

Ellen Wall

Q: When and where were you born?

A: Frankfurt, Germany, January 1921.

Q: Did you go to school in Frankfurt?

A: Yes, I went to school in Frankfurt, first to grade school and then to a so called Lyceum.

Q: While you were in school what did you hope to become?

A: I must preface the answer by saying while I was in school I was under fourteen which is part of the whole story, so one's hopes for the future are not clearly focused at that time. So at one time I wanted to become an X – ray nurse and another time I wanted to become a fashion artist, so much for...I was very interested in languages. I certainly wanted to get further into that, in whatever area.

Q: What did your parents do for a living?

A: My father was a businessman.

Q: What type of business?

A: Wholesale parts of motorcycles and bicycles. I knew very, very little about the business.

Q: When you were in school did you have many non – Jewish friends as well as Jewish friends?

A: Many non – Jewish friends. It went immediately when one went beyond the point of playing hopscotch in the street (illegible) that every relationship was colored by what was going on, because when I was I guess twelve, it was 1933, which is when things started to change your friends' parents or you didn't go to this one's house anymore. Day by day your whole relationship with the friends changed.

Q: How did it change? What things were you noticing?

A: Well things that I remember vividly were that, I lived in a very well to do neighborhood, and therefore after school one went to each others' houses or whatever, to play in the garden or to do some homework or whatever, and there were some girls whose houses we all loved to go to because they were so terribly elegant or the beautiful gardens or the maid used to serve us lunch and all this, impressing young kids, and those were the girls who immediately didn't invite me

anymore. Obviously the father or someone (word missing in original transcript) told those girls to cut the relationship with the Jewish girls in the class. The other thing was that the relationship with boys changed, which at that age in life is important. There was a boys, I went to a girls, you are probably aware that junior high and high was the same thing, and a few blocks away was the same thing, a gymnasium for the guys. The boys who were very eager to join the Hitler Youth didn't look at you any more. Up until then they were just as friendly or as good friends as anybody else.

Q: How did you explain this to yourself? Did you understand?

A: No, it was quite self - understood. I grew, I think the first thing changing, due to my father's business being part, a business that dealt with metal parts, and the manufacturers very, very early in the game when I guess the population was not as much aware of the preparation of war and the buildup for war, but the manufacturers who delivered to my father said very, very early in the game we do not deliver to Jews any more. So when the conversation around the dinner table always revolves around how worse business is getting there were no more things that my father could sell. Little did I care about, they turned out to be ball bearings, I wasn't interested in whatever he was telling at that point. Then of course you grow up, things are getting worse, something is happening, things are getting worse. You see uniforms, you see parades and you are told go away from that. Walk the other way. Then it becomes part of your daily life that there is something that you are somehow not afraid of, it was (word missing in original transcript) to be afraid of, but there is something to stay away from, to avoid.

Q: Did you ever enter into any conversations with these friends that you had been to their houses or played?

A: No. No. On purpose because nobody wanted to be told I don't want to be with Jews any more. On the other hand there were vivid conversations of a peculiar relationship I had with what was called a next - door best girl friend, right, the one you hung on the phone with, but at that time you didn't hang on the phone, you were running back and forth. You didn't brush your teeth without asking. She was my age and this is a particularly illustrative case. She had a younger brother. She had a mother who immediately became a big shot in the woman's Nazi movement. Now this girl spent as much time at my house as I at hers with the mother debating for hours, how am I going to (word missing in original transcript) I don't know, that this was the most fabulous thing that ever happened to the country, and that they were praying for these kind of things to happen and that of course that what (word missing in original transcript) to my family was not as terrible as what was in the newspapers every day, but that certainly all, most of the other Jews did all those terrible things whatever the paper said and even at that stage or age I was vividly debating that, but you also know my mother's sisters and you know my mother and you've been to our house, and my mother's friend said well this has nothing to do with you, it has to do with the Jews who exploit

and make too much money, they will be taken care of. She became a bigger and bigger big shot and my girl friend started to go therefore with guys who were SA or SS and that made me hate her, which was a good word at that age so much that I wouldn't speak to her any more. She would still speak to me. Her name was Inga. I remember the whole family because they were a great part of my life, and strangely enough the kid brother who normally you would consider the brat, was the one who was different. He also was different the husband in this family and he kept quite in the background. He wanted nothing to do with his wife's party and activities. He eventually walked out on the wife and her party activities and was never heard from again. If for other reasons I don't know; who cares about older people at that point, what might have been wrong with their marriage I don't know. But the kid brother used to come to me and say those terrible things that his sister Inga who now went with this SS man was telling us and used to say tell your parents to get out. It's just no good that's coming up or if you need anything call me (words missing in original transcript) the next building. I think he was four years younger than I and eventually Inga married very early, while we were still in Frankfurt and moved out of the neighborhood and I then only saw her coming, at that point you couldn't come anymore by car cause it was already war and there was no gas, so she used to come by bicycle with her husband. She married one of those guys. I think it was SA, but some kind of a party functionary and he had to be a big shot because he was limping, a young guy, but otherwise they were very fussy about deformities, he had to be somebody already, and we went in '42 to Theresienstadt so I was twenty one. Long before that whenever I would see Inga or this guy showing up, it was a rather small street so, apartment houses that had five or six stories, narrower probably than this street so you kind of could notice who walked in or out next door. We wouldn't even look at each other, whereas Ralph the brother, when he was already in the Hitler Youth uniform, his mother made him join, would cross the street and say "Hay, how are you. What gives. Etc."

Q: When Hitler came to power you were twelve. Let's say twelve, thirteen and fourteen and you saw all these non – Jewish girls and fellows joining the SS or whatever, did you ever have a sense of isolation or wanting to belong?

A: Well no, but that might be in my case a physical matter. I am handicapped walking and to me therefore outings and camps was something awful because it made me feel handicapped more, so therefore I had no desire to go into that. It wasn't my thing. Where I felt isolated and left out was in school activities, in school.

Q: How did this show itself in school?

A: It showed itself in school because you had a club for this and a club for that and first you belonged and then they told you this year we can't take you. We're filled up. That's the part that hurt. The part in school that hurt the most, I went to a rather fancy school. I was aware of...it happened to be the neighborhood high

school, but it happened to be a rather fancy school. You had all kinds of limousines pulling up in the mornings bringing girls and picking up girls in the afternoon. It was a very good school. It still is rather famous and I liked it very much. In 1935 I was called (word missing in original transcript), I can still see the principal's office. I was told don't come here anymore. I didn't know what the guy was saying. What do you mean? I mean where am I supposed to go? Did you open a branch? Before I understood what he was telling me, that you couldn't go to school anymore, period.

Q: When you heard this, did you go home and tell your parents?

A: Yes. I think I cried every day. I don't think there was anybody in my class at the time. The reason that I remember is that at that time don't forget that in '35 quite a few people, my parents were very stupid about the whole thing now in retrospect. Boy were they dumb.

Q: Why do you say that?

A: Because it can't happen. Nothing can happen my father said with him and all the decorations.

Q: He served in the first world war?

A: Right.

Q: How did he think of himself in terms of the German...?

A: He was a really proud German. He still had his uniform in the closet.

Q: When business started falling off because of what you mentioned before, that he wasn't sold the metal parts, how did he react to that?

A: As I said before, I wasn't all that perceptive about it. I guess kids are cruel. It's your only daily program that you care about and my parents were in a way in another world. As a girl and being at home I know how depressed my mother was. I guess my father wasn't home enough for me to be all that interested about it.

Q: What did you notice about your mother that made you think that she was depressed?

A: One of the first things that happened was that she started to discuss money to members of her family which up to then I had never heard. Her brothers like my mother, that there were discussions about income. Bills that had to be paid, and bills that were owed from the past in business, payments for advances or loans or whatever, and there were continuous discussions about that and how that would

affect us and then I heard, and then the discussions became more immediate. As I said, we lived in Frankfurt, and if you know enough about it was kind of a center city. It was the middle of a lot of railroad connections. So a lot of our relatives used to come to discuss things in front, at our house. The biggest change at that point was that somebody from the family was forever showing up for discussion about moving, which until then nobody moved. I mean people just didn't move.

Q: I was going to ask you if there was any discussion about emigration?

A: Yes, of course. There was discussion about before emigration discussions about moving. Whoever from the family lived in small towns even before 1938, before November 1938, talked about moving into the next larger city because they didn't feel safe. And then came the discussions about emigration. None of that ever affected my parents to the point where they said alright let's talk about us. Much, much later I was the one who started it.

Q: Why do you think they didn't react in terms of thinking of themselves emigrating?

A: It's hard for me to figure that out, because in later years she used to blame it on my father. She grew up in an age where women didn't work. I mean by the time my father left she couldn't balance a check book. It was the generation of women who were marvelous housewives and baked and cooked and otherwise didn't open their mouths. She always said that he didn't have the get up and go to start anything. Maybe she was right. I can't tell.

Q: In any case you weren't discussing emigration until...

A: Until after my father came back from the camp from November '38.

Q: Just let me backtrack for a minute, back to when you were in school. After you were told you couldn't come to school, did you feel in your mind endangered?

A: No. Rejected. That's when I felt I don't belong anywheres anymore. Also at the time, at the age of fourteen I guess, the thought of now being at home with your mother, a girl of that age you have more arguments with your mother than conversations. Now I'm going to have to stay home with her all day kind of thing. What do I do when I get up in the morning?

Q: Did you have many Jewish friends at this point?

A: Yes

Q: Was there a camaraderie developed?

- A: Yes, of course, but strangely enough or not so strangely emigration at that time had a great deal to do with money. A great deal.
- Q: In what sense do you mean that?
- A: The more money you had, the more money your family had, the easier it was to emigrate. I mean you had to go somewhere and live, right? So you had to either have money outside of Germany or you had to have a family who was willing to give you money to live. So that split a great many relationships, and at that point we were decidedly in the have – not category. In terms of relatives, the ones who had were going.
- Q: When you saw these friends leaving how did you feel about the exiting you were witnessing?
- A: Well a great sense of losing friends and kids I was close with.
- Q: Did your father feel at this time that it wouldn't last?
- A: My father felt it was going to stop any day.
- Q: How about yourself?
- A: I honestly don't know. I really don't know. Nobody had any idea about what was going to happen. Nobody. And if they did they pushed it far back in their minds.
- Q: Did you ever see any signs at that time of Juden Unensch or Juden Forbotten?
- A: Oh yes. We saw them all over. You didn't see them outwardly as much as, when did start the term?
- Q: That was after 1939?
- A: Oh it was. Well the Juden Un(word missing in original transcript) and traveling the back of the railroad or the strassenbon for the matter or the bus became a matter of course. I had Hebrew class was at the temple not at the school.
- Q: Had it been in school prior to that?
- A: No. No it never was in school. In Germany it never was in school. It wasn't part of the school at all. Whatever you did for religion you did wherever you did it. In the building wherever it was. So Hebrew classes were in the other part of town to which I had to take two strassenbons and I remember for quite a few years, I still must have been in school, to go there on Thursday afternoons and liking it because it was an occasion to be there with other Jewish boys and girls. Despite

the fact that I had to go on the back of the strassenbon second car. Second car, first platform. I remember that much.

Q: Was there any chance of you continuing school in a Jewish school after...?

A: Yes there was. I never quite understood why my parents didn't want, it was a private school. They may just not have had the money at the time. It was a very famous school, you might have heard the name. It was called the Flentopeen and it was very far from where we lived. They said at the time at that point two things, they didn't want me to be on that strassenbon for so many hours a day, and number two, what was the use for a girl at that point to go beyond the education I had. Now in the kind of school I went to because it was a very good school we were heavy into French, English, Chemistry and Math. So was the Flentopeen. It was an equally good school. So my father and mother said what's the use of your going on with that now.

Q: When you went to this Hebrew school which I take it you continued even after that did you belong to that congregation?

A: Yes we belonged to that congregation and we were very active, my parents were always active in the congregation.

Q: When you went to services or meetings or whatever it was did you ever hear the rabbi either from the pulpit or in private situations, speak of the situation in Germany or what should be done or should we emigrate or any such thing?

A: Public servants such as the Rabbi or the Cantor who taught the classes had to be terribly careful in what they said, could not imply that something awful was going to happen. You couldn't say that anywhere from the pulpit. You could say that it might be beneficial or members of the congregation who are now living there and there are reporting, yes that happened all the time, but they were very, very careful about what they said that you should go or you should do. It would have had immediate repercussions. The Germans were so schizophrenic about that whole situation that nobody said go. Nowhere but in these very, very harsh newspapers, such as the Stermer, you've probably heard about it, did they ever say get out of here. In the contrary, if it came to red tape they made it exceedingly difficult. Taxes on top of taxes on top of taxes and we signed and you had to get the papers. That's what's so schizophrenic about the whole thing, so at the same time nobody ever said here's what you should do.

Q: As a young girl were you ever restricted from going to movies or concerts or...?

A: Oh yes, sure. And it had the opposite affect that when I came to New York and I said now I'm going to go. I also said I'm not going to get married. I'm going to go. I had from 1936 when I was fifteen, I got a job and met a girl that I liked who was half Jewish from a mixed marriage. Her mother was Jewish her father was

not, her father kept his job for quite a while despite the Jewish wife, and we and some other boys went to the movies religiously every Saturday night until I think there came the thing with the star. I don't think we could go anymore.

Q: Did the movie houses display signs Juden Forbodden?

A: Yes.

Q: Before?

A: Yes. But as long as we didn't have to wear a star we went anyway.

Q: You mentioned just before that you got a job. What kind of a job did you get. You were only fifteen, right?

A: I got a job through a friend of my father in an office as a go – for. You know go – for. There it was called leiling, which was kind of nice because they teach you anything and everything you have to know in an office. And then I went which you had to do if you had (word missing in original transcript) in an office, you went to a trade school and learned typing, which the boss had to send you to the Jewish firm.

Q: Oh it was a Jewish firm in 1936. How did you feel about working?

A: Oh I started to have a good time. The year in between when I was really at home between being kicked out of school and getting this job, I remember as being one of the worst years of my life. My mother hired a young man as a tutor so to speak to go over some English with me and to keep up reading and some math. Him I remember very well because he was blind and he had all his books in braille. I guess that's why I remember him so well.

Q: A Jewish fellow?

A: A Jewish fellow. Yes. And then when I got the job I started to have a good time again.

Q: How did things on the job from 1936 until Crystal Night, how did things go for you on the job?

A: Well due to the fact that I met this girl and had suddenly a whole circle of friends who were exactly in the same circumstances, who had to leave school, and were working because they wanted something to do, certainly not for the money we were making which was ridiculous in terms of the value of money. We had at least somebody to go for walks with and discuss this and all this was very, I think we shut out what was going on in the outside world, because by then the letters

were coming in from my uncles and aunt who had come here or from some people in my father's family who had gone to Israel very early in the...

Q: What kind of letters?

A: Well that it was rough or that it was hard to find jobs or that so and so who they hoped to be in contact wouldn't see them or wasn't alive anymore, or that the aunt who promised to give all of us the affidavit wasn't giving anymore. That is one place where money played such a big part, you know that you have to have an affidavit to come here, and lots of people bought it.

Q: When your father read these letters, or should I say your parents, what was their reaction to hearing about these hardships in America or Israel or whatever?

A: Well I suppose to them those were all abstractions anyway.

Q: Did it help to put it even further in the back of their minds?

A: Probably. Probably.

Q: Was this business that you were in you mentioned it was a Jewish business. Was it aryseered after Crystal Night?

A: After Crystal Night, yes.

Q: What happened to you or to your family on Crystal Night?

A: It was 1938. I was at work and my father was trying to make a living selling cigars.

Q: In other words he was not in his business anymore. When did he?

A: I don't know exactly when it stopped. When these deliveries stopped from this wholesaler and then he tried some smaller companies and they wouldn't either so, I don't know what year that was. So anyway I don't remember that day exactly, but I remember that I don't know if it was Saturday or Sunday, I was home on that day in November and that my mother was bothered because my father had gone out on his daily rounds trying to sell the cigars, and that he hadn't come home, and then I went downstairs, or had I already come home from the office, that I don't remember, and then I went to look around the neighborhood to see if somebody had seen or heard something about my father and then I stopped at some Jewish neighbor's houses that lived around the street, and had heard that people had been apprehended in the streets. Up until then we hadn't been aware of that. As I said people were very, very careful about what you said on the phone. Everybody spoke in a code anyway on the phone, discussing emigration

and things like that. I don't even remember if we had a phone come to think of it on Crystal Night. Jews were not permitted phones anymore.

Q: When you found out...

A: Well in the evening when he didn't come home I went to the neighborhood precinct and got no answer, not much of an answer. Only got the answer that all Jews have been apprehended, go away don't bother me. Nobody looked up your name or anything like that. So if he didn't come home, then he's been apprehended. That meant we didn't know. At the same time arrived by cab a cousin of mine from a neighboring town saying they were apprehending Jews in Weisbaden I think he came from and I had to get out of there. And my mother said what do you want here we have the same thing here. He said I've got to hide from what's happening in Weisbaden. Then my mother said go upstairs to where the maids rooms were, which was like the floor below the roof. He went up there to the empty maid's room and stayed there. He never went anywhere. So by late in the evening we assumed my father was amongst those who went

Q: Were you aware that the synagogues were burned or that...?

A: Only towards the evening. There were no Jewish stores where we lived so we didn't notice anything, any of that going on. And I think the full brunt of it we really didn't, and the synagogues were far away from us physically from where we lived. We lived in a very residential area. I mentioned that I had a very long trip to get to the synagogue. So I think it was really until the next day that we heard the whole story.

Q: When you became aware of what happened...

A: Then it became frightening. Then everybody was scared out of their wits because then you immediately knew whoever let the house may never come back.

Q: How did you know that they may never come back?

A: Because we heard that they were taken to concentration camps. We didn't know what that word meant, but you knew that the word meant something awful. Nobody knew about extermination or gas or beatings. I mean those words you just didn't believe there was such a thing. I suppose it had to do with the fact particularly in Germany you lived up to that point a very, very middle class orderly bourgeois kind of an existence where these things didn't happen. I guess from then on I remember I went to sleep with my mother. I always remember that my aunt lived, my mother's sister lived in the neighborhood came and sleep with us. Her husband also didn't come home.

Q: How did you go about finding out what happened to your father?

A: I don't remember and the strange thing is that we must have been so shocked that some of this we really don't remember. Until my mother was alive we were talking about that still. She died in 1971. She didn't remember either, we also don't remember, it was at least two weeks until he got home, and those are things one blocks, he was one of the first group because of his World War 1 decorations, so did the husband of my mother's sister, the brother – in – law. He was (word missing in original transcript) by sheer coincidence. I only remember the shock of seeing him come home and crying and my mother putting him to bed and he would not stop crying. I think it was the first time I ever saw my father cry and I was seventeen years old at that time after all.

Q: During those two weeks when he was away were you aware at any time where he was?

A: Yes we were and I think we were through the police. Somebody came and gave us a slip of paper. We knew immediately that he was in Buchenwald.

Q: Would you have dared at the time to ask next door, Inga's family?

A: No. Wouldn't. You just assumed which I guess was part of the problem with the whole German side of this happening. Nobody questioned anything. It was just assumed that there was nothing you could do about it.

Q: Were you notified at any time of how he might be released or when he might be released?

A: I don't think so. The only thing was that it was publicized that they were releasing people who had served the German state in one way or another. That was publicized somewhere, probably in the newspapers, although there was hardly anything in general about this whole thing in the newspapers as you probably know. Officially it didn't happen. I also remember going to that neighborhood precinct every couple of days and getting nowhere. And then my mother used to send me rather than go herself trying to find out what they know. They knew from nothing.

Q: Why would she send you rather than go herself?

A: I have no idea.

Q: When your father did come home you mentioned that he was shaken from the experience. Did he ever discuss after that...?

A: Only about the beatings. That was about the only thing he discussed.

Q: In observing your father then how was he able to take, how was he able to absorb all of this having felt that it couldn't happen and that it would go away?

- A: Well I think his ego was already at that point, even before that, very much deflated, though the fact that he couldn't make the money anymore that he was used to making, that he couldn't support his family anymore the way he always had. It crushed him very, very much. I don't think he was ever afterwards, he became a meek little man. And the two things happening together he was probably never a very powerful force or go getting person. My mother was always the stronger one, but those happenings accumulating, by the time that we got to Theresienstadt, he didn't care one way or the other. I mean he just lived day to day and therefore adapted beautifully to Theresienstadt. He had give up fighting this completely.
- Q: After he came home did things change for you after Crystal Night?
- A: Yes.
- Q: How so?
- A: They changed number one that the company I was working for got taken over the next day. I was told not to come back and my girlfriend who I had gotten very friendly with, the one who was half and half, she could stay. She wasn't Jewish. It always what religion or what congregation do you belong to, so my life started to change again. By that point I was old enough to say I've got to get myself out of here, I've got to do something. I started to correspond, I know we couldn't make it, we tried to make it, yes, something happened in the meantime that I had gotten an affidavit from somebody in my mother's family, but only for me, through an uncle who was here in the meantime. And I got turned down at the consulate because of my disability. I wasn't high enough and the relationship was too distant. I didn't have anybody any closer than my uncle who was in no position yet at that time to give a affidavit
- Q: It must have been very difficult when you were in Stuttgart. How were you able to walk away from there?
- A: Yes (words missing in original transcript) I even remember when I got there that they were so proud of it that I spoke English. I also know and you heard it over and over again that that whole Stuttgart consulate setup was awful. These people were not to be believed. They were partly and partly civil service stupid. They couldn't have cared less. They made it as difficult as could be.
- Q: All Americans?
- A: Yes. How it was set up, every file, every communication, every letter was like getting something out of the Nazis. Before you ever got an answer I can still see some of those mineograph things. Come at this hour, don't come. Come at this hour, don't come. They, we didn't think it was that peculiar, we thought every

authority was that way. Then we found out later on the mistakes that were made, and that they were playing the same game.

Q: When you left Stuttgart did you feel threatened in terms of physically threatened?

A: No I never felt physically threatened.

Q: How did you think that you were going to get out of Germany at that point?

A: Well at that point I started to correspond with people in England that my father knew, and we knew that you could go and be a maid in England and then somebody else wrote that somebody they knew had a factory in Scotland making knitwear and did I want to work there, so I said fine, so I started that and they started to get me working papers. To make a long story short all this correspondence took months because the mail was censored. We had to be very careful as to what you wrote, and I got the papers to go to Scotland on September 1, 1939, the day I listened to the declaration of war with England.

Q: When you got the papers...?

A: I wasn't elated. I was scared to leave home at that point. It was anti-climax after writing for almost a year at that point, from right after that. The interesting thing is that whatever happened to me always had to do with work. It still does. I'm just that kind of a workaholic. I immediately got a job working for Jude (word missing in original transcript) Frankfurt, which I don't know if you knew that it was a federation of different congregations and with it an official kind of organization that really belonged to the city. It had nothing to do with as it is here now that congregations are private. They weren't. They had to belong to this Kultusgemeinde for which you had to pay taxes and all. And I knew how to type and they needed help in the office. I had been secretly with people there just because we had been active in the cula in one way or another, so I started to work there I think right after I had to leave that office in a department called Kindertransporter. There was a very famous woman socialist who stopped working for the University of Frankfurt because she was Jewish, and had taken over that department, and I worked for her and she was very, very stimulating woman. They organized the Kinder transports, it was an arm of the government. Alone they couldn't have done it. They organized and they transported to Switzerland and to Holland and to England. So that became a very satisfying experience to get into that, something very positive.

Q: Were conditions in Frankfurt getting worse between Crystal Night and the ensuing year or so?

A: They were getting worse, sure. It started with less food. There was no official war going on until, the war in Poland was going on. It really started getting bad during the air raids. When they started, about that time. September '39 started

the war with England so from the winter of '39 and we used to go in the cellar every night with a suitcase and say hooray let them come. Yippee there they are, we hope they come more often. Nobody at that point thought you could get it from whatever comes, they said let it happen.

Q: What were you thinking when you said let it come?

A: That we couldn't save because we were sitting with the other people in the house. There was another kind of lucky, so work wise at that point I was satisfied with what I was doing for awhile, but on the other side was the apartment question. It was an awful time to know that you've got to move. We don't want to. You've got to. Jews were not permitted more than a room and a half for three, no what was the edict? Two people could have three rooms tops. Now we were three and we had I think five. Yes, so we had to take boarders.

Q: The landlord I take it was not Jewish.

A: The landlord was not Jewish. So we took boarders and the boarders made for a whole lot of excitement whatever their own problems were with children or emigration or family. Then came one day, I forget the year when a guy in an SS uniform rang the bell and said my name is Dr. Gastner, I'm taking over your apartment, you are leaving in two weeks and that was then in a good neighborhood, par for the course. Then the jud (word missing in original transcript) gameinde had to get your (word missing in original transcript) department of apartments because this was happening all the time. Had to find you an apartment and so the only thing they had was what the Germans didn't want which were big old fashioned apartments and since you weren't supposed to have this, a catch - 22 kind of thing, you had to have these apartments with many other families, share the kitchen. So we moved to completely the other part of town which by sheer coincidence was a very nice part of town because it had these huge old West Avenue type of houses with these huge apartments and we had this apartment with I think two other families.

Q: That must have been very difficult for your mother.

A: Four other families. Less difficult for my mother because the first thing she said to her sister and her husband then you are going to move with us there because they were in an apartment which was part of a Jewish one family home where there was an apartment in it for rent upstairs and these people were very rich people with a beautiful big one family home. The minute that they went to Switzerland they knew they couldn't stay in that house anymore, because somebody was taking over that home. People had to walk away from it and they knew they had to get out of there so that shelter was so tricky and that was one of the worst experiences at that time. To literally didn't know where to go.

Q: Did everybody know to go to the kultusgemeinde?

A: Yes. Everybody knew. It was the only place you could go. I then worked in the mornings at the kultusgemeinde. I also worked, as the kultusgemeinde got bigger and bigger it became a bureaucracy by virtue of what was happening. The kindertransports stopped because the Germans said no more and the guy from the Gestapo was there as the head of the kultusgemeinde it was all in government control.

Q: Speaking of that did the Gestapo or any other ministerium give you any problems as far as the Kultusgemeinde activities?

A: No. They wanted the least to do with the Germans and you people wanted, and had the one guy sitting there that you people had to ask, was a very famous SS man and there was once a long New Yorker profile on this guy that I think I still have, so what was (word missing in original transcript) for so long. It was like talking to God to go to this guy to get any decisions or get anything signed. He had to sign everything. I still have my (word missing in original transcript), my ident, signed by this guy in order to come and go at odd hours with curfews all over the lot. The curfews were forever, I mean they kept on changing, having to do with air attacks and so on.

Q: When did you first have to start wearing a star, were you working for the Kultusgemeinde?

A: I don't remember. I can look it up. It was on the (word missing in original transcript) card.

Q: Do you remember working for the Kultusgemeinde at the time?

A: Yes.

Q: When that law first came out, which obviously was for identification purposes, how did you feel about that?

A: It was just another drop on the Chinese water torture. At that point it was already everything, as I said one of the worst things to affect your daily life was your shelter. You gotta move, where you going to go, where you going to sleep, it was far worse than not being able to buy half the groceries, because that was affecting everybody else.

Q: When you say where would you go, you finally did get an apartment with your aunt and uncle?

A: Yes and with three other families.

Q: At that point were you all wearing the star?

A: Yes. Everybody was wearing the star.

Q: How did people from the numbers of people you were with, you were able to observe, how did people deal with this?

A: Well I'll tell you. It was quite simple. If you didn't look Jewish it changed your life completely. If you looked as Jewish as I did or everybody else in my family did it didn't matter because you were used to being looked at funny in the street anyway. I mean to have a dark complexion or my father had a fairly long nose, whether you had this official sealer or not mattered little. You couldn't get on a street car other than the back car anyway, you could only go in certain stores, you couldn't go into a movie anymore with or without that, so only the blonds were affected. It was as simple as all that. People like my mother. She used to go in every store. She was a redhead, and that was her worst thing. She couldn't go in a grocery store after she, food shopping went anywheres, went out to the countryside to get food and so on, because she didn't look Jewish.

Q: How did she feel about having to wear the star?

A: As I said, beyond practical considerations it didn't matter, because by that time physical, my family and I never in anywhere said we are not Jewish. I mean we were so consciously Jewish, my father's family was very orthodox, my grandmother on my mother's side, so we were always so very aware of being Jewish, so I think to have that thing on you was just another addition. I think it was much more shocking to the many people who didn't really want to be Jewish and there were many in Germany. They were very emancipated, especially in the intelligentsia that wanted as little to do with this as possible. To them that was a rocker, to us you couldn't do this you couldn't do that so whether you had this hanging on you or not you didn't want to talk to anybody in the street anymore.

Q: By this time was there any, obviously nobody foresaw what would happen, but by the time they went to issuing stars and kencarsa?, identification...

A: And the middle name Sarah and Israel, you know about that?

Q: Yes, was there a feeling of doom, especially you were working with...?

A: Doom is not the word. There was a feeling of hopelessness, but then unfortunately in a way for the Jews there was also a war. And the Germans were doing so well at that time. That was in a way as bad as what was happening to us because your sense of justice left you completely. On top of it they were winning already yet.

Q: Speaking of that there brings an interesting point, when the western powers, the English, the French didn't come to the aid of Czechoslovakia or...

- A: That's what I mean, the complete hopelessness. The idea that we had no more way of getting out. Whatever is going to go happening here is going to happen to us first. What we didn't know was whether it was air attacks or incendiary bombs, or whatever. This was this complete feeling of abandonment.
- Q: Speaking of not being able to go anywhere, I asked you before different ways you considered emigrating, but did you consider South America, or Shanghai or any of these?
- A: No my parents didn't because that involved large amounts of cash. I don't think I would have ever thought of it, that I would be independent enough in my thinking to have thought of it myself.
- Q: Okay. During this time you continued to work for the Kultusgemeinde until 1942.
- A: During this time in this large apartment with all these other parties, this refers to the fact that people who weren't consciously Jews or practice Judaism were much harder affected by these things because that brought something up that was completely different in their backgrounds psychologically that they also had to cope with. There was a high level judge. I don't know whether he was single or he was a widower. He was a rather famous man with many titles. He was the original owner of this vast apartment which was very, very beautiful, carpets and paintings and whatnot. From month to month came new edicts and laws and declarations. Now you couldn't do this and now your taxes were this and now your jewelry had to go here. I don't know what came out during what week. Then you couldn't have (word missing in original transcript) women. I don't know what came out on a given day, but we were having supper in our one room, but we heard a noise, something like that, and my father said that was a gunshot and it sounds like it came from Judge so and so's room and he just killed himself. I don't remember what the law was at that point that my father immediately associated with him, so he said to my mother and me, you stay here, don't go in I'll go, so he went in and came out and said yes he shot himself. We called the other two parties who were in this apartment, my aunt and uncle and the other couple, and said the judge killed himself. Now the point was you had to go to the police. Not to send a man to the police. Which one of the women ought to go to the police and report it? So I don't know why I said I'll go. Walked to the nearest precinct and said I just want to report that Judge what's his name killed himself and would they come and do something about it. And one sergeant said to the other sergeant, good, one of them less. That reaction I remember distinctly and a little bit later they came and they carried him out. It didn't affect us personally that this guy shot himself because proud Jews kind of looked down on people who didn't want to be Jews anyway. And my father knew that whatever would happen this man's reaction was that he didn't want to cope with what's ahead.

Q: By this time what did the people in your apartment think was ahead? What were you anticipating?

A: We didn't anticipate anything because it came so rapidly fast. There were so many things that we didn't anticipate anything. What came next was that people got a knock on the door at 5 o'clock in the morning. Nobody anticipated that.

Q: What happened when they got the knock?

A: When they got the knock they said pack a suitcase and come with us. Those were the first transports.

Q: When was that?

A: I believe early in 1941. Amongst them my aunt and uncle.

Q: How was it determined that it was your aunt and uncle and not...?

A: It was determined at Gestapo headquarters by who knows how. We later on got postal cards from all of them from a camp in Poland. Much later. At that point there I was at the Kultusgemeinde.

Q: At that point when the knock came everyone was home at five o'clock in the morning, right? I mean you were there.

A: Yes, but there were many knocks before for no reason. Does so and so live here?

Q: When the knocks came was there a tremendous sense of fear and hysteria?

A: Yes. Oh yes. Not hysteria. Fear always, yes.

Q: When your aunt and uncle were taken it must have been....

A: Yes. I didn't know how to cope with it. That you barely said good – bye. That you just help somebody pack.

Q: What were they told?

A: Nothing. Just come with us. Nobody was told anything. They were just called terrible names. That was the...then came shortly, then came the kultusgemeinde protesting. I don't know what made them do that the fools. I suppose the whole Gestapo were laughing in their beers. But then the kultusgemeinde was permitted to set up a transport department and that made us think immediately, there are going to be more of those. Immediately a list of the apartments that were emptied out. Yes now I remember. My aunt and uncle were not in our apartment. They

were in some tiny apartment of their own and we assumed that they were picked because they wanted apartments at that time. They also picked people who were very, they were well to do and we couldn't understand why they were there. We really couldn't understand it ourselves. If we had that much money that you didn't finagle it out that somehow you could move. I had a very good friend whose father was a famous court psychiatrist. They took him away very, very early in the game because as a court psychiatrist he was known, he was called in in insurance fraud cases when people make up diseases and stuff like that and he had unmasked a couple of big fakes and so he was done away with very early in the game and on that first night of the knock on the door in 1941 his one surviving daughter was picked up because there was somebody who still knew that her father, why was that father taken away. There were many cases like that and she was in an apartment by herself. So then the transport department in the kultusgemeinde started to type lists. Lists of people who left apartments emptied out that were now available to the Germans. A couple of houses got bombed and shattered, not many. The English didn't do very well, the Americans weren't there yet. And to become a member of the transport department suddenly became a big deal and those transports, the other transports to Poland went on, every couple of months. We later found out that those people didn't necessarily stay there where they were transported, they worked on all kinds of sites, camp sites.

Q: Was the kultusgemeinde questioning where they were going?

A: Yes, but you got no answers. To relocation sites it was called. They were being relocated. Some transports were distinctly old people, told they were coming to some old age home. Needless to say there was a big Jewish hospital that was emptied out in one transport. Kultusgemeinde, it was emptied out because they were going to another hospital. They needed the hospital. Innocuous answers. And then due to the fact that this kultusgemeinde transport department became a central filing system for them, what went on there for money or apartments, property, all kinds of things, the people who we worked there were important. There were only two...

Q: Did you realize this was a central filing system for them?

A: Yes. I knew three days ahead of everybody else's notice of doom. Then I saw suddenly so and so was going in two days.

Q: Was there any way of forewarning people?

A: Yes. Yes. I knew in the position I was in I probably was followed. I couldn't move. I also couldn't use the phone. But my father went and told the people that we knew. The payoff, in quotes, was that I was put, or my father was put on a list to go to Theresienstadt rather than to Poland, and I was put on that same list because I was one of the crew working for the kultusgemeinde. That was one of, the transport before the last out of Frankfurt.

- Q: When you saw your name and your father's name...
- A: Well we knew that we were all going and there was very little left after that. The last nucleus that was left after that was mixed marriages, people who were half – Jewish, some almost immovable patients in hospitals...
- Q: In other words you knew you had to go somewhere?
- A: You knew that you had to go somewhere. It was made quite clear that this was some kind of a privileged group, and that we were called before, and we had to be the next morning with suitcases and as much as you could carry, which was already the privileged thing, somewhere on some rail depot in the suburb.
- Q: Was there ever a question when you saw your name, when you realized that everyone was going, of living underground?
- A: No, because we wouldn't know how to handle it or where to go. Physically, or who to contact. At that point we had a few gentile friends bringing us mostly foodstuff, vegetables and fruit that you could get in the countryside if you could travel, but we couldn't because of the star. We had also given the gentile side of mixed marriages, my mother had given some belongings, some small carpets, I think this one, no not this one, I have it on the outside, and some small fur pieces (word missing in original transcript), and some silver she had put in a suitcase, that is in my papers. All contact then stopped. The cleaning woman kept on coming with the foodstuff, and she came at night. Decidedly all under cover of darkness. You couldn't move even anywhere to us anytime in the daytime hours.
- Q: Was it possible at this time to shop at all?
- A: Yes. In certain stores at certain hours. There was a sign.
- Q: Were you abused, not physically, but verbally?
- A: Oh yes. All over, and in the street too. Usually by young people.
- Q: By this time you mentioned not only the sense of abandonment, but your father had just given up, when your father or your mother or yourself, when you saw all these things, you couldn't move anymore anywhere, what hope did you have?
- A: That the war would be over. That they would lose. That was the only hope.
- Q: But at that point the war was going well for the Germans.
- A: Yes, it was going extremely well for Germany.

Q: How did you keep going?

A: Who knows. I mean I personally kept going by being young and stupid. I mean whatever was the thing of the day at that age. What do you do about clothes? What do you do about having a period when there is a war and you don't get any tampons? No lipstick. Oh God, you could get a lipstick somewhere. What about stupid things like that. About what do you do from potatoes seventeen ways in the way of recipes. About everyday things. My mother did fabulously in Germany by way of washing and mending socks for guys who worked extremely hard in gardens where there was foodstuff. She became a real eager beaver..

Q: How did she make those contacts?

A: Jewish people we were in the barracks with. That we lived with. There was a whole lot of black market going on in Germany, but those people were just too afraid to approach us. So it had to be from people who really loved you, such as servants or business friends or neighbors who didn't mind the danger and just wanted to help.

Q: Were there such friends?

A: Yes, oh yes. The people that my mother gave the suitcases to or the people who brought fruit or occasionally a chicken or something like that that they had gone to the country to buy in the black market.

Q: When you saw your name on the transports and you prepared to go did you have any idea what Theresienstadt was?

A: No. It was broadly advertised by the Gestapo as an old age camp, as an old age home and that this was a wholly different privileged kind of group. We bought it, or we wanted to. However, the realization came very quick that all wasn't what it was cracked up to be because on the train, first of all we went on passenger trains sitting down in compartments, but in the building in the floor below in one of the other huge apartments lived an old couple that we had gotten friendly with, and on the train we were in the same compartment and he keeled over and my father took one look and said my Mr. Landau is dead, and then we called one of the guards on the train who didn't react at all. And then somewhere on the route, I have no idea where, the train stopped and somebody came and pulled him out by the feet. Meanwhile she was a very old lady, she was completely hysterical. So that was the first inkling that this was no normal trip. I guess he had a heart attack and nobody checked whether he was dead or not either. My father said he was sure. That was the first body I ever saw. There were many more to come. But in getting to the camp, which was at night there were many Czechs that were Jews and there were Czechs that were guards and not all too many that were Germans. That was the advantage of Theresienstadt. Not too many Germans that you had direct contact with, that you got hit by, or screamed at by or whatever. That they

said immediately what did you do, what work did you do, but in great detail, so I told them in great detail what I was doing at the kultusgemeinde and that turned out to be my salvation and that of my family.

Q: How?

A: I got immediately into the central administration of the camp. I hate typewriters to this very day I think because of all this.

Q: It was the Czechs that questioned you?

A: Germans and Czechs. Then we were very surprised. We all had flashlights and we all had tea in our luggage, and I remember how surprised we were that they took things from us.

Q: This was still on the train?

A: No, this was arriving in Theresienstadt.

Q: When you first arrived in Theresienstadt did you still have to go through a baggage check as you just mentioned?

A: Yes. And they took what they wanted. That shocked us. Shocked us no end. How can they take this when it's ours? That's how stupid or believing or whatever. We then came to mass barracks which were old military barracks where everybody slept on the floor and mattresses and we thought that this was a matter of course. This wasn't very shocking.

Q: When you say, Theresienstadt was set up in 1942...

A: No it was set up before.

Q: I mean the first deportations were in spring, 1942?

A: No. Rosh Hashanah 1942.

Q: So you were among the first to come to Theresienstadt?

A: No. There were many Czechs there before. I don't know when my transport got there in the fall of 1942, but there were many Czechs there from the beginning of the war on.

Q: But the German Jews?

A: German Jews, there were some there before.

Q: When you came into these barracks what were your impressions of Theresienstadt?

A: I know that we rationalized it. You had so much to cope with.

Q: That's really what I'm after. What kind of things to cope with?

A: Cope with real things like where do I go to the john now. So impressions, it made little difference, you had to find a modus operandi and you had to find where your mattress is and where your food came from and where you could wash yourself and that's you were probably busy with that.

Q: How did you do that?

A: You were assigned a barracks and you were given a ticket to go for food which I've still got somewhere, and you were told where to report for work. So it was click click, like in the army. Every hour on the hour you had to be somewhere, you had to go somewhere, and it became a tremendously busy place. And if you stopped yourself to think about that or if you were too sick or too weak to follow this tremendous curriculum that you had, that's when you died from sheer sickness and illness and exhaustion. As long as you were physically able to stay with this terribly strenuous getting out, go get this black stuff coffee, and some kind of (word missing in original transcription) and some kind of bread, if you were well enough to get up at five and to go for it and to go to where you go for your work assignment and to go back to do, there was a lunch break, a big one, and see that you could go to and stand in line long enough to get the soup and then maybe get back and you walked far enough to get you to the barracks and rest for an hour. The rest of your two hour noon break, and then be ready again for your afternoon work assignment and the see like that my mother that she had something done or had found something or had hustled up something that we could eat at night and then find an hour that you could wash yourself and your clothes, and by eight o'clock it was always dark in the barracks at night and yak where did you come from and where did you come from what (word missing in original transcription). As long as you could stand that pace and take part in it, you were fine, until the transports went from there, but many people and of course older people, couldn't cope with that. They were too weak and got sick and then infection and sheer dirt and the viruses that come with diarrhea and exhaustion and dehydration and no medication, that's what killed all the old people. They all died a natural death by leaning back. And one sister of my mother we met there from another town.

Q: By accident?

A: By accident. I mean they had moved to the next larger city and the transport had gotten them there because he was decorated in the first world war and he got sick, and many of these barracks had attics. Huge attics. Attics like you might see in a

huge school building and there were floors there for the mattresses. The last transport got in the attic because it was the worst. It rained and it snowed and you had to go down to go to the johns. They were on one of these attic floors and he caught a cold. He was dead in three days and she said I don't want anymore. She died two days later. When I asked you what made you interested, those two children, my cousins, didn't ever want to hear about it. They felt so bad, they felt so guilty about having been there with the parents being there

Q: They got out on children's transports?

A: No, they got out, the daughter got out, her husband was very well off financially, and the son was a very young guy and got out to England shortly before.

Q: I mean they weren't young children any more. They were older.

A: A son my age, a daughter considerably older and they just don't want to hear anything. I mean they don't know how it happened, why it happened, where it happened. We brought, when we came here after the war we brought a death certificate because you need it for financial arrangements as you probably know by nowadays for the gutmacher and all kind of things. They didn't even want that.

Q: Just going back to Theresienstadt's conditions. What were the sanitary conditions like?

A: Not bad. It was a barracks built by Maria Theresa. Now think of it, eighteenth century army barracks as crude as it was we lived like people lived in the eighteenth century. The outdoor johns that were like a hole in the ground. I don't know how the sewer system went. Some had johns, the smaller building, on every floor. Typhoid only came when transports came back from other camps and brought it with them. The worse thing we had were lice and vermin and those things that come with not washing and not enough water.

Q: So there was not enough water. How did people wash?

A: Pumps, outside.

Q: Theresienstadt is cold?

A: Not as cold as here. You get winter with snow and you got, there were some stoves. Now I forget where we got the coal, to heat some water at times. That's what I mean with being busy. You had to organize this. You had to be a hustler. You had to be a black marketeer. I got terribly upset at orthodox Jews. It colored my whole outlook. Those were the biggest hustlers and the biggest dealers. Oh my God. There was one in our barracks. I'll never forget this Mister Katz. He was a shoemaker by trade. He was very, very orthodox, and fixing shoes was as

important as anything. So he worked for the guards and he had forever some canned meat, and we forever could see him opening these cans and eating meat out of these cans. And with a little old lady so sick. Too sick to go out and get something to eat because you had to stand in line for it in the rain or the snow or whatever, and this guy wouldn't offer anybody anything. We had many books written by the Czech young people about the characters and it brought out the worst and the best in people. In many ways you can equate the situation, let's say with what happens in a blackout. It absolutely brought out the worst and the best. It did tremendous things to marriages. They were cracked. I mean people were sleeping with each other. That was the end of their mate, left and right. The only...

Q: There was no privacy I take it. Were the barracks men and women?

A: No separate. And the ones where you could get privacy. It was blankets or something. Or there was a room. People used to rent out that room for that purpose. Now singles fooled around much less, because you knew getting pregnant was the absolute living end. I mean that could get you shot on the spot. Your fear was the best detriment.

Q: Why did that only apply to singles?

A: Well that's what we could never figure out. I guess maybe being young and not old we figured the married people knew better, but that was the only detriment. But at least if oldest would be so and best marriages were cracking up because all those guys fooled around. I mean this barracks room full of women and lets say this, it was like four guys walking in the dormitory in another building. It was the only sport or entertainment. No it wasn't in Theresienstadt, I don't know if you know there was this huge whole movie set up there was in Theresienstadt. There are many books written on that and concerts set up.

Q: Concerts I knew.

A: There was this famous movie that even channel 13 had on it about a movie director by the name of Mr. Gasson was talked into by the Germans into making a fake movie out of this paradise Theresienstadt, where children played and it was.....

Q: What I was going to ask, was there any hierarchy that developed in terms of one could do better if one...?

A: Oh very much. Oh very much. Amongst the Jews you mean. There was already a hierarchy that was brought in by the Germans as such. They were called prominenta and they were actors or scientists and they lived a little different, our rabbi arrived as such a privileged person. We resented it very much because he was just another rabbi, with his wife.

Q: Who was your rabbi?

A: (word missing in original transcription) 's father. (word missing in original transcription) who has that congregation over there, and people say you know, what makes him different. We accepted it if it was famous physicians or scientists, writers, or even stage people or movie actors. That was quite accepted that they had rooms with their wives by themselves.

Q: Did you understand the rationale as to why they were treated differently?

A: Yes. The rationale was that these people had contacts that possibly they could get through to in the outside world, and that the Germans wanted to give them some kind of modicum of normalcy there, of that they were really just being in a different location.

Q: When Theresienstadt got more and more crowded.....

A: As soon as it got overcrowded the transports started to leave.

Q: That's what I was going to ask. When that first transport went were people aware of what it meant?

A: No. Nobody was aware of what it meant until the very end.

Q: What did they think?

A: It's going to another camp. There were people who volunteered for that reason. Then the opposite happened. I don't know if you heard about it, but there was a very famous transport going to Switzerland, and it went there and it was bought and the Germans made an enormous amount of money. This was one of those fabulous deals. I don't know how much money they asked per head. Nobody volunteered because we didn't believe it.

Q: Not only that, but how would one have paid for that from Theresienstadt?

A: Oh it was a matter of the family somewhere else.

Q: Okay, so then the choice would have been made on that basis. When the Red Cross came, Theresienstadt was always used for kind of a model for the Red Cross, were the people in Theresienstadt aware of the Red Cross being there as visitors?

A: To a degree, yes, but it was first of all when the SS walked around, one stayed away physically as far as one possibly could, and so when you saw those cars coming through or a couple of those SS people walking with somebody else you

went to the other side of the road if you could, because normally meant to encounter these people if nothing else terrible verbal abuse, so you didn't know if they were Red Cross or anything. The only time we were aware of the Red Cross was when the Russians took over the camp at the end. There was talk at the end about extermination when we knew what was happening at the other camps, about an extermination area being built at Theresienstadt and that the Red Cross offered the commander a passport out through the Russians if he would stop it, and even some of the literature said that they could prove it that he bought and he got out and that they never found him.

Q: You mentioned that your father adapted very well to Theresienstadt. Can you explain that a little bit?

A: Both of them did. Both of my parents did. He became like the superintendent of this, now this was a small building we were in. He became like the superintendent. He also worked in a place that gave out uniforms to people who worked in factories like overalls. Some kind of fumigation or laundry process. There were several war essential industries around it where people would march to and fro for people to work in their factories. And I think he suddenly got a sense of that he liked to have something to do all day. It gave him some of his values back, not certainly in money, but the frustration of not being able to do anything anymore, and there he had a busy day. He also, anything that was done religiously had to be done on the sly, so to speak, services. He organized some of those. He had a good voice. When there were only ten men he could be cantor for the evening. My mother was very good in black market deals. She organized food therefore with the laundry and mending things.

Q: What do you mean laundry? You talked about mending things.

A: She laundered things for guys who were by themselves because being clean was terribly important. The Czechs got packages all the time. Czech guards let in their packages so the Czechs had all this stuff that we didn't even have in Germany before the camps such as soap, cosmetics or Kotex or whatever some of those things. They came in from Prague.

Q: You mean the Czech guards let the Czech Jews have packages?

A: Yes. There were deals made. The Czech Jews were very nationalistic Czechs. We don't understand how they can all turn into Communists by now, but anyway very chauvinistic, and they were not very friendly to the German Jews. A big, big division in the camp. The other division was a generation gap. This camp was full of young Czech people. Suddenly there came all these old German people, veterans of the first world war and their families, so there was a whole culture clash there amongst the inmates. That built another hierarchy, the Czechs who had gotten there first, who had reorganized and made that place livable with a

Jewish administration calling the shots and giving out (word missing in original transcript) jobs and cushiony jobs and who worked in the kitchen.

Q: When the Germans, how did they feel about the Czechs being in control...?

A: They couldn't care less. They got out of that camp whatever they were supposed to get out of it which was mostly labor for those factories.

Q: I mean how did the Germans who came...?

A: Oh you mean the German Jews. We were flabbergasted. The young Czechs had the attitude you let it happen. You know, just another bunch of Germans. We were very, we had, then of course there was a language barrier, don't forget. And anybody who was anybody spoke Czech only. They made a point of speaking Czech only, except in the administration building, where the Germans being German, they had to speak German. So I was in a group, again I was in the transport department and there was a group of about fourteen typewriters around a huge round table on a three shift going day and night, would you believe. Typing lists of both people who had arrived and making lists of people who went, alphabetically, by nationality, I mean statistics, whichever way you can imagine. At that point grouped by ages, we had already Dutch people in the camp at that point. There were several statistics that I hid at that time, breakdowns and totals of come and gone that the Beck Institute wanted soon after I arrived. I gave it to them. They have a great deal by the way of this, I don't know if you...

Q: Yes I know the archivist there, especially since Leo Beck was there.

A: He was one of those prominenta that got the special treatment and the special rooms.

Q: That's why I asked who the rabbi was, but I forgot it was from Frankfurt, he was from Berlin.

A: He was a nobody. That's why we resented him being on one of those over privileged people, but at the administration there was a Juden (word missing from original transcript), who after all, I mean 30,000 people, that's quite a job. They had to report too to the commandant every day about illness and deaths, natural deaths, and about people who were called to the commander and appeared again and naturally got trucked (word missing from original transcript) somewhere else or killed on the spot, whatever. And systematically every one of those Jude (word missing from original transcript), Jewish heads got killed. There was one famous guy, one fabulous guy from Berlin, Dr. Epstein. I guess it was the daily contact, I guess the Germans felt this guy knows it all.

Q: Let me ask you, you mentioned before, lice was a big problem. How did you manage to keep some kind of cleanliness under these conditions?

- A: I mean by working hard at it. You got up early enough in the morning to get some water, and you had to wash your hair and you had you had to organize yourself some curlers or something.
- Q: What did you do for shampoo or soap?
- A: We got it on the black market.
- Q: Did the Germans or Czechs realize such a black market went on?
- A: I'm sure they did because they were part of it. They took. The Czechs had many friends in the neighborhood, it was very close to Prague and Czechs being Czechs they had the hate of the Germans in common. Also some of those girls slept with the guards whenever they could. I had one girl I was friendly with, boy was she an operator. Very beautiful girl. We went one night, one of the guards told her she slept with, potatoes were coming at night, so she said to the guard get her some and he said I can't do that, they see me take they know damn well who I take for, you got to come and get it yourself, so when he said come and get it I let some fall all over the truck, so we were there some four in the morning in the back of some barracks, then you had to organize something. You didn't have any shopping bags of any kind, so you had to organize something that you could make a sack of. This became big adventures. We had a ball. I learned some Czech. It was essential. I still speak some Czech because of that and to be part of that group, you didn't have any fun or you couldn't go to the concerts or anything like that.
- Q: Let me ask you, did you know anybody who did become pregnant?
- A: No, but I'm pretty sure that there were enough doctors there to abort.
- Q: Did the doctors in the barracks in Theresienstadt, I realize that they didn't have much to work with...
- A: No, but there was a building there for them where they could work with whatever they had. There was some stuff, the worst thing that there wasn't was any medications, but there were instruments and I remember having horrible luck, you got infections that got pussy for a long time because of lack of vitamins, lack of antibiotics and I had you know a horrible thing opened up under my foot and they had it taken care of they said they couldn't treat teeth. There was nothing you could do, you had to have them pulled.
- Q: There were dentists?
- A: Yes. It was the entire community and it was a very bright, smart, well to do community.

- Q: How did they if you had to go to a dentist, did they have such a thing as novocaine or...?
- A: I forget. I forget. I only remember I had pyorrhoea and lost my teeth because of the two teeth that I had out and later on I couldn't get those two teeth replaced. They got loose and the gums started to go and it wasn't recognized here until I was already here for five years. It's irreversible once it really starts.
- Q: Let me ask you, if you didn't have anything to trade in Theresienstadt...?
- A: You died I think.
- Q: What types of things, you mentioned laundry, you mentioned young women in terms of sex, what types of things could you...?
- A: Well for instance, my mother was kosher and she used to kosher at that point and she wouldn't eat the meat and I didn't care much for the meat and I really didn't care so we said I've got this meat I got yesterday, what are you going to give me. I'd rather have bread and margarine instead of meat, and there were these packages that the Czechs got. Then there were things that you could get at times. You could get I don't know how often you could get a blouse or a dress against stamps like food stamps. Like rations, right. Or you brought your woolen socks because obviously stockings wouldn't last so we tried to get heavy stockings and then somebody arrived with six pairs of new socks in their luggage from an incoming transport or you had, as I said some of these cultural activities. I was always in a position to get tickets because of the jobs. I sold many of those tickets. My father got sick once with one of those bouts of diarrhea. They were deadly, because you got dehydrated and you didn't have anything that was good enough soup that the body would keep, so you knew had to keep feeding people, or one, two, three, it went that fast. The weight loss anyway was one of the main problems. And there was, we are still very friendly, a woman who worked in the kitchen who stole and brought it to my father and when she was through with her turn of duty, whatever hours it was, just because she worked in that kitchen and her husband was an invalid and my mother saw to it that the husband ate whatever she left and prepared for him.
- Q: Was there contact then between the men's barracks and the women's?
- A: Yes, oh yes. Also there were smaller buildings such as ours where it was just separate rooms. Or in the case of our building it was a private home originally. The rooms were just door to door. Like here was one room where there were twelve men and this was the room where there were the twelve corresponding women and daughters, you know that way. And my father was in (word missing

from original transcript) when he was so ill and he was in the next room on the same floor and without our friend Claire in the kitchen bringing something every day and she always said don't worry about Mr. Wertheimer, we'll get him through. I'll see what I can get, and she simply stole the kind of thing we normally wouldn't have gotten near it.

Q: Did the guards close an eye?

A: Yes the guards closed an eye or also in many instances due to this huge amount of people there were many, many Jewish guards that closed both eyes. Some of them as in many situations were pure finks, you know people making brownie points, making profits out of those situations. There were Jewish cops all over. They had to be tough because Jews are crooks the way other people are crooks, and there was stealing going on and beatings and what not.

Q: When, you mentioned that you saw the first body on the train going to Theresienstadt, that there were many more to come, how were you able to deal with all this death?

A: The bodies going by, I guess by being very young and those people are old that died.

Q: How about your parents?

A: Well it affected them much more because the people who died were their age, and in retrospect when you think about it now, they weren't old. Think about it. My mother was born '95 and say, she wasn't fifty, but at that time for me those were old people. That's what I mean by generation gap.

Q: Speaking of generation gap were most of the young people you were with were they mostly German or mostly Czech?

A: There were 95% Czech. There were no German young people unless they were in some kind of funny position like I was in. So all my friends from the camp are Czech.

Q: How did you make sure, or could anyone make sure that you weren't on a list to be deported?

A: There was no such list. It was made up on the spot. Whenever the call came. The call to the German commanders must have come from someplace far away, wherever the next higher up Gestapo set up was.

Q: When did you become aware where these transports were going?

A: Only when they came back. There was a point near the end when the Germans were already retreating and had to evacuate camps less they be found out which they didn't want at the time. They brought people from Auschwitz and from Ravensbruck back in trains to Theresienstadt. That was the (word missing from original transcript), people who left Theresienstadt shortly before the end. There must have been, in the winter I guess, from '44 to '45 and that was the shocking thing. Up till then I was, well just to backtrack quickly, I was in two transports, no my parents were in two transports, on the list twice, from Theresienstadt away to another camp, you didn't know where, and twice I volunteered to go with my parents, what's the use of my sitting here, I didn't know where I was going and they were going. Twice, in front of the train, did the Germans say, anyone here from administration, out, back to work now, and my parents with us, and their group, and we took whatever we had, packages and bundles, and went back to work. Looked at each other, back to work, screaming back. No idea that the train would have left without us twice.

Q: When you had to go back to the living quarters were all your things still there?

A: Untouched. It was much too fast. They didn't why they sent us back, and the irony of this beautifully organized system, there were rooms full of filing cards as I said from every angle. Who died, family relationships, where they had come from, I mean demographics of all the people who had passed through that which were thousands and thousands. And they blew it all up. In the end they took it all to the commandanture building. I had to be carted there by people because there weren't any trucks or horses, in carts, boxes and boxes and filing cabinets and whatever, and then they blew it up. Enough of us had something to pull it together, so that's why, the main files of people who had been there and all their statistics are in Prague

Q: What kept you going all that time, It was a long time?

A: Three years. Well for many, one thing was certain, a great deal of good camaraderie, I mean you are all in this together, and you make the most of that, and as I said to you when we started the story, the best part of it is Lewis. That if you have people that you are together with that you love and you have, the food was terrible, but it was enough.

Q: Did you ever get meat?

A: Yes and we got a lot of horse meat too. One day by the time I had finally got my mother to eat meat, one of our friends sent over, she was in the kitchen too, as a supervisor. She sent over and was active in noon break. I'll never forget that, and said tell your mother not to eat the meat today, they were also very kosher, it's horse, so I come flying there from this office, and said mother did you eat, Theresa said you shouldn't eat it's horse, and with that my mother threw up. She ate it. It would have been stupid to tell her, but there were many good times

and then there was this relationships with a whole lot of single guys there and I guess the thing that kept you going was this relentless time pact that you knew that if you just sat on that mattress and you just went to work and back, you didn't get anything to eat, you didn't get your clothes clean, you didn't get your socks washed and you saw, talking about the many bodies, they just died on their mattress, and then they were carted out, and there were a group of people who had to take care of bodies, and they put them in all these (word missing from original transcript) and they put them in a corner and there were four there and three there. It all went so fast. You realized how thin people were because one person could carry out a body like nothing, and sometimes they would let a regular funeral take place, mass funerals, and the coffins were this shape, only about this wide and this was plenty big because people only weighed about one hundred pounds.

Q: Was it usual to have coffins?

A: In Theresienstadt I think it was usual, but coffins were like plywood. It wasn't what wood you might have seen as a coffin.

Q: Who made them? Who supplied them?

A: There was a shop in the camp. Prisoners. I don't know whether it went on till the end. I know that when they buried my uncle and aunt and I know we went when they buried, then you got an escort, there was nothing, but fields around the camp, there were no religious right near by, so that when you walked out with the guard, maybe if you had started running you would have been shot in the, there was no use to run. Some young people with the Czechs did escape. There were some who made deals with the guards to escape.

Q: How many, what the percentage of German SS, I don't mean necessarily SS guards there as opposed to Czech?

A: I don't remember, but there were very few. That was in essence the difference of Theresienstadt amongst other things that had to do with (word missing from original transcript). There was a camp nearby which was the horror of all horrors. A prison, and you only knew whichever one got taken from our cap to a prison called Die Kleine Festung that they wouldn't come back. Nobody ever came back and that you found that all these things afterwards. You knew that the outside world. Somehow you knew that whatever was out there was worse.

Q: When these people came back from transports from Auschwitz or people who had been in Theresienstadt, what was the mood like when you found out what was going on in other places?

A: Oh that was awful. Furthermore the way they looked, that was the first eye opener. In most of the camps they had their hair shorn, we didn't. We only did if

people couldn't get rid of the lice again and again, but then other than that having your hair done right was a big deal.

(new tape)

about the American who came to look for his mother and I helped him to look through the material that we still had and he came to the conclusion that his mother had, not that she had been sent somewhere else, but that she had never been in the camp, and he came back with food and after a couple of days with the offer to write for me to my family in America, which he did, and after a couple of days I got from the Red Cross a telegram which I still have. Don't worry, say what you want, we'll get you out, let us know what we can send. Well what America didn't realize and what we realized very much was that we were hermetically sealed to anything. There was no mail. There were never mind Russians, it didn't matter, there were no Russians, no Americans, there were no cars. The Red Cross was the only link to the world. But the Red Cross did send immediately food parcels and clothing, so that when my family got the telegram that we didn't want anything and that we would let them know where we would go to next, they couldn't understand why we didn't want anything. It must be very strange, in retrospect one of the strangest things to realize that money is everything. That money even under those circumstances was everything. I forgot a strange story in the middle of it all. In the middle of an evening in the barracks talking about our trip to Theresienstadt amongst the women before you went to sleep for you could only talk for entertainment, and everybody said what they had smuggled in and what they had brought or what the guards had taken, and my mother was explaining, my mother wore very proper corsets, with these bones, stays, and my had to explain how she in Frankfurt had sat down and carefully wrapped 100 marks, bills behind the stays and how her daughter who was the over conscientious employee of this Jewish kultusgemeinde had take them out, because I had heard of people getting shot on the spot from being searched and found and here out. That's what kept on coming back to us in the office all the time. I didn't tell that to my mother. I just told my mother you're going to go on the trip to the camp with that, I'm not going with you. Just take it out. So she said as she showed the lady on the next mattress. I had done such a beautiful job of sewing I have to show it to you and as she was showing she had forgotten to take out two so she had two hundred marks were in for a long time for all kinds of things. You never heard the end of that from my mother that stupid me made her take the rest out.

Q: Well let me ask you how did you take the two hundred marks and use it? How did you convert it?

A: Convert it. By Czech young people. We never asked. It went for whatever was the most important. It could have been aspirins. It could have been toilet paper a terribly important item. It could have been jam which was very important

because it contained sugar and went with a lot of different things. You could put it on potatoes if you were sick and tired of the daily routine of potatoes, and a jar of jam is a compact something that you can get in and out of the camp easily enough.

Q: But if you have say a hundred mark bill?

A: I don't know how long it went or what we did with it, but the guy, whoever the Czech was that my mother made the deal with broke it down, so obviously it was through the guards, but money made a great many things possible. Money made it possible that you could live in Germany in time.

Q: When you were in Theresienstadt waiting to leave, did you still have any money?

A: Yes we had then money from the UNRRA whatever they gave us which was, they asked us where you wanted to go and they gave us, I think it was the American occupation money, because there was no German currency, and we said we didn't want to stay in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Was there ever a question as to where you would go?

A: Well yes there was a question. The question was one of two places. UNRRA opened a camp, really a rest camp in Bavaria called Dechsendorf, I don't know if you heard about it. I'm sure you will. Dechsendorf, It was an American Jewish camp to make people recuperate in the mountains in a very pretty part, just to feed people up and make you sit down and catch your breath and see what you wanted to do, or to go to the city where you had come from where they said the authorities were responsible for what would happen to you. So we said what are we going to do, sit in Bavaria in another camp to catch our breath? We were physically in fairly good shape. We were ninety pounds each, the three of us, but other than that we were in good shape and looking forward to what was happening next. And so we said we had made the connect to my uncle here. He had made it quite clear in very terse communications that he was now in the money. He just kept telegramming, don't worry about anything anymore. We'll take care of everything. Also there were seven brothers and sisters, my mother was the only one who came out. That was the other side of the coin for him.

Q: He and your mother then were the only two?

A: The only survivors. And the other thing was my father said what if I can claim any insurance or whatever it's where I'm on the tax rolls, and I said if I want to have any papers, if there is ever going to be an American consulate anywhere or anything, we heard that the Americans were all over Frankfurt, then I want to be in Frankfurt, then I'm going to be right there. I knew there were people who would put us up. I didn't feel now like going from one camp, Theresienstadt had become that rest camp at that point. You got clean mattresses, you got clothes,

you even got a cardboard suitcase from the UNRRA and the HIAS. You had medical supervision. You had all kinds of shots and you got food, so we figured out are we going to sit in Bavaria, we might as well stay here until and when the roads were cleared, to have those buses go. And trips by themselves were adventures at that time so (word missing in original transcription) just relax. They were horrendous. There was no gas and what was normally an eight hour bus ride turned into two days or longer.

Q: Could you laugh about it at the time?

A: Oh yes. It was hilarious. We slept with farmers on these big eiderdown bed things. We laughed because they looked, they had never seen Jews or prisoners. We slept in these big farmhouses with the cows and the chickens outside. The bus had to stop and these American I suppose had made these arrangements before us, for money you can get.....

(new tape)

Q: I've come across in reading, they talk about building Theresienstadt to make it into a "model" camp so that when they had visitors it was presentable. When they were building this up was there anticipation of visits by the Red Cross or foreigners coming in to see what was going on?

A: Definitely. I mentioned in one of our previous discussions, I think I mentioned A European movie director who worked himself in a dream of glory to his death by filming these mock up model set ups. But it wasn't really, the word building is exaggerated in that context. They fixed up places so blatantly phony and so quickly under such strict orders that they had to be finished that night and this project had to be finished that night, and the things that were erected were so ludicrous that we all knew that somebody must be coming, that it could not possibly be the real thing. For instance there would be an open space and suddenly small merry - go - rounds would be set up there. Talking about ridiculous things in the camp. My mother was part of a cleaning brigade. That was part of her activity during the whole time in the camp, scrub woman. They had to mop the sidewalks in front of these old barracks dating back from Maria Theresa in Theresienstadt, so it became a very laughable kind of thing.

Q: When these visitors did come, were you aware of their visit?

A: Yes, but the areas were cordoned off, so far. And there was so much SS around, it was quite besides the point whether you were aware or not. It made little difference. There were performances in quotes for those visitors, usually by children's groups. Children were kept separate in a so called children's home which normally was a barracks ran by, not all children, but most, ran by Jewish prisoners, and at that time all the children would get new dresses and they would play ring - around - a - rosy or march across to the merry - go - round. There

was also I remember at one time all of this movie director quick got on film while this was in progress this set up. There was an outdoor cafe and some people were commandeered to sit in the outdoor cafe and chat while these visitors were walking through. Visiting government dignitaries that you might see anywhere smack left and right by police and SS, so yes of course we were aware. It didn't make any difference. We just thought, we were hoping that these people would see through these ridiculously freshly painted setup with flowers and there were flags, maypoles, and that kind of silliness.

Q: What did they do with all the people? The barracks were built for what 9,000 people or whatever?

A: They took them to Auschwitz. It was a transit camp. That was the idea. That was the idea that we didn't know then. I told you that we were in the trains or ready to go in the trains. It was a transit camp.

Q: I meant in preparation for this visit specifically.

A: Oh it didn't matter. I mean the real thing was never seen.

Q: Did they put people in attics especially for this visit or crowd them even more than normal?

A: No. They just utilized the areas that were usually cordoned off and we were not permitted to enter. They belonged to the German commandant fuhrer administration buildings. They were vegetable gardens that the Germans had. There was a church there that was always closed and cordoned off. An old, old church, around that side there were flower pots and people were permitted to go there, so it didn't make a bit of difference to life in the ghetto. The one or two things that everybody enjoyed were outdoor concerts. People could go outside and hear that while there, there was a Czech symphony, you might have heard about it, a very famous conductor, and they were asked to play for these people. They got all the instruments they ever wanted for this occasion, a month of rehearsals before, and there were some fabulous concerts. Of course everybody enjoyed just going outside.

Q: After these visitors left was there a feeling of abandonment, or it must have been very...

A: Feeling of nothing. It didn't make one bit of difference. Nobody said who is it, why are they here, as long as, the highest building was the commanding officers, the commander's main administration, it used to be the old city hall and school in this little town and there was this swastika flag flying, above everything, and as long as that flag was there and everybody could see it, the difference it made. That was I guess the main thought behind it, the difference it made. We are here, the SS are all around us, whoever they were talking to, we didn't know who these

people were, there was no way of knowing who these visitors were. It could have been a bunch of other Germans. We didn't know, neither did we care. It was so outside of our realm, as if now in one's daily life discusses whether you buy a Jaguar or Rolls Royce, what do you care. It didn't affect you.

Q: Towards the end of the war as Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians, as Belsen was liberated, more and more people came to Theresienstadt.

A: That's right. That's when we got typhoid and the truth together. That was one of the worst times despite the fact that we heard that liberation was close, but we had heard what went on, in the meantime we didn't know.

Q: When you say they brought typhoid and the truth, these people who had come in from marches from those places? How did you begin to hear the truth?

A: There were for a time. Before they were in separate barracks, and we heard there was a quarantine started. The rumor mill was tremendous in places like this, when there is no other news rumors are (word missing in original transcription) and you could visit, and there were Czech guards and they let you in to that part of the camp until they quarantined off for good when more and more people got sick and you found people that you knew. That you wanted to talk to.

Q: You mentioned that people who were coming back from Auschwitz or wherever they were coming from were in separate barracks. What made you think you knew somebody?

A: As I said, the grapevine told immediately that these people who were there were some people who had been in the camp before. In Theresienstadt. And then we heard that there were Czech people there from this city, in that, usually transports had something to do with locality, and the minute that that got known people from Prague went to these barracks and asked who was here. Also conversely the people in those barracks asked is my brother here, I'm so and so, ask around is my brother here, is my mother here, or is my boyfriend here. So that immediately became a dialogue. Then the guards got stricter as more people had typhoid and you were not permitted to talk to those returning prisoners anymore.

Q: When you first did talk to them, I'm not specifically referring to you going, but whoever did, was the the, it must have been a terrific shock throughout the camp.

A: It was. It was like, how shall I say. We all knew in our subconscious that something horrendous was going on, but as in most unpleasant situations you push it away. As I mentioned to you, survival depended on the daily routine of being busy and hustling and organizing, and so you pushed aside this (word missing in original transcription) and all of a sudden it came crashing down on you. That was the one side. On the other side was, don't forget that most of us at that point weighed about 100 pounds and had about three years of malnutrition.

With it goes a certain dullness. You come and everybody was so (word missing in original transcription) at this point and so tired, that if there was no way of knowing, when you hear something like that you relate it directly of course to those who belong to one's family, and except for a few cases, yes a few people heard there that there husbands and wives had gotten separated were no more, but this Auschwitz was so huge in comparison to Theresienstadt that these people who had been there couldn't know when you asked did you know if my mother or my brother or this person is still left. How could you know? You knew less than if you had been in a big city. So you related this immediately to a personal level. And if you did not know that somebody died there or was killed you kept on hoping because you also heard that certain people went from there to Ravensbruck or to other camps. I don't think anybody ever gave up hoping and if you did as some people that was the point you if you were too old, too (word missing in original transcription), too whatever to organize to say well let's see what we can do about it tomorrow, lying back, then that was the end.

Q: When these people came from Auschwitz, Auschwitz had been liquidated at that point. There were no more transports after that, were there?

A: No, I don't think so, no there were no more transports after that. That was an in-transport. I think there was more than one of those incoming.

Q: But I mean all transports stopped then?

A: Right.

Q: Did the fact that there were no more transports cause any concern, or any...?

A: How could we know that there were no more transports. We didn't know. Transports didn't go all the time. Transports came months apart. Nobody expected that there would be no more transports.

Q: I see. I wasn't aware of the fact that they came months apart.

A: Months. Some times six months apart. That did not mean anything.

Q: When the Soviets liberated Theresienstadt, you mentioned that they declared a 48 hour holiday. You mentioned that you had gone off to a town.

A: Afterwards to Prague.

Q: When they first came in did they try to feed everybody?

A: Yes. They didn't first come in. I think I mentioned the Red Cross came in first and the Red Cross stayed, and the Russians didn't make any appearances at all except for a few guards around the commandanturer building. They were

preserving for themselves what ever was inside or they thought was inside. I think they were very much afraid of the typhoid. They, some girls tried to talk to the guys because Czechs and Russians can understand each other and so there was some banter going on with these guys. We saw that they gave us immediately, they dispensed, I'll never forget it, lard, and some smoked ham which was all fat, and tremendous amounts of rice and tea. Now the lard and the ham was an absolute no no. Never mind kosher, but nobody had had any fat. Whoever tasted it got deathly ill right away, because you can't absorb that, even if you, what are you going to do with it. But we cooked a tremendous amount of rice and tea which was marvelous, which was two commodities none of us had seen since before camp time, because there was a war time command against imports in Germany and that just didn't exist.

Q: What, did people realize not to eat the lard?

A: No they didn't. They ate it and they got sick.

Q: We were talking about the people eating the lard and the rice. When you say people got very sick, what do you mean by sick? How did it affect them?

A: The sickness that was most prevalent there was diarrhea, and it meant dehydration, and it meant you couldn't really have anything to counteract that which

Q: Was the Red Cross able to combat that once they were in?

A: Yes, they gave us, they immediately distributed large amounts of charcoal.

Q: And the rice probably helped too.

A: Probably.

Q: After the Red Cross entered were you at all restricted in terms of staying in the camp?

A: Yes. We were completely restricted. We were told that there was combat area around. We didn't know if that was true or not, but that there were troop movements around, that there was typhoid around, and that there was nothing to eat, so that it was in our own interest to stay in the camp.

Q: Had the SS disappeared before..?

A: Disappeared overnight.

Q: Before the Red Cross came in?

- A: They had disappeared while the Red Cross was there before the Russians came.
- Q: You mentioned that you went to Prague. How soon after this liberation?
- A: I don't remember. I was, between the liberation and our leaving were two event filled months. I don't remember at what point in those two months.
- Q: But little by little you were allowed to leave?
- A: Yes, little by little all the chicks left, because the greatest handicap to leaving was transportation. There was no civilian transportation period. It was a war ravaged world and there were no trains, there were no trucks. There was nothing. So you had to get yourself on some kind of more or less official vehicle before you could come to somewheres where there was some kind of public transportation.
- Q: You mentioned that the UNRRA came in, and they came after the Red Cross?
- A: Yes, and after the Russians. I don't even know anymore if the Russians other than some kind of administrative person, whether they were there all the time. I don't remember that. I didn't see them.
- Q: But you in other words dealt with the officials of the UNRRA?
- A: And the Red Cross.
- Q: Just as a matter of, during those years you were in Theresienstadt was there much dissention between the different nationalities?
- A: Yes. I think I mentioned that. Also the different nationalities due to the German way of shipping people around, made for a generation gap. The Czechs were all young and Theresienstadt only had German old people. Not only, but 95% and the Czechs considered us Germans.
- Q: When you say they considered you Germans...?
- A: Goddamn Germans coming.
- Q: You as a young person must have had a lot of just by virtue of age, must have had a lot of contact with the Czechs?
- A: Yes, and worked with only Czechs.
- Q: Were you able to gain acceptance even though they...?"
- A: Very difficult, and I had to learn Czech in order to do it. They didn't want to speak German. That was one of the barriers. They made a point of, while under

normal circumstances, especially people from Prague speak German well at that point they didn't want to speak German. The Germans were the beginning and the end of all their misfortune. You know, we allowed this to happen so to speak.

Q: They did...

A: Yes, in fact there were such right wing Czechs that didn't speak to me, people I worked with and or their husbands barely spoke to me. There was one particular couple who overlooked and the husband, no the husband died I think in Auschwitz, anyway I lost track of her. I met her again here. She was alone. I met her in the subway up here, and anyway years ago she wanted very much social contact. I didn't make any move because I didn't forget those years. The stupid kind of prejudice of hardly being spoken to. I didn't want to explain this to her. There was no point explaining this to her.

Q: The isolation, I forget the year you were born in, but in terms that you were a young girl when you were in Theresienstadt, but the isolation within Germany as a Jew and then to be isolated in Theresienstadt.

A: That's why it hurt twice as much, but I don't know if you ever heard from your parents that in Europe people were terribly prejudiced against each other anyway. I'm sure you heard that the Viennese couldn't stand the northern Germans and vice versa, and it came out there I guess for want of something real, that we looked down on Viennese Jews who came there as nobody, and they couldn't work and they wouldn't work and didn't want to work which meant keeping the place clean as much as possible.

Q: As well as the Czechs doing the same, your parents, were your parents kind of spared from that feeling?

A: Yes, because there were not many, the Czech older people if they didn't speak German or if they didn't want to speak German moved amongst their own barracks and they had no...

Q: Were the barracks separated in this sense?

A: Yes, very much because all those incoming transports were kept together pretty well and those transports came from a certain town so it was localized.

Q: Were the outgoing transports also localized?

A: No they came across the board.

Q: Once you were under UNRRA control, you mentioned that it was just a matter of transportation to get out of Theresienstadt. When did you leave?

A: In July of '45. Till they said they had buses to Frankfurt which is where we had come from. They also offered us, I think I mentioned this in a previous discussion, they also there was a camp, a transit camp being opened near Munich and that anybody who didn't want to go back to where they came from could go to this camp in Dechsendorf in Bavaria, and many people opted for that .

Q: Why did you not go back to Frankfurt?

A: Because all that was in my head was the American consulate and of course we were without any money and without any way of spending money for that matter. If it came to money and ways of buying things, that where we had come from possibly there would be some friends left to lend us money. My father knew business people that he thought could lend us money so that we could, the only thing we had on our minds was getting out, not staying, and so we thought we could operate best from where we knew our way around. We didn't know that Frankfurt was leveled. We had no idea. It was the greatest satisfaction of my life to see that.

Q: Well you did go into Frankfurt.

A: It was completely leveled, the (word missing in original transcript). And we had never seen. We were in the countryside, and traveled on buses supplied by UNRRA through the countryside and then suddenly saw these cities in rubble. That was the (word missing in original transcript).

Q: You were with many other people on this bus?

A: On a very stinking gasoline bus. The stench, wood burning oil, for many days.

Q: Where did you sleep during this trip?

A: Good question. They must have made previous arrangements at farmhouses in the countryside and they looked at us like something out of a zoo.

Q: These were German farmers?

A: German or Austrian. This was through Austria. Farmers in old big farmhouses, and everybody got some blankets or some feather bedding on the floor and a lot of soup and food, but they didn't smile, they hardly spoke to us. They were probably scared to death of us and we must have looked something terrible despite the fact that we got regular clothes.

Q: I was going to ask you, you got regular clothes?

A: We got regular clothes long before that. That happened almost immediately. That was the easiest thing to distribute. That and anti - biotics. There wasn't a real

anti – biotic in 1945, but we got something against infections. We kept marveling at the feather pillows and at the soup, and the people looked at us like we came from out of a cage. I guess we didn't realize yet what we looked like. And these people had not seen war refugees, probably, before. I think it was one or two nights that we stayed over in places.

Q: It brings up two points. First of all, how did you feel about these Germans you were beginning to see, either staying in farmhouses or any contact that you had with them?

A: Zero. We were completely self – centered. We didn't care anything about these Germans. Now my age has something to do with that, now became a great adventure. That some young people had gotten together on the bus and every step for us we were looking forward to, and I didn't care what my parents felt and I didn't ask. Only that's egotism of youth. They were probably very scared about what they were driving into, but they also knew it couldn't possibly be worse than what we had come from.

Q: You mentioned very early on that because of the fact that your father took it so hard in the beginning, that was the reason he could adjust to Theresienstadt. I just want to go back to that a bit. How did your father manage to keep up his morale in Theresienstadt?

A: Well with my father it had to do with being very, very religious. There were many people who said this is God's will and if God wills it, and the rest of us kept saying in German and very clearly, bullshit. My mother never kept a kosher house again anymore.

Q: Had she believed in keeping a kosher house, she was religious before?

A: Yes. Very much.

Q: How did that affect your father. I mean was his belief shaken?

A: I think in retrospect my father was rather henpecked anyway. My mother, so what she wanted to do she did anyway.

Q: But was his religion enough to carry him through, I mean...?

A: A great deal carried through. It was the first thing he picked up here, and the first thing he looked for here.

Q: He became religious here as well?

A: Right away, whatever was in Hebrew he looked very much forward to coming to.

Q: In Theresienstadt did he participate in services?

A: Yes. As long as it wasn't dangerous he went.

Q: On the other hand your mother became....

A: My mother became completely cynical. I became completely turned off. I turned back on long, long after all that. Also I mentioned on another tape that we were together with some very, very orthodox Jews, super orthodox, and they were such crooks.

Q: German Jews?

A: Yes. Out and out crooks. That was another thing that turned me off. I never knew Jews could be so crooked.

Q: How did they show they were crooks in Theresienstadt?

A: One was a shoemaker and that was a vital thing, and he would charge tremendous prices in food to get the shoes fixed up, and if an old or sick person couldn't pay that, he wouldn't do it. And what he was doing, he and his wife were older people themselves. Nobody knew what he was doing with all this food, and he went after canned stuff so that he could sell it for other things. The Czechs they brought some canned stuff, sardines and other things.

Q: When you say the Czechs you mean the Czech Jews?

A: Yes, had brought some canned stuff that didn't get taken away. There was canned stuff around.

Q: How did you open canned stuff?

A: I forget. There was also one kind of canned meat that we got, every once in awhile, officially, so there must have been some kind of can opener.

Q: When you came to Frankfurt and you saw this rubble, where did you go?

A: All organized by the UNRRA together with the army. In the rubble of course there were buildings, I mean there were still many people in Frankfurt. We were put up in what was a former Jewish old age home which was a building that was functioning. Run by that point by the army with the UNRRA. They wanted to reopen, Frankfurt had a famous Jewish (word missing in original transcript) gartenstrasser. It was not in shape to be opened at that time. That's where we were first going to work and then we said it was too (word missing in original transcript) the water wasn't working, the lights weren't working, so they took us to this old age home which was functioning.

- Q: Did you renew any contacts with former Germans or did you meet any?
- A: Some neighbors. To go back to the girl next door who was my girlfriend. She wasn't around. Somebody from her family, I forget who, was it an aunt who lived with them, or some kind of unmarried cousin, who said oh hello, I thought you were dead, to my mother and me in the street.
- QL: Had you gone to that street?
- A: No we wound up in that street by nice friends. We met, I told you that place where we stayed was army run. It also became the center of a lot of Jewish boys or descendents of German Jews who looked for relatives. They all came there, and some other girl and I met this fellow.
- Q: When you say Jewish boys are you talking about American?
- A: Army boys, and a lot of strange coincidences started to happen because everybody found names of relatives and mutual friends. All these boys wouldn't have come to us (words missing in original transcript), so they kept asking questions, and we were told that we could stay there indefinitely or they would slowly get us apartments, and I don't know how we got to old neighbors on the building where we had lived for a long time. I forgot whether my mother or my father went to see them, probably about money or what had happened to some of the stuff we hid in the neighborhood, but anyway they were told that the Nazi doctor who had made us walk out some five years prior was still in our apartment. The building was still standing. The street was standing. It was pock marked and there were plaster chips loose all over and windows cracked, but this doctor, whatever his name was was still in what was called the Wertheimer apartment, and I told one of these army guys my girlfriend and I became very friendly with because he wanted to organize things for this. He was a great guy. He organized mail to the United States to relatives right away. He organized fresh fruit. He organized other guys to come and write letters for people who at that point didn't know who to contact. He's just one of those guys who said okay I'm here, now I can do something. And we told him that we had heard that our apartment was available. People said that our furniture wasn't in it anymore. They didn't know what had happened to it. The neighbors had looked in and the apartment was there and standing. He said oh wait. It will take time, but he will get out. You are going to get back in. It took about three months and a lot of pulling of strings and we were back in the old apartment.
- Q: It must have been for your parents as well as yourself to go back to that apartment...
- A: Well it wasn't the same apartment. First of all we had been evicted from that apartment because the place was too big, and then in the meantime we heard now

my mother had lost so many sisters and my father had lost brothers and all we were trying to do was to keep up the contact to come here. That was all very temporary to us. And then there wasn't a chair in there anymore that meant us, so it was a bunch of furniture and a roof over our head versus this house with a lot of rather old and sick people. My mother at that point was about fifty or so. She didn't want to be there either. And the whole state in Frankfurt you couldn't walk very far. There was no public transportation. You couldn't walk very far because of rubble and because of American and German muggings. And then you had rubble and no lights and a black market that all the crooks in the world congregate. You couldn't go out after dark. It became one in – between stop. Let's see what we do here and feed us and make ourselves comfortable. And this girlfriend of mine, (words missing in original transcript) and I started to talk to these boys about working. Meaning right away there was no consulate, no mail, there were no planes. It was going to be awhile. And he said no sweat. You can speak English, you can start working. You want to start working, you can start working.

Q: How did you speak English at that time?

A: German schools teach English from the time you are ten years old on.

Q: But was that good enough...?

A: Good enough to be understood. So then we started to work for the army, office work. Then came the emotional shock. Then we found out that most of the guys that we worked with had German girlfriends. They had been there for awhile. Let's say we had come there in July and started to work there not right away, in September or August. Frankfurt had been out of the war since the beginning of (word missing in original transcript). They were well entrenched. They had gotten themselves somebody to stay with, sleep with, live with. There was a non fraternization law, remember we said hooray this is the way it should be and then we saw that nobody gave a hoot. That was very hard. We found another thing. We found anti – Semitism in the army amongst officers. We recognized it right away. Everybody else took it for granted. There were a bunch of Irish or Basque, very high colonels, that wouldn't talk to any of us or to the Jewish lower ranks just because that wasn't part of their club, but we were so naive that this just didn't exist amongst Americans. It was twice as (word missing in original transcript).

Q: When you mentioned that the American soldiers had German girlfriends.

A: They all had German girlfriends.

Q: Including Jewish soldiers?

A: Including Jewish soldiers, some, I remember hearing for the first time in this army office, one soldier being interviewed by this major that I worked for behind closed doors all the time. I was sent out, and I found out by a round about route he was called to the boss all the time because he had V.D. I think this was my first official encounter. I knew where this guy lived in the neighborhood with a girl in Frankfurt and all I kept thinking was a well one finally got it, thank God. So that was one of those (word missing in original transcript). For the rest of the time we had a very good time.

Q: In what sense?

A: In what sense, well to give you a small for instance. I had a birthday and somebody one of the guys in the office knew about it and told the other guys and they had been and this boy Eddie had been we were back in the old apartment, had met my parents before and brought my mother all these buttons to sew on and the laundry to do and stuff like that, and he said tell your mother we're going to make a party. The colonel and I decided we are going to have a party at your house because we couldn't come to any of the army barracks area, we are not permitted and he came with ten chickens and cakes, and wine and every commanding officer in the unit. And then my mother had the first experience with American men in the kitchen, wanting to do the dishes, for the first time.

Q: That was a surprise for your mother?

A: Right. We had many things like that.

Q: Was it a surprise for your father?

A: Yes. But he got very much used to it. He did what he wanted, now he liked to do that kind of thing. But my father was still so German that all these officers showing up in his house was a big honor for him. We had a Jewish chaplain that I worked for who started to answer inquiries about people who wrote, if there was somebody in this old age home and would he stay in this old age home, and other than this army chap I started to help the chaplain to answer these inquiries, and we met very many nice people, I mean army personnel running to take things to where they heard somebody came back to a small town. I can get a jeep and take it there. So it was also in a way and also when the movies opened and I got packages from here, cigarettes (word missing in original transcript) here. I didn't smoke at the time, so we started to go hear the movies, and black market opened up. Clothes of course was this big thing.

Q: How did you get the clothes?

A: I don't know where the stuff came from in Germany, but there was fabric around. I had it made, payments I guess, which came from here.

Q: All this time your contact was mainly with American army personnel?

A: Only. There was no other German mail. The guy I had met in Theresienstadt. I told you I met a soldier, had kept up the contact through his army post office number. He also sent other friends of his, Jewish officers that he heard were going to Frankfurt, to pick up mail from me, and then Eddie the guy who really started to run the first Jewish (word missing in original transcript). in Frankfurt. I don't know you might have met him. His name was Eddie Rosenbaum and they lived here. They were brothers. One, the older brother, one was (word missing in original transcript), I think it was the older one, he was in the army. He was somewhat younger than I am. He's not in New York anymore. He was quite fantastic in organizing. I mean he got every Jewish body together whether they had to do with Germans or not to get food, to get medication, whoever didn't have a family here to just write to somebody. Give me an address and I'll forward it to (word missing in original transcript) here in Washington Heights, that somebody would send him packages.

Q: At that point did you have someone to contact in the United States?

A: We had all the time. That's why all of this out of Theresienstadt was such an in-between period. We had still in Theresienstadt word and cables from my mother's brother and in these cables he had, it all went through military channels and UNRRA in Theresienstadt and he implied don't worry about anything. That implied that he had money, which he didn't have, but there were many years in between when there was no contact. Stay well, take care of yourself, just write where I can cable money. Can I cable money? He couldn't for the longest time, but the fact that this came was well there is somebody waiting for us, which there was.

Q: When you got to Frankfurt you proceeded to make arrangements to come to the United States?

A: Well we couldn't for almost a year. There was no consulate.

Q: And that was the only channel to do it through?

A: That's right.

Q: So you had to wait for the establishment...

A: No. But we didn't know. The Joint and HIAS opened up their own channels, but it took them time. We then in the end didn't have to wait, for the consulate, but we had to wait for Joint and HIAS to get themselves organized, and they took anybody and everybody whether they had contact here or not. We were on the first boat.

Q: Now, while you were in your own apartment in Germany, you started to talk about your meeting this former friend, neighbor, who said to you and your mother that she thought you weren't alive. What was your feeling towards these Germans you had known before?

A: Utter disgust. We didn't want to talk to them, we didn't want to be talked to. We didn't even want to talk to the people in the building, with the exception of that one, there was one couple, through who we had gotten the word that we should get this, the guy was still there and...

Q: Yes. Did they approach you at all? Any of these people?

A: Yes. Approach is the wrong word. It was a small apartment house with only one party on each floor, so you couldn't, and they were all walkups, so you couldn't help meeting, and it was rather cold. You spoke to each other, but you didn't want to talk.

Q: Did they offer help, or did they offer excuses or...?

A: Oh everybody offered excuses. Everybody offered excuses. Nobody offered help. I mean the real help always came with an ulterior motive as I guess in any place in life. I worked for the army there were a lot of other Germans working and it was a quartermaster, big office building, and I remember the super of the building and his wife hearing who I was saying how terrible and they had no idea. How could they help? And I said where can I get fruit and vegetables? And they said immediately, for two cigarettes I can get you apples and potatoes, and etc., So they were obviously asking for a deal with them. I gladly would have given to, it was not easy to organize these things. I had my source and I used it.

Q: When you say it wasn't easy to organize, you mean the army didn't provide?

A: No the army couldn't provide. The UNRRA provided, but the UNRRA provided money and you had to go back in the mainstream and your life was, it was all over Europe and England and (word missing in original transcript), that was the worst kind of starvation. There wasn't anything. I mean the ground was leveled, the fields were not worked on and the army had trouble just feeding their own. There just wasn't anything.

Q: How did you get the cigarettes?

A: In the packages here from my uncle.

Q: So they were trading stamps?

A: They were money. Money nobody wanted. Exactly. They were money. We also got what we asked for. We needed soap and stockings and cigarettes and coffee.

With this then we could buy nearly everything else. I had lots of other family here. I had lots of cousins here, so my uncle got in touch with them and said send cigarettes and coffee and some kind of fat for cooking in the can. I forget what it was. But you couldn't send oleo. You didn't want to send oleo.

Q: So in other words when you talk about black market, black market was...

A: Black market was with the Germans and with the Americans. Many Americans got rich. I mean you could buy diamonds or anything through the black market. It was all over Europe. Tremendous amount of black market activity and it encompassed everything. The movies, the line was around the block. You paid three cigarettes you went to the head of the line. Any books you read from the postwar periods, but then we were in our twenties and there were all these guys around and this was all just fabulous. It was all very exciting.

Q: In terms of your parents. When your parents moved back into this apartment and they started getting news of other relatives, was this a very difficult time?

A: Very difficult and that shows in the pictures that we took during that time. That my mother had suddenly lost three sisters. My father wasn't as close with his brothers, but people had died here that he was close with. Yes it was a terrible time. We looked like the walking dead. I mean not I so much because when you are twenty something you get yourself some makeup and some nice clothes, but my parents were the ones who looked awful.

Q: How were they able to pull the pieces together to go on?

A: Well probably. We were very fortunate, because everybody made it very clear that they were waiting for us with open arms here, and only felt bad that it was just us and that no one else had come out of it, and that of course made the transition much easier.

Q: When you got word that you were leaving from Frankfurt, that must have been a difficult day when you got on the boat.

A: Difficult? No. Exciting. They were army boats and I was always helping on the water and I knew I was going to throw up (words missing in original transcription).

Q: It was an army boat?

A: It was UNRRA and Joint distribution committee organizing. It went through another camp. We went by train as a group to Bremerhaven and stayed there till one of those liberty ships showed up which was hired for the purpose from the army.

Q: What boat did you come on?

A: The Marine Flasher I think. I remember that goodbye for the second time around from that apartment. Goodbye with very close friends. One with my very close girlfriend, half Jewish, who was there all the time, during the war in Frankfurt, all along in Frankfurt, and another very close friend. A gentile woman who was married to a Jew. Her husband had been with us and had then come back and she had stayed in Frankfurt, and I had worked as I said for the army. In these army quarters that (words missing in original transcription), there was a German woman who ran clothing factories for the army, because she was married, had been married to a Jew, she had risen very (word missing in original transcription) in the army. She had, picture this, she had the use of a beige open Mercedes Benz. A huge one. She had hired herself a chauffeur and had to make in this clothing factory, talking about crookedness, beige uniform. She sent the car to get us to the train. We had no suitcases other than things with strings and cardboard boxes and not very much, because what was the use. So we went from the apartment. There was this car standing there with this chauffeur and my girlfriend and my mother's gentile good old friend and with arms full of lilac bushes as going away flowers because you couldn't get any other real flowers, and these cardboard suitcases and these awful clothes. The guy drove us to the meeting center. There was no big train station. The train station was completely bombed out. It was some suburban station that worked at that point as the Frankfurt railroad station, and from there the trains left to go to Bremerhaven to this Joint Distribution Committee camp, but none of us forgot this sight because of the way we left in splendor and we did nothing but laugh. It was all one big adventure. Then we came to this Joint center in Bremerhaven. They had to wait for these ships. They settled these ships to expect, but they didn't know what was coming first. Then we met again people from other cities and then we realized that Frankfurt was such a big army center that we had had such an easy time, that people in other cities didn't. It was Eisenhower headquarters for so long.

Q: When you arrived here the Marine Flasher was the first liberty ship to land. Were there a lot of newsmen?

A: Yes. I can give you. I can show you some newspaper articles. There was complete craziness. It was completely cordoned off. There was newsreels and of course there was no television at that time. There were radio people and nobody, and before we had been through immigration and health department, nobody was permitted to talk to anybody. There was only United States lines docks, wide areas cordoned off where nobody was permitted to go near and it was much later, hours and hours before people were permitted to meet anybody, and so behind all those wires and things you saw everybody waiting there in masses and we had gotten in the night before, on a Sunday, and standing there and seeing all those lights, and then somebody said we're not really in New York we're in Brooklyn and then somebody said Brooklyn belongs to New York and then why can't we

get out, because you can't get out here on Sundays, disembark, there was no docking facilities or customs or health department, you had to wait.

Q: On Monday when you did disembark, was your uncle waiting for you?

A: My uncle and seventeen cousins and (words missing in original transcription). That was a very emotional thing. What was also waiting for us was New York May weather and hot. Completely unprepared for that. Haze and humid.

Q: When you say completely unprepared for that...?

A: We had gotten on for the occasion our newly made tailored suits, travel outfits and raincoats, and it was boiling hot in May.

Q: When your uncle and cousins met you, where did you go that first day?

A: My uncle was very well to do by that time. He had hired a big hotel apartment for us.

Q: Where?

A: Broadway and 67th. It doesn't exist anymore, that block. In fact we are going to look there now.

Q: Did you go there?

A: Yes we went there right away, and the place was full of flowers and cake and we were aghast. My mother and I, we were eleven days on that boat and my mother and I were eleven days seasick. My father was the only one who ate everything. One interesting psychological point of that trip. People stole in that ship whatever wasn't nailed down. Towels. The dining room was no dining room it was a mess hall. Alright. Sugar, jam pots, salt shakers, forks, spoons, it disappeared from one meal to the other.

Q: How do you explain that?

A: Everybody explained that and everybody excused that by saying we've all been in terrible spots where we've had nothing. I don't care how I do it, but I never want to be in that spot again. This had nothing to do necessarily with being in a camp. It was being in a war, and then we found out that Frankfurt was a better place to be than many other places where people then didn't have anything to eat either.

Q: That's true. How did your parents start to earn a living?

A: They didn't. They didn't have (words missing in original transcription), but we knew right away that we couldn't stay in this hotel. I mean we didn't want to.

We found out right away how much that was. And in 1946 you might have heard, New York was an impossible place to find an apartment, so the first thing we went, we thought 181st street was heaven.

Q: How did you ever see 181st street?

A: Because we right away this one lives there and that one lives here, so we met them there and discovered here they are on St. Nicholas or whatever it was called and all the shopping was there and all the people lived there, so. We went on the subway pretty (words missing in original transcription). We were city people and on buses right away. I was told by my uncle that I ought to make up my mind what I wanted to do about having had fashion drawing experience in school and didn't I want to use it and I ought to pursue it and I ought to find out about school. And in the course of finding out about schools I started to talk to people and that's how I got the first job, on Vogue magazine no less, but through a connection, somebody said I know somebody who works on Vogue magazine and why don't you see her about schools and she said you're terrible and why don't you work awhile before you make up your mind what you want to do with, you're not good enough professional (words missing in original transcription), but maybe you want to do something else in that regard in graphic arts and work here first. The schools here are very expensive and they are not for free and it's not that simple. Wait awhile.

Q: So she directed you? And she also directed you toward Vogue magazine?

A: She was at Vogue. She was a brilliant German Jewish woman who somebody knew.

Q: And your parents? Did they...?

A: My parents didn't do much. They had some temporary work.

Q: In the beginning when you started to work for Vogue, these were mainly American people you worked with. American born. All? How did you adjust in the beginning to American work ways?

A: It was really very exciting. I liked it.

Q: Did they ever question you as to your past experiences?

A: No. It wasn't that kind of a place. It was all very low – key. There were very, very few Jews there.

Q: In your social life when you first came here, did you make friends with mostly German Jews?

- A: Yes. Almost all German Jews. First of all I got to know my family again. I got to know family that I never knew and whoever left between 1932 and 1934 and then it was 1946, so that was most of the social life.
- Q: A long time had gone by.
- A: And then the second group we socialized with were all people from the camp that had gotten together here.
- Q: You mentioned two things, when you were with the American boys, this Eddie or the other American boys, were you more comfortable with the German – Jewish crowd or equally as comfortable with the Americans?
- A: I think I was always more comfortable with the German – Jewish crowd.
- Q: Is that still true today?
- A: Yes, to a degree. I don't have an American – Jewish social life. I really don't. I know very many Americans. It matters little whether they are Jewish or not. I think the background or whatever, I think most of my friends feel the same way, by the way, They married within, well my husband's Hungarian, but let's say they married within the European areas. They looked for it and they still move in those circles. They are still most comfortable in those circles.
- Q: If you had to choose a reason, how could you account for that? You've met many Americans over the years.
- A: I don't think I met many American Jews and was conscious well these are Jews. It had to do with that old prejudice that Germans have against Polish and Russian born Jews. There's no denying that. There was a tremendous gulf. They never even crossed paths until New York. It crossed paths in Berlin for instance where there were Polish Jews, they were completely separated.
- Q: But you feel it crossed paths in New York?
- A: Yes in New York it crossed openly for the first time. And those people were rather well to do which made for some resentment. Many of them.
- Q: Do you, you are not with Vogue anymore, did you switch to Simplicity a long time ago
- A: A long time ago.
- Q: In your job now, as opposed to your American counterparts in the same job, do you feel there are any holdovers from your European background?

- A: No because all of New York has become so much more cosmopolitan or broad minded and everyone speaks some Jewish even though they are black or Puerto Rican. You know. I think the world has very much changed. When people became conscious that they could travel and that it was fun to travel many points of view that were very parochial before completely changed.
- Q: Very true. Did you meet your husband in any of these organizations, Haboneem or New World Club?
- A: No.
- Q: From your parents, from watching your parents, what was the most difficult thing for them to adjust to? What was the most difficult adjustment they had to make in the United States?
- A: Well my father (words missing in original transcript) he became very ill in '49 (words missing in original transcript). They had a fabulous time. They moved to Yonkers because my uncle had an interest in an apartment house there, so that was the place to find an apartment.
- Q: You moved with them to Yonkers?
- A: Right. And so then they went to look for a (words missing in original transcript) and then there was a Jewish Center that had another bunch of refugees and they had language lessons, my father had English in school and went back to it very quickly and liked it. My mother never had any English in her life, but she enjoyed it, and they played cards and they went shopping. It was all grand. The only thing was in my mother's life. I wish my sisters were alive, my father his favorite brother M(name missing in original transcript) had a heart attack. He died just before we got here. He missed him terribly. But I don't think, but the fact they had no money worries. They had and everybody said please take care of yourself and now you go to the Catskills and now you stay there for four weeks and I had the wide open world suddenly at my command, including a subway and a very exciting work area, even though it paid peanuts. Only after a couple of years (words missing in original transcript), I can't just let my uncle worry about my parents. Now it's my turn.
- Q: So then you began to take over?
- A: Right, and then my father died and then we moved when my father died. I wanted to get out more and my mother didn't want to be in the apartment any more where he had been so sick and then we moved to Bennett Avenue into what at that point was that new building over there.
- Q: From your point of view what was the most difficult adjustment that you had to make here?

- A: I don't know if there were any difficult adjustments, because there were no point of comparisons. The only thing that I think I was sorry for which was my own fault was that I missed it that I didn't go back into a normal school situation. I was in my middle twenties at that time. I was much more concerned with making some money.
- Q: It would have been difficult.
- A: It could have been done, but maybe I was just too complacent then, or was having too much fun or something.
- Q: Do you feel that America has afforded you opportunities?
- A: Yes. But there is no point of comparison. I don't know why my father didn't do so well over there from what I know, and I didn't have to give up a job or a career over there so there was no (words missing in original transcript). From the day I came over here, it was something I was dying to do, I was waiting for long before the camp.
- Q: Do you mean your particular field?
- A: Yes and to come to the States. I then didn't want to stay there growing up in the Nazi time before I even knew there was going to be a x camp. It was a very joyful experience to come here. I remember my mother and I standing on 72nd street in front of a bakery store saying what do they have all these cakes for. Who eats all this stuff? Who cooks all this? This is ridiculous. And then we walked in and we were asking, asking we were strange looking and even with English we didn't know what all these things were called. It was for the birds. And then we noticed that people talked about vacation all the time. What's the big deal about vacation? What did you do this summer and one more year we were doing the same thing.
- Q: So little by little you adjusted?
- A: We adjusted very quickly. Coming from a big city helped. Speaking the language helped, and my mother was a very gregarious housewife. She didn't speak English very well, but she loved to cook and invite everybody and that got her (words missing in original transcript), between speaking Yiddish and store English and Yonkers helped because there were classes and as I said my parents loved those classes and they became a club and they had outings and trips.
- Q: Speaking of Yonkers. Yonkers was less German Jewish than Washington Heights. Did that disturb them?

- A: That bothered them tremendously in the (words missing in original transcript), they thought it was outrageous what they had to listen to there.
- Q: In the congregation that was not particularly German Jewish?
- A: Right. I mean there were some there, but it wasn't. It was all (words missing in original transcript) sounding stuff.
- Q: So that when you moved from Yonkers to Bennett Avenue did you feel that they were happier within their....?
- A: My mother was. That's why she wanted to move. My father wasn't alive anymore. I met my husband in Yonkers through Viennese neighbors of ours. So that made it easy for my parents too, there was this we were wall to wall with this Viennese couple and they enjoyed showing my mother around by where's there a good butcher and they had a car and they said come along there were relatives and my husband that's how I met him. That made, my father loved it in Yonkers.
- Q: Did you ever go back to Germany?
- A: Yes, frequently. I'll be going now.
- Q: On vacation or business?
- A: Only family. Ingber has a son through who we met, and that's a whole nother story for which we don't have time. The story of rather a romantic life, but anyway he grew up in England, he's not Jewish, and he went with the army in, no he went to Europe on a trip. He met through Jewish friends of my husband a German girl and he married her while he was over in the army in the sixties. He is an American journalist and he lives in Germany with the family. So one year they come here and one year we go there. He's just been transferred to Bonn and they just rented a house and this is our turn so we will be going to Bonn.
- Q: Now how do you feel?
- Q: Terrible the both of us. They were there two years. We don't talk to anybody. We just talk to the kids. My husband's mother was killed in Auschwitz, other than that he is very un – Jewish and wasn't as far as religion is concerned, but we've gone and whenever we are (words missing in original transcript) we go to the opera and then we look at the strange people who sit next to us, our, that's my generation or his and they are extremely well dressed and in (words missing in original transcript) everybody dresses up to go to the opera and they wear a lot of dirndls, evening dirndls, so the ladies with their terribly expensive brocade or taffeta dirndls. The (words missing in original transcript) sitting up there and the very properly dressed guys in dinner jackets and we say those are them. These people start talking to us because of a program that drops on the floor or whatever

you talk to, and intermission everybody goes for drinks there and we don't answer. And same thing we've been together in hotels with the kids. We usually go somewheres in the countryside, and people stop and make conversation, you are from New York and blah, blah, blah and how come you speak German. They catch on who we are. If they don't catch on we don't say. And I get my hair done and they say oh you speak German so well, you must have been in school here once. I say yes. I don't want to explain or anything. I remember one very typical statement in (words missing in original transcript) the kids lived in a big modern apartment and they had some friends there and as we came from the airport with the suitcases we meet the neighbor woman in the elevator and she said to me oh I heard you were arriving today. Doesn't it feel good to be back in the old (illegible). There's no English word for that, do you know the word? You've got to write your name around that. And I stared at her and I said something, it's nice to be here. Never once would I have felt in those many years we had been in Germany those other times, because of that close girlfriend that I had there, that at least when our kids lived in London I stopped over in Frankfurt and got together with this girlfriend for a few days, but never once in all those years that I was there did this occur that this was my old home. I was there to be with somebody that I wanted to be with, not whether this was nice to be in the old home. Never once was this the old home in all those years.

Q: In relation to that how do you broach that subject with your daughter – in – law?

A: My son won't ever understand it. He said the generation is dead, it doesn't exist any more. My daughter – in – law was born long after all this.

Q: Have you met her parents?

A: I met her mother once and I feel what's the use of talking about it. To expect her to understand me. I don't. My daughter – in – law knows nothing of it. She was born before the war ended. She was in 1944. What does she know?

Q: Does it bother you that she doesn't know?

A: She knows and she's heard. It bothered us tremendously that he got married over there. And he said why do you do this thing I don't want. But this is all colored by the fact that no doubt that they were extremely well off and that they lead a beautiful life and that there is nothing here that can compare to the way they live. So you can never say why don't you do this. They couldn't do that unless he would be making three times as much. She is extremely well educated. They have fantastic friends. They travel all over the world, and whenever they are here they say Eeh God, New York. How do you stand it? So it is a very bad point of comparison, because it is, when you are over there and you see how much easier people live, and how much cleaner it is, and how much better the schools are, and that the medical system works differently and that the social security system

- works better, then you have very little argument left for something that happened to you forty years ago. Why should they care?
- Q: You mentioned that when you went back to Frankfurt one of your greatest pleasures was that it was in rubble. Well today that is very different all over Germany. How do you feel about the fact that they have done so well?
- A: Lousy. Always did. Lousy, that' (words missing in original transcript) there's no justice in this world.
- Q: Same thought that is running through my mind.
- A: I can't hold that against (words missing in original transcript) and I never do and we have a great thing going together and beautiful kids, and to her and her mother, they don't even know even know any Jews. They know so little about Jews. They thought that interestingly enough that the U.S. is run to (words missing in original transcript) the Jews and in the many years before coming here she found out about that (words missing in original transcript) insurance agencies and government and with all her education and all her degrees she didn't know any of this.
- Q: But the interesting part is her mother. Her mother must have known Jews in Germany before.
- A: Her mother was a seamstress for a lot of Jews, but then quite on purpose we didn't look for any contact with her mother. We felt the two weeks we were there every two years we want to see the kids. And the mother was there so we didn't say where is your mother. Once we sacrificed for three days with her mother, she happened to be really a lovely, capable bright and sparkling older lady, and that's it.
- Q: You never brought up the discussion in terms of some people catch on and some people don't, where people have caught on...?
- A: Then they ask incessant questions. Who do I owe an answer to?
- Q: So you've avoided...?
- A: Oh yes, of course. Am I going to sit in a hotel restaurant with somebody at the same table and ask them questions, you know, why are you here, where...? If I were to have a choice I wouldn't be there. I went to Frankfurt to see my girlfriend, She was here frequently, her parents were here. As I said half – Jewish friend. She was married there. Also married a newspaper man. They met and she wrote and they made scads of money and they built a fabulous house, and visiting there was a great deal of fun. I usually did it for three or four days to go shopping and we had a ball like old girlfriends can get together for three or four

days of shopping and doing great restaurants, and my husband usually came back here because he didn't know them much and it was boring for him, and living in that beautiful house and she died at a very early age, and so did her husband.

Q: Have you ever gone to Israel?

A: No.

Q: Okay, I was just curious. By the way just in relation to Germany, how do you feel about the vitagutmacher?

A: I feel good about it because I am affected by it. They do a great deal.

