and liberated you, you went the three of you with the carriage to a small town?

A: Yes, but then they drove us the Russians 100 km with a car away from the Germans, further inside because the war was still on and the Germans could come back again. They drive us further in so that we were not so close to the front scene – that we were safer. But then we had to work for them too. We had to wash pigs and we had to cook for them but the cooking was not so bad because we stole out the whole meat. They ate soup, we stole the whole meat out of the soup. Now, coming back to Berlin, from Berlin we went with the Swedish Red Cross they took us over the border and we went to Hanover.

Q: When you were in Berlin, how did it feel coming back to Berlin?

A: Somehow you didn't have any feeling – you just wanted to get – you registered in Berlin also – you wanted to find out if you found people and things like this and these American soldiers, they were very nice, they put ads in the Aufbau. They wrote to their families here in the United States and they put ads in the Aufbau – they wrote that we are alive and they should get in contact with us.

Q: Did you meet any Germans in Berlin?

A: We met Germans but we didn't talk to them. We were so hateful – we hated them so much that we wouldn't even look at them. We didn't want to have anything to do with them. We stuck only to our people.

Q: How did you do that?

A: Through the Jewish hospital on the Oranischestrasse and they had a durchgangslager.

Q: Wittnau?

A: No. Also on the Oranischestrasse for people who came from the eastern part and wanted to go to the western part – until they were able to go there, they stayed here.

Q: Who ran this?

A: There were some who were half – Jews and had been left behind. I don't know how it came about but this was the original Jewish hospital in Berlin. I don't know how it was still there, after the war.

Q: How did you go from Berlin to Hanover?

A: With the Swedish Red Cross. They took us over the border. In Hanover, we didn't find anybody either. I looked around and nobody was there. I found the house where my grandparents used to live and nothing was there anymore. It was completely bombed out and then I said to my girlfriend, I'm coming with you. She lived in a small place in Westphalen – I'm coming home with you. But first we went with other friends to Dortmund, they came from Dortmund and they looked there and in Dortmund we came also first in – it was also like a lager and that was under British – Dortmund was in the British sector so one officer came and visited us and he saw me with my feet all open and I was the only one – the others were all on the floor but they had for me like a children's bed, a crib, that I could lay in. When he saw that he said that is the end of it and he took one of my girlfriends and he said here's a list of all of the Nazis during the war and whatever house you like to have, you pick and they have to move out within 24 hours and leave everything in. So my girlfriend went, and she was also very – everyone of us was very hateful, so she picked a nice house and we all moved in there. We had the whole house for ourselves with a little garden...

Q: Did you ever meet the man who owned the house?

A: No, they had to leave everything in the house and we lived there for about two or three years. But then I went with my friend Inge to her home town – she came from a small place in Westphalia and we wanted to see if somebody from her family came back. We came there and her cousin had come back from Riga. We stayed there – there the farmers and neighbors, they knew her and they were very nice to us. They gave us meat and all kinds of food to eat.

Q: Did they ask you questions?

A: No. They didn't ask anything. They didn't want to know – they didn't know from nothing – nobody knew. It was all new for them but they were nice and they brought us a lot of stuff to eat. One evening, a telegram came. The cousin of my girlfriend, she had in Riga a boyfriend – he wanted to know if she's still alive. Then he came to this small place – Rinburg that's near Warburg and they got married. Then we went back to Dortmund again and I had to go to the hospital a lot because I had a lot of trouble with my heart from the typhus and diphtheria I was a couple of months in the hospital with my feet. One day the brother of my

girlfriend showed up – one day he was just in front of the door so a couple of people came back who you didn't know were alive.

Q: That must have been quite a reunion.

A: Yes. It was. So we all always stuck together. Then they sent me from the one hospital to Bergen – Belsen to a hospital and from there they sent me to Bad Nauheim.

Q: Why to Bergen – Belsen?

A: Bergen – Belsen was at that time a DP camp after the war but they had very good hospital facilities because it was run by the American army and they had everything there. I was there for about three or four months and then they suggested I should go to Bad Nauheim which was a good place for heart things and Bad Nauheim was a DP camp also where about 400 or 500 Jewish people from all parts stayed. In the meantime, my friends had relatives here and they left for the U.S. in 1947 and I was more or less alone. I had an aunt and uncle here but they didn't do much – they only started to do but then when I was so far good, I figured that I might go too. Even if America didn't come up for me, then I figured I might go to Israel – that time Israel was still the illegal transports and I was a little afraid that I couldn't make it and then Pres. Truman put in a special law that 200,000 DPs can come to the U.S. on a special quota. The only thing you needed was working papers that somebody gives you a job and somebody whom you could stay with. You didn't need an affidavit anymore that somebody has to put up money. So, I had a sister of my father who was living here – she didn't write me much to Germany. But her husband was very nice – I got every month a package from him and he wrote very warm letters and he sent me a latter saying that they were looking forward to my coming and that I could stay with them and that I would be like his daughter. And my girlfriend worked for somebody, she learned to make monograms, and they were Jewish people and they wrote her a letter and said they were looking forward to have me. So I had the papers and so with the second transport I came to America.

Q: How was it for you on the day you left?

A: Very, very good. But when I arrived, I think it was the worst day I ever had.

Q: Why?

A: It was so terrible. I arrived in Boston. I was with a lot of friends on the boat. I didn't have much what I had to bring here. The only thing I had – I had a pair of men's pants, I got a coat in Germany and I had a sweater and I had a blanket. That's all I brought over here and in one suitcase, I had a full case of sardines. We got them over there and I didn't want to leave them and we arrived in November and in Boston, the train goes to the pier there, they put us all in the

train who were supposed to go to New York. I was very much looking forward because my girlfriend with whom I had been very close was here and I couldn't wait to see her again after a year. But in the meantime that uncle of mine had died and my aunt who is really the sister of my father. So when we were all in the train in Boston, outside somebody called my name – I should come out of the train. They just received a telegram from my aunt – she doesn't want to have me in New York and they cannot send me there.

Q: Who did this telegram come to? Who was taking care of all this?

A: To the JOINT. The JOINT brought me over. So they said they cannot send me there and the train left and I was all by myself only with the people from the HIAS and the JOINT. They had a big discussion what they will do with me and I cried my head off. I didn't speak a word of English and all alone there. I said why can't you send me there – my friend is in New York, I want to go there. They said they couldn't send me and they had to send me somewhere else and they don't know where yet. So they let me stay until 1 or 2 o'clock in the night at the Pier and then they decided they will bring me to a hotel overnight. It was on a Friday evening and they would discuss Saturday morning what they will do with me. I was crying my head off and in the hotel was a man who owned like chocolate and cigars and newspaper – a Jewish man – like a candy stand. He saw me, we had the big signs on – they gave you the signs that you shouldn't get lost. He said why are you crying – you are now in America – you have no reason. But I told him the story and he tried to comfort me. But the ticket, you know they wanted the ticket back what they gave me for the train. That I learned in the camp already – the ticket I stuck right away in here (bra) and I told them I left the ticket in the train – when they took me out I left the ticket in the train. I had $1.50 which they gave me as spending money. So I had $1.50 and I had the train ticket. So I told this man I have to get to New York. So he said my wife needs a girl to clean at home. Why don't you stay two three weeks in Boston and you help her cleaning and then you'll have enough money and you can go to New York. (interruption)

Somehow got on the train and met a woman who stayed with her on the train until she met her friends.

Then we went home to my girlfriend's house – she had a furnished apartment with her brother and another woman and they took me in.

Q: You mentioned that you wanted to see New York.

A: But they didn't want to – they didn't want me – not the way I looked. They put me in a cab and took me home. The fiance of my girlfriend took me downstairs right away where there was a dress shop and I got my first dress. Then I looked

decent and a week later, I was taken to the hairdresser for a haircut. So, you wanted to know my impression of New York – I like it very much – it was like a paradise. Everybody was nice and I had more friends here with whom I was in camp. We always kept together you know. We were always in contact. Everybody tried to be as nice as possible and I got clothing and they showed me around but on Saturday morning I arrived and Monday morning I went down and looked for a job and Tuesday morning I started.

Q: Did you get the job where your friend was employed?

A: No. That was just a formal thing – they only had a little store and they really couldn't use anybody. He just sent me the papers that I was able to come over.

Q: How did you get a job?

A: I went down to the Aufbau – New World Club. They said they had a very nice job for me if I can sew on buttons and cut up material – that was a blouse factory. I went there, they were Jewish people and only German Jewish people were working there so since I didn't speak a word of English – it was an ideal place and everybody – I was young and everybody spoiled me – they were all elderly people. I really felt like in Paradise. Later on, I got a very small furnished room. In the beginning, I made 18 dollars a week, and I was even able to save.

Q: Where did you get this furnished room?

A: My girlfriend lived first in the Bronx. When she got married she moved to Washington Heights and then I got this room in WH on 177th Street. It was small but I was happy.

Q: With German Jewish people?

A: Yes. A single woman and I was happy there.

Q: Have you ever returned to Germany since you are here?

A: I was once back – four years ago, I got a free trip back to Berlin.

Q: How did you get a free trip?

A: I always swore I would never enter Germany again but as the years passed by and I read in the paper that you could apply if you were born in Berlin, they invite you to spend a week in Berlin. I figured if I ever get a free trip to Berlin I will go and see where – what I didn't remember too much anymore and I wanted to see where I was born and where I lived. About 4 years ago, I got a phone call if I can go in three weeks, they have a flight for me.

Q: Who sponsored the trip?

A: The Germans. The city of Berlin. Actually the mayor of Berlin sent out the invitation. They take people over 80 years or people who were in concentration camp. I went with very funny feelings – very, very funny. And I must say I had a very good time – I didn't feel as though I was in Germany.

Q: When you got on the plane, did you?

A: On the plane, this was a big group – 370 people. And they treated you on the plane already like first class passengers. When we arrived in Berlin, there were women with flowers, the buses were already standing there. You didn't have to go to the airport terminal, the buses took you directly to the hotel – a beautiful hotel, new and modern. Ever day you got about 30 marks spending money. You had everything free – all your meals. I even came home with money. You know, I had a girlfriend here who was working at that time with the American army in Berlin so I was – it was a good time for me to go – I could spend the evenings with her and the same day we came in – another plane came in from Israel with 150 people – the same deal. And I was together with the Israeli people so I had the feeling all the time that I was in Israel not in Germany. I had no connection with the Germans whatsoever. In the morning the buses were ready, the guide spoke in English and in the bus we spoke either English or Yiddish and it's a shame to say it but it was a wonderful time.

Q: You didn't come in contact with any Germans at all?

A: Actually only the guides in the buses. Yes, we were invited to the Reichstag. They made a special memorial you know that time they tried to kill Hitler.

Q: July 20, 1944?

A: Yes. And they had a special celebration for this. That's why they called so many Jewish people into Berlin that day. They had a reception in the Reichstag with champagne.

Q: How did you feel being in the Reichstag?

A: It was a strange feeling. A city what once threw you out and didn't want you and all of a sudden they gave you a reception like this – it was a very odd feeling. The first morning we didn't have anything. I took a bus and I went back to the house where we lived. I wanted to go there all by myself. The house was standing. I didn't remember a thing.

Q: Had you gone back to the house when you came back to Berlin in 1945?

A: That time, no.

Q: Why didn't you go back then?

A: We were too sick. We were in the hospital that time so we stayed in the same – you couldn't travel at that time. It was right after the war and I didn't want to see it either. I didn't want to see it that time but this time I wanted to see it. I even tried to get into the house but it was locked. Then a young fellow came and I told him I just came from America and I used to live in the building, if he would mind, I used to live on the top floor, if he could see if the people are there so I could see the apartment. He said come in but it was vacation time in the summer and they were not there so he showed me his apartment but it didn't mean anything.

Q: Did being in the house or on the street?

A: It gave me a pretty bad – I felt pretty blue afterwards. I also wanted to go because my father was buried in Berlin in the Russian zone and I went there but I wasn't even able to find the grave – there was nothing there anymore.

Q: Would you go back to Germany again?

A: No, no more. I saw what I wanted to see and I wouldn't go back. I have nothing there.

Q: This time when you went, Germany was rebuilt. Did you have any reaction to that?

A: No. It seemed almost like a strange city. It was a sightseeing trip but I felt nothing what I really remembered except the middle of the Kurfurstendam. You know I even went back to where I was in 1945 in the hospital and I didn't remember there either and that was not so far back and that looked strange to me too.

Q: How do you feel about the idea of the Wiedergutmachung?

A: How I feel about it? They cannot ever make it up – that's the one thing. The only thing that I feel about it is that it makes it a little easier for us – for me to manage. But still not easy enough that I could take it a little easier. What they did they can never make up. They cannot bring back all my people I lost. They also cannot do anything – you know that I suffer a lot with the headaches and things what I have from the camp when they hit me on the head and I was often unconscious and they injured some nerves, no doctor can do anything about that.

Q: Now, in looking back, what do you think was the most difficult adjustment for you when you came here?

A: I don't think I had a difficult adjustment because everything here was so much better than anything I ever had that for me, it was not an adjustment.

Q: How did you manage with the language?

A: I never wanted to go to night school here. The only time I went, I took up bookkeeping because I couldn't stand to stay in a factory and cut pants. I worked after the war in Bad Nauheim – in the Jewish community I worked there for a couple of hours a day and I knew how to type and so on but if you don't know the language, you cannot take an office job. My only thing was – I mean the factory was terribly boring. I hated every minute of it and later on I had to sew and do piece work and I only wanted to get into an office. So I figured the easiest way without using a language is bookkeeping so I had to take up bookkeeping. I went to Geo. Washington High School for a year and a half and took up bookkeeping and after I worked for a year and a half in the factory, my English was, I mean I could understand everything I hated to speak, I hated to open my mouth but I wanted to try to get an office job and I went down to one of the Jewish organizations to see if they had a job. The woman said they had one wonderful firm and if she ever could get me into it, I would be very lucky. But she didn't know if they were looking for somebody. She called them and he said no, they weren't looking for someone but I should come down so he could interview me. So he interviewed me and he wanted to know my whole life story and he said they weren't looking for anyone but as soon as he could find something for me, he would give me a ring. I figured everyone tells you that but when I came home, the telephone rang and he asked me if I could start tomorrow. I started and I was with them for four years. It was a big shoe company. That job and the Tabernacle was the best jobs I ever had. There were three bosses and one was like a real father to me. They really gave me the opportunity there to learn everything you need in an office. From the switchboard – I was scared stiff because I didn't want to answer the telephone.

Q: You were embarrassed?

A: Yes. I didn't speak so well yet and to concentrate what the other people are saying – I didn't understand 100% what the people were saying either. To ask 100 times, I was panicky at the switchboard. But I learned and later I had to use it.

Q: Are most of your friends today German Jewish?

A: Most of my friends I was together in camp with. All my really close friends are the people I was together with.

Q: How do you feel about being part of the American society?

A: It's hard to describe. I feel like an American, we all feel like Americans because Germany is forgotten but the real American people I have a feeling I cannot get so very close with because they are completely different. First of all, we went through much more in our lives and we take things harder and sometimes when I hear American people talk about what they think is a big thing for them, I think it's nothing. I always said I don't think I ever could marry a real American man – he would never understand me. A real American cannot. I never even told it to anybody like I spoke to you. Nobody can really understand.

Q: It's an unbelievable experience.

A: It's hard and sometimes I wake up at nights and I see all those people in front of me and they shoot the people in the camp and I think about my mother and you cannot say it to anybody. You come into the office – you are depressed the next day – who knows, nobody will know and doesn't want to hear about it. And I'll tell you one thing, every time I come – the High Holiday services for me are just murder. I'm used to it to go to the synagogue but it makes me sick when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur come, I'm out of my mind. I think if I could hide somewhere – when you see all families together, you have nobody, then it really hits you. And what gives me a lot is this Memorial Plaque here gives me so much.

Q: support?

A: Yes. Because each prayer what is – I have to look at that and somehow I think at least somebody thought of them. You see if somebody dies, like my father, if somebody dies and he has a grave. But my mother, I don't know where she ended up. No grave, no nothing – that still bothers me.

Q: That last moment you were together must be on your mind often.

A: It's always and I don't think a month goes by that I have no dreams about my mother. You know if it's a natural way that somebody dies, it's very sad but you get over it. But over this, I don't think I'll ever get. It's an impossible thing.

Q: It wouldn't be human because as you said, look how difficult it is when it is a natural thing.

A: A natural thing is difficult but still you know you could do everything for them until the last minute and there – and really I was young. To be alone from 15 years old – when I see all the other kids here, like Sharon's age, when I was Sharon's age I didn't have parents anymore. I didn't know a home life or anything like that. And if you see now the kids take it for granted somehow.

Q: They don't know any different.

A: Thank God but when you asked me about the American thinking, it's different – it cannot be the same. Because nobody can really understand. If they read it in books –it's sad but what they read in books can't even be true – it was even worse.

Q: When you look back, how can you explain – how did they manage to do this. It's an impossible question but how did look at this?

A: I don't know. I can't even explain how our own Jews did some of these things also. When I see our guard with his gummiknippel (rubber club) each time it goes through me. That was the thing I always got hit over the head with – with the same thing that he carries around. It just reminds me. The Rabbi thinks I'm crazy, that I shouldn't think about it.

Q: He has the same problem we all have – we grew up here and we can't know.

A: You can't know. You can't know what hunger is – that's the worst to be hungry. You can't imagine how bitter it is to be hungry. For me it was terrible.

Q: One thing I wonder about – you never knew from moment to moment – that has to be a terrible.

A: You see you don't think of the future. At the end we were with Hungarian girls together. They were not too long in camp. In Hungary they took them just at the end.

Q: 1944?

A: 1944 – the last two or three months. But there was one very sweet girl – three sisters were there and every morning we went to her and we told her the dreams we had. We were dreaming about water – was it clear, that's good, you will be free soon. She always had an explanation.

Q: Was it always an optimistic explanation?

A: Mostly yes. She always said soon we will be free and also you heard rumors, there were no newspapers or anything but there were always rumors that kept you alive – what you were hoping for. When you were in Riga you were hoping the Russians would come. Somehow there was always something which gave you some hope. It was hopeless and you still had some hope. You tried to hang on.

Q: Looking back, what do you think was the most important factor in allowing you to survive?

A: The most important – actually that you didn't give up was that you were very close with your friends. If we wouldn't have kept so much together between us –

we were all like sisters – I don't think we could have made it. Inge and I when we were in the barns, on the marches, when we had to walk for a week, we were fighting should we stay in the straw, should we run away, we were often thinking this.

Q: By run away, you mean escape?

A: Stay back and not – we might have made it, we might have made it that time because it was going to the end but also, everybody would have seen us...

Q: What prevented you from trying?

A: The prevention was the striped clothing and that we had no hair. Everybody would recognize you – it was a mark.

Q: Was it short or was it?

A: None, none whatsoever. Otherwise, because we were back in Germany, we might have made it.

Q: Was there ever a chance, did you ever think of escape from Riga?

A: From Riga, I had once a chance to escape but I was then with my mother together. I had once a German soldier who I had to work for – he wanted me to escape – he would have helped me to escape to Switzerland. Then he wanted to send me to his parents and I should stay with his parents.

Q: Wehrmacht?

A: Yes. Wehrmacht but I said I wouldn't do it – I wouldn't leave my mother. He said he couldn't take two but he could take me and say I'm his wife and he could bring me over. I had once the opportunity.

Q: That's an impossible decision.

A: Yes. I said I would not do it. I would not leave my mother. Under no circumstances. I know what happened to a couple of girls.

Q: You mean they were able to get away?

A: They were able – through some people, they made it to foreign countries.

Q: Have you ever been to Israel?

A: Yes. I love it. I loved every minute of it.

Q: Did you go to Yad Vashem"

A: I went there but I couldn't take it. Our tour just stopped in front of Stutthof where we were in the camp. I didn't leave but I felt it for the whole day.

Q: You mentioned that you were part of an organization for the survivors of the Riga ghetto. Have they tried to...

A: We try everything possible to find as many people as possible who belonged to the S.S. or who did the killing in Riga and we have been pretty successful. We found this man who lives in Mineola. We located him through somebody who lives in Israel. He is a carpenter here, he came under false pretences in 1950. We protested in front of his house, in front of the German consulate and now, they brought witnesses over from Israel and I don't know what they will do with him but the Russian court gave him the death sentence in absentia. He is a Latvian – so it is hard because the Germans don't have anything to do with him either because he has no German nationality.
(Discussion of Roschman in Argentina) (Odessa File).
We are very active in our organization to get them – that's the only thing what we can do. Even if the Americans don't do anything but he doesn't have an easy life anymore here. He doesn't live in peace anymore.