

Trude Wittner January 8, 1978.

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born in a very small town in Germany near the French – German border, on the German side and the place was called Wittlich and I was there from 1921 until 1937 – at the end of 1936, we left.

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

A: I was there three or four years. I don't remember that exactly in the Jewish Volksschule and from there I had to go to private school and it was a Catholic Lyceum.

Q: When you say you went to the Jewish Volksschule, what was the Jewish population of Wittlich?

A: There was actually a big Jewish population. The city had about 7 to 8 thousand people and there were about 80 Jewish families which was quite an amount for a small town like that.

Q: Were these 80 families all members of one congregation or...

A: Yes. There was just one congregation.

Q: Was it orthodox or liberal?

A: No. It was really very conservative synagogue and the teacher was a rabbi and the cantor – he was everything.

Q: Was this Jewish Volksschule affiliated with the congregation?

A: I don't believe so. I think in this part of Germany each religion had it's own Volksschule which you had to attend whether you were Catholic, Jewish or Protestant and from there on you could go to a hoehere schule – it's not really our high school – it's a private school, or you could go on in the Jewish school for eight years but I went to a Catholic school besides there were very few Jewish children at my age left. There were a few younger ones and a few older ones but just my age, there were very few children.

Q: When did you start to attend this hoehere schule?

A: Probably from 1927 until 1930.

- Q: That's when you went to the Jewish school and after that you...
- A: And then I went to a Catholic parochial school – this was an Ursuline order and here I spent the years from 1930 or 1931 to 1936.
- Q: How would you characterize the relationship between the Jewish and the non – Jewish children in Wittlich before Hitler came to power – in your school years?
- A: In my early school years, we had a very close relationship. There was actually no difference between the Jewish children and the others. Maybe I myself felt very very young as almost like an outsider even though everybody was very very nice to us but I was always very Jewish thinking – it was very deep rooted in me and certain things I went along with not with all my heart but I was accepted there.
- Q: When you were in this Catholic school, did you notice a change in attitude after Hitler came to power?
- A: Tremendously. From one day to the other.
- Q: How would you describe this change?
- A: I would say this is the greatest loss in my life – until today you know, I feel these few years were devastating to me. I feel today, I still think I'm a person without childhood. Even the teenage years, even later after I was out, I just couldn't adjust. You know there is like a loss, a lack in the middle of my life. You know there is something which is missing and this was the years when I was – actually it started already before Hitler that I had fears and it probably came from the fact that my father was from Saarland which was at this time status quo between France and Germany and we were always listening to the radio – what will be for these people. Father for instance left Saarland one year too early. Otherwise, I think I don't remember the date one had to be in Saarland to still be a Saarlander and father left I think in 1917. His brothers and sisters were still there so when Hitler came, they were called Saarlanders although they lived in Germany and they were able to leave the country. My father could not because he was considered a German. So, this sitting there and listening put tremendous fears – you know I was very young, I was only 9 years old but I was afraid what will be but from then on, it was always listening quietly to the radio and these things are so deep and are still nowadays still in my mind, in my memory. Sometimes I think it's crazy – why can't I forget this.
- Q: What happens in your childhood often remains with you...
- A: Yes. Oh yes.
- Q: Were these girls in the Catholic school members of the BDM or any other Hitler organization?

A: Oh yes. All of them. I was the only Jewish girl in the class.

Q: Did this affect you?

A: Thinking back now, I think I probably would have needed later on some – a psychologist, somebody to help me to get over this but who had money and you know, we just went on and you went to work and you did this and that but it affected me so tremendously that I think now it probably could have been helped to overcome this.

Q: How did these girls act towards you?

A: First of all, nobody ever came to me anymore – I was not able to – you know I went to classes, I had to sit in Rassenkunde, I had to sit in every week speeches for the schools in Germany radio – Goebbels, Himmler, Hitler, whoever spoke and we had to sit there and as I said we had Rassenkunde and in Rassenkunde you – we had special teachers because the nuns refused to teach it and they were actually my good luck because they really protected us as much as it was possible but I had to attend these classes – not very long – then I was able to stay out but it had a tremendous impact on me to hear their things and after that you had Rassenkunde and it was talked about how inferior the Jewish race is and so on and there were some people I know – a cousin of mine who spoke up – she was older than I was – but I was just sitting there and saying nothing and coming home and being unhappy.

Q: When you came home, did you tell your parents?

A: No, not really. You see, I wanted to protect them – they had their own tzures and I didn't talk about it. Later on in life, I did.

Q: That must have been very difficult for a young girl to listen to that.

A: Oh yes. I think that was the worst.

Q: Had these girls been friendly to you before?

A: Yes, very much so. There were very few who didn't do anything, I mean nothing against me but they didn't tell me either you are still my friend or so – they were afraid. I would say it was fear on their part not that they disliked me or Jews in general but they just were quiet.

Q: Children always like to be accepted. How...

A: Right. For instance, when we had one hour of games, I wasn't allowed to play with them – they pushed me out – you know ball games and such.

- Q: Did you ever have the feeling that you didn't want to come back to school the next morning?
- A: Oh yes sure, naturally. But I did go. I went until one teacher once came to my parents and said why don't you take her out. I see what is going on. So I was fourteen when I left that school to the regret of the teachers because they really were very good to me.
- Q: Was it a nun who came to your parents?
- A: No. It was a lay teacher and she was very nice and understanding.
- Q: How did your parents react to what she told them?
- A: I don't remember that very well – I only know that I quit school very soon after that and went to some relatives in another town and went to what they called a *berufschule* – this was a very short time.
- QL Was this *berufschule* organized for the purpose of training you for emigrating?
- A: Right. I couldn't take many courses there because I didn't live in that city. I took English and some Hebrew and I did some sewing which I hated and then I had to go back again for some reason and then my parents saw to it that I went out of Germany and I was for a very short time with some of my relatives in Luxemburg who were Saarlander and could get out until we got our visas to Israel and certificate and then I had to go back to Germany which I was afraid again to go back.
- Q: Let me just backtrack a moment. While you lived in Wittlich and were going to school, how did your father earn his living?
- A: We had our own business but this business went down immediately in 1933 – April 1, 1933, we had the boycott.
- Q: What type of business was he in?
- A: We had a retail shoe store.
- Q: Were most of his customers gentile or?
- A: Yes.
- Q: And they were influenced by the boycott?

A: Very much so because this was a city where the district courts were and around us were villages where farmers lived and the farmers were threatened that if you buy there, you cannot get this and that but the district court workers and there was a tremendous jail there too and they all were employed by the government and they were threatened that they would lose their jobs – this was the main population there and so they just didn't come anymore and we had to keep all the people who my father employed though the income was going down, down, down and we were not allowed to fire a non – Jewish employee.

Q: Did you father ever have any problems with non – Jewish employees who were Party members or...

A: No, no. They were pretty nice but coming back to this day of boycott, I still consider this my worst day in my life. I mean I went through quite a lot later on but this was a day which comes back sometimes in my dreams – after all these years – not often but it was such unbelievable fear and I have friends who went through similar experiences and it didn't affect them so much. But I was a young child – I was in school that Saturday morning and I asked in school whether I could go home earlier and they said yes, sure. And the school was a little bit out of the district – the middle of the city where my parents had their store on the marketplace and there were different streets you could go down to our store. I came from school and was permitted to leave an hour earlier but they started earlier too – marching, which I didn't know and I heard these drums and I think this was unbelievable fear and I ran with my school books down the street and ran into them. I thought they were on another street and I went by them but when I came to our house, they were standing already. We had a very large entrance to our store and on each side was one man standing with his big placard "Die Juden sind unter Unglück" or "Die Juden sind Blutsauger" and I had to go through under that sign and my parents were standing in the store and they had locked and they saw me coming and later on, my father and my mother said they never saw me as white as I was and I went in there and I started sobbing and my parents too (crying) and that was the worst day.

Q: You felt the pressure very early...

A: Yes, in this small town, everybody knew everybody. I probably knew every person maybe not by name but by site. I knew the people and my parents were very well liked. When we left Germany, many people came to the back entrance and said Oh we didn't mean you – these are the people from Berlin and Frankfurt – these are the bad people but not you, we love you and come back and so on.

Q: When you came home on this boycott day, were you afraid of physical harm?

A: For my father because I saw before that that Jews were beaten in our town. I saw one man beaten and I knew of others.

- Q: As a young girl, how did you feel when you were rejected in school and found signs Juden Unerwünscht on the streets...
- A: It was a time which I would say destroyed a young person if he wasn't very strong. It seems to me that I wasn't very strong. Now later on in life when you compare to other people, we didn't go through that much but...
- Q: But at twelve years old...
- A: I remember that they built this stadium and I went with a girlfriend, a Jewish girlfriend, we went there looking and the first thing we saw "Juden Unwünscht" and "Juden und Hunde werden nicht herein gelassen". So, this was also – but it didn't affect me so much because I didn't need it – for instance, there was a little cafe house which also had the sign but again I didn't need it. It was much more what went on in school at that time which I had to go to and the fear for my parents – you heard about what happened to this or that person. There were friends of my parents who fled overnight and I don't believe they did anything wrong – they were framed or whatever...
- Q: When did you leave for Luxemburg?
- A: Beginning of 1936.
- Q: Between the time of the boycott in 1933 and 1936, did your parents discuss emigrating?
- A: Oh yes, sure. We tried to get out already in 1934. That was always – we tried very hard to get out – just anywheres and we were one of the first people who decided to leave and my father's friends thought we were just out of our minds. There was one man who decided to go to Holland and he said to my father – why don't you come over and we will try to find work for you and they didn't come out anymore – they went to Holland. But when we said that time, we go to Israel, people just came and said you will be back very soon. You are just overreacting and I wouldn't say that my father was Zionist and it was just – my father knew or had the feeling that it will take quite a while and we just couldn't afford it – I mean couldn't afford it financially to stay on. It was impossible. And besides my parents were just as unhappy as I was – maybe more about my younger brother. Our school actually came to an end and they saw we had to leave.
- Q: Did your parents ever consider coming to America?
- A: Oh yes. That was actually our first choice and my mother had some relatives here who had left Germany after WW1 as young kids but everybody in the family wrote to them and they gave some affidavits but when we wrote, they told us they gave some already and they could not take the responsibility. And to Israel, we applied pretty early and this was still Palestine and there were three possibilities

to get there from Germany as Jews. Either you had to have a trade which father did not, you had to be a farmer which father was not or you had to be a capitalist which my father was not either anymore. I mean before my parents were not rich but we were pretty well off and so the question was how to get that money to get out because we were unable to sell the store.

Q: After the boycott, did you father attempt to sell the store?

A: Sure. Immediately. Nobody came. And it took a few years until we were able to sell and then for a very very low price but we had to get out and it was probably enough to get us out of Germany. I don't remember exactly the financial standing but I only know that the thousand pounds were not available at the moment when we tried to get out – we hadn't sold the store yet. So we were lucky enough that we had one relative here in the United States already – a brother of my father – who deposited 1000 pounds in a bank in Israel in our name. It was never our money because he helped many people to get out with the same money but with that money there, we got the certificate to enter into Palestine.

Q: Just to go back for a moment, when you went to Luxemburg, in 1936, did you go to relatives?

A: Yes.

Q: You mentioned a brother, did you go alone?

A: Yes. I went alone. He still was in first or second grade.

Q: How did you react to leaving in 1936 when you were 15. Did you want to go?

A: I wanted to be away from the small town where I was. I was not crazy about going to Luxemburg for personal reasons but I went anyway and made the best of it. I was not very happy there but it was better than – I missed my parents tremendously – for many years, I was the only child and then my brother came and I had been what you call verwoehnet and here, it was not the way I wanted it to be but it was better to be out and it was anyhow for a few months and then I was called back and we went to Israel.

Q: On the day that you left home, you mentioned people who had come around to the back entrance, did any of your friends, either Jewish or non – Jewish come to say good – bye?

A: Oh the Jewish friends naturally. I belonged to a – this was the only good thing – I belonged to a Jewish Zionist movement and this was the only thing which we really enjoyed very much and you forgot when you were there, all your troubles and they naturally, in fact we got a party that time when we left and that was a good thing which happened.

Q: This was the Habonim which you belonged to?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you ever remember discussions within the group about the situation in Germany?

A: Oh yes, sure. We had also people from bigger cities coming to us to talk to us about it and I was actually supposed to go to Youth Aliyah but our visa came earlier than my going to Berlin for Youth Aliyah so I went with my parents.

Q: When you look back at your leaving Germany, do you remember how your father felt when he left?

A: My father was a super German.

Q: As a child, did you see how the Nazi pressure changed your father?

A: It took him a long time to change. It was for him almost unacceptable to be seen suddenly by other people as a non – German. In fact it went so far and as children we were always laughing about it when we were in Israel – father took his Eisernes Kreuz to Israel and my brother used to put it on and march around and sing German songs. I found it now – my mother passed away last year and I cleared the apartment and I found it with a few letters – disgusting absolutely but he had it. He changed completely later on when we were in Israel.

Q: But you say it was unacceptable to him...

A: Completely unacceptable.

Q: Did he think that Hitler would not last long?

A: It was probably hoping more than believing because we felt it so badly – this anti – Semitism in our town and he knew what was taught in schools. These kids my age – what they were taught in school must have gone deep in them and they will carry it on certainly to the next generation even if nowadays they say that the youth of Germany is better – I'm sure there is still something of what their parents were taught.

Q: When you left Germany that day, how did you feel about leaving?

A: My feelings were absolutely mixed. You know if I think today, I think something was not really right with me because I still had bad feelings about leaving. On one hand, I was happy to be out of the Nazi's land but Germany was probably – I loved the land because though I was very very young, I loved German poetry – I

still read it. This is the only thing I read in German but I loved it. I was a good student in German history but it affected me deeply – it was like a tremendous loss even though I was happy to be out. You see, these conflicts, tremendous conflicts, we were accepted and loved everything around us and then, this sudden, very sudden change must have, on many young people tremendous...

Q: It's like leaving home, it's hard.

A: Yes. I remember that I cried when we left and on the other hand I was so happy to go out.

Q: I don't know that a child watches their parents reactions at such a time, but how did your parents feel?

A: I know that they didn't talk at all until we were out of Germany – it was just a terrible...

Q: What do you mean by didn't talk?

A: They didn't say a word on the train, nobody talked. It was probably inner turmoil.

Q: Did they leave family behind?

A: Oh yes. My mother had many sisters and brothers and very few came out. A few came out but the others were all in concentration camps and were killed.

Q: Do you remember going to say good – bye to these relatives before you left?

A: Yes. We went to say good – bye to them.

Q: Do you remember discussions urging them to emigrate?

A: We didn't have to urge them. They all wanted to get out. This was also very frustrating that we got later on letters from other relatives – you could have helped us to get out. You know they still had in mind that my parents were once very well off and they thought they could have helped. But it wasn't so. We didn't have it anymore. But my father was probably much too proud to say – well, I'm at the end.

Q: Were you only able to leave with the 10 reichmark?

A: No. Since we left early, we were able to take our furniture and the household belongings and I don't remember how much we were able to take out but more than that. We were able to live in Israel for a year or so on the money that we had.

- Q: How did you make the trip to Israel?
- A: The first thing was that one gentile man picked us up early in the morning – before other people were out – not that we had, we had a visa, we were free to go, we had all the papers. It was not like fleeing but my father didn't want to have any commotion because it happened that one family who left before us, they all came to the house and they screamed and said thank goodness we are rid of you. To avoid that, there was one gentleman, who I'm sure he risked quite a bit. He took us by car to the next larger city and from there we took the train to France and from Marseilles, we went by boat.
- Q: When you arrived in Israel, did you know anyone there?
- A: No.
- Q: What happened to you those first few days when you got off the boat?
- A: My uncle helped us – he had an address where we went to – strange people and they had what they called pension. We had one room for the four of us and then we knew it was much more money than we could afford and we rented a room in a rooming house – all four of us again in one room. If people say now they have to have space – we needed space then too but it wasn't there. I was the first time who worked.
- Q: How did you get a job – you were only 15?
- A: How did I get a job? There was a man in the same place living where we were. He was a lawyer in Germany and he worked as a waiter in a cafe house in Haifa and he came to my mother and said I have a job for you in the kitchen and I nearly jumped at his throat – my mother working in a kitchen. I'll take it. And my mother said no, you are too young and so on. But I went. The next morning I was in that kitchen. It was very very hard work and I was a skinny little thing and was very upset with everything that was told – you know, people told me what to do and I didn't have the slightest idea how to do it and they screamed at me and it was very unpleasant but I stayed until I got something better.
- Q: Did you know either English or Hebrew?
- A: A very little bit – what I learned in school – that was all.
- Q: How did you make yourself understood?
- A: They all spoke German, unfortunately. I would say unfortunately. This was a German place and they took tremendous advantage of us. What was hard for me to understand when I came to Israel because I was in the Zionist movement, I was looking forward to coming to this land and be free and have the same rights and

not be looked down upon as a Jew, this was fantastic. But suddenly to be looked down upon as a German – this was very hard to accept. Because of the job, we had to become a member of the Histadrut and everybody got a job better than the German Jews and this was also a conflict which I was absolutely unable to understand.

Q: Was this because most Israelis at the time were of Eastern European background?

A: Yes. Right. They were earlier there. I mean there is no question about it that as they asked sometimes “Did you come from Germany out of Zionism or out of Germany?” and we came out of Germany – there is no question about it. Not that there were no German Zionists but we were not. But this they did not know. I was looking forward to living in Israel happily and forget about everything and then to be looked down upon as a German Jew and not being able to find a job which other people who were less time in the Histadrut got made me very unhappy.

Q: How was this anti – German Jewish feeling shown?

A: Oh, you were the Yekkes. They didn’t tell you openly, they didn’t do that. But it was hard as a German Jew to...besides, our knowledge of Hebrew or even our ability to speak Hebrew as well as the others was not good.

Q: Also no Yiddish...

A: Right. Alright. Yiddish – our next door neighbors were Yiddish speaking and they were very very helpful. They came over immediately and helped us in many things. My parents spoke German with them and they spoke Yiddish but they understood each other and they became good friends.

Q: Were you at all given the option of going to school in Israel?

A: Probably I was given the option but I had such a sense of responsibility which probably when I think back was overdone on my part. My father developed in Germany heart trouble and was unable for quite a while to work in Israel. And mother – mother worked. She worked very very hard in other people’s household and I did. I did everything but I should have gone to school. Somehow if I would have been a fighter, I would have gone back to school sometime but what I did, I took courses here and there but they were more on the cultural level than what one learns in school. I missed out there.

Q: Even now when people go to Israel, they are caught up in the idealism. No matter what the condition of Palestine was, it must not have come up to the idealistic view. How did you...

- A: Not of my expectations. I expected much more. Probably if I would have gone into a kibbutz away from home, I would have adjusted better. I was immediately, although I was only 15 years old, in the mainstream of work and worrying about how the rent would be paid and I'm the one who is the strongest – my brother was only 7 years old when he came here and he went to school and studied and I had to help or I felt I had to help.
- Q: You mentioned that your mother was working, what kind of employment was she able to get?
- A: Only household – taking care of children which I did for a while also. These were actually the only jobs available if you didn't speak the language fluently. Later on, I worked in different places – office work and at the same time, it was a factory and I worked in the office there.
- Q: Were you ever able to get help from any organizations?
- A: No. I don't think I ever asked for any help from an organization. We were always able to manage – to survive.
- Q: How did the outbreak of the war affect you in Palestine?
- A: I guess like everybody else. We were Israelis – couldn't call it Israelis really. We were affected by everything. Whether my life was ideal or not, personally we lived through so many things there – the riots between the Arabs and the Jews, between the Jews and the British and our hearts were bleeding for all the things which happened there. We were in it. Whether we personally had our struggles, you lived there and you bled with every Jew who was suffering,
- Q: As the years went by, was there a big German Jewish community?
- A: Yes. We lived in Haifa and there were a lot of German Jews who came there.
- Q: Did you associate mainly with them?
- A: Mostly, yes. But I had other friends too. It was not – let's say western Europeans – it was not absolutely German.
- Q: You mentioned the trouble with the Arabs, did that ever personally affect you?
- A: Oh yes. I lost very very good friends, young people. It was before WW1. They were caught, they built a new kibbutz and the Arabs built a barrier and they were all killed – I think they were 15 of them – and two of them were friends of mine. So many things happened. Then World War 11 came and they were very hard times but more or less everybody was in the same boat.

Q: what was morale like in Israel at that time?

A: High, very high morale.

Q: Were there many people who you knew from Germany who were involved with rescue efforts?

A: They were not my friends directly in Haifa but I knew some people who I knew from Germany who were involved in rescue efforts but they lived mainly in kibbutzim. They were the ones who really did things.

Q: To come back to your parents for a moment, was it difficult for them to make the adjustment to Israel considering that they were not so young?

A: For my father, yes. My mother adjusted to everything in life, as most women do better than men. No question about it. I know so many people, especially like the German academically trained men – they had a hard time.

Q: What did you see that made you think your father didn't adjust as well as your mother?

A: I don't think it was only my father. It was all the men in this age range – my father was 50 when he came there. They were not used to all this. They were not used to drying the dishes in the house when they were doctors or businessmen in Germany. On the other hand, there were quite a lot of them who built villages and some of the most beautiful villages in Israel were built by Deutscher Akademiker – there were jokes about it – that they built it up, that they built the houses themselves and as they passed the bucket from one hand to the other, they would say 'bitte schoen, danke schoen Herr Doktor'. But father and all his friends that I knew, it took them longer, it just took them longer to adjust. He adjusted to life in Israel but it took him longer. We went out immediately to work and the men sometimes waited for the opportunity to do the same thing they did once in Europe which was impossible.

Q: In Europe, a big part of one's social standing depended on one's occupation and this was all taken away. Was your father depressed over this?

A: Yes. Yes. And I would say that the heart trouble he had in Israel was affected by that – "What should I do, what will people think if I do this or that" which Herr so and so did not do in Germany. But he did. Later on, he did quite a bit of hard work – it was just that it was harder for him to accept.

Q: When did you come to the decision that you were not going to stay in Israel?

A: It was actually my father who I wouldn't say pushed me but his heart was so determined to see his brothers and sisters again who all lived here in the United

States. You see, they were as I told you, Saarlander and they were able to leave Luxemburg where they made a stopover and then they went through Portugal where they lived for a while and then they came to the United States and he wanted very much to see his family again and again I was the youngest – my brother was in the middle of his studies and maybe I also saw it as an adventure – to see something different and so I said I will go but I am coming back. I will see how I like it there and maybe I will make some money and will bring you over.

Q: When did you leave Israel?

A: This was 1947.

Q: What were conditions in Israel like when you left?

A: It was very hard – otherwise, I probably would have refused to go because I got more or less adjusted to life in Israel and I had friends but economically, it was very very hard. I would say this was probably the reason why I gave in and said okay, I am going but if I don't like it, I come back.

Q: Living in Israel at the end of the war must have given you an opportunity to see the ingathering of the survivors. Can you describe this a little bit?

A: You saw all this misery. I had one experience which affected me personally very much because I saw it with my own eyes – this was the going down of the Patriot which I really saw. Haifa is built on a hill and I had that time a job pretty high on the mountain and the – I took care of two children at that time – and the mother of the children didn't see very well and one could look down at the harbor of Haifa and we knew that the Patriot was there. Illegal ships were coming in and they were taking the people off these ships and loading them on the Patriot to take them back to Cyprus and the Irgun wanted to delay the departure of the ship and unfortunately, they blew out the whole wall of the ship instead of making just a small hole which was what they intended to do. And this woman said to me "look, Trude, do you think this ship is not standing straight?" I looked and said my God, and we took the binoculars and we saw – within twenty minutes, the ship was under water and I had friends who were on the ship. I had known beforehand that they would come and we later visited some of the survivors – some are now in the United States – and one who is a very good friend of mine lives in a kibbutz in Israel. Also, we went to the beaches in the morning and looked for people who arrived and we were called by the Hagannah and always brought in clothing for these people.

Q: Did you belong to any organizations like the Hagannah?

A: The Hagannah but for a very short time only – I think one year.

Q: When you came here in 1947, did you stay permanently at that point?

- A: I came as an immigrant because I was told it was better. You could always go back anyway but if you come as a visitor, it makes it hard to stay here in case you would like to. I came as an immigrant and after a few days, I said in one year I will be back in Israel. But it didn't turn out that way.
- Q: When you came here, did your relatives meet you at the boat?
- A: Yes.
- Q: How did you start to earn a living in New York in the first few weeks?
- A: I took a job with a new – born baby. I was not a baby nurse but I had worked for several years let's say as a kind of baby – nurse but I did very nicely.
- Q: How did you get this job?
- A: I got the job either through the Council of Jewish Women or Self – Help. I'm not sure anymore. They gave me two addresses and the first one I came to, they said you can come tomorrow.
- Q: Where did you live?
- A: I lived for quite a while with my relatives and then I got myself a room.
- Q: When you left Israel you mentioned that you intended to go back. Did your parents want to come to the United States?
- A: My father wanted very much to come here not because he didn't like it in Israel – he wanted to see his family again. They were very close knit family and I would have had to work a few years that I would be able to send them the money to come here and after three years, my father passed away in Israel so that was that.
- Q: Did your mother come to the U.S.?
- A: Mother – much later – she came here 1959.
- Q: When you left Israel and came to the United States, did you find it very lonely?
- A: Yes. In the beginning, yes. I visited millions of people whose names I had in my book but with all the people around me, I was lonely, very lonely. It took about two years and then I wasn't lonely any more.
- Q: Did you join any organizations?

- A: No. I had mainly personal friends.
- Q: Did you live in Washington Heights?
- A: Yes.
- Q: How did you meet your friends – both men and women?
- A: Through other friends, and I went sometimes, not too often to the New World Club. They had what they called that time Wandergruppe.
- Q: After having lived in Israel where you were used to a more mixed group of Jews from all origins, when you came here, did you still associate mostly with German Jews?
- A: Yes. I was more or less forced to and I didn't like it. I absolutely disliked it very much. I felt it was like a ghetto. On the other hand, I was in different places, smaller towns and I think it's not good for an immigrant to make a living.
- Q: What types of jobs did you have?
- A: Until I got married, I always worked here. I was a baby – nurse and later on, I stayed with some people where the children were no babies anymore. They were bigger children but I stayed because they were very nice to me and it was actually my home. It was my home. I'm still very close to them. I feel now that it was actually wrong to do this because I never went into business life. I never had the opportunity but I could have had it.
- Q: Was English a problem for you when you came here>
- A: In Israel, we only spoke Hebrew and German but I took two courses in English in Israel before I left and that was all my knowledge. I had some English in Germany but I stopped school so young that there was probably nothing left of that and my English was pretty poor when I came here but I could make out. I came to people with a new born baby and there was no necessity but the woman just spoke English to me though she was from Germany and that was very good and she told me that when I go to the Drive with the baby, I should stay with the American ladies – they will teach you and it helped tremendously. After a year, I spoke quite well. My accent is still here but I was able to make out very easily with English. I went to lectures. This woman was fantastic – she told me where to go. She told me to listen to the radio, not the German programs, only English, only the News. In this respect, I had an easy adjustment here.
- Q: What do you think was the greatest adjustment that you had to make here?

- A: Not to feel really at home. New York was such a big city and it took a while. Language was an easy adjustment but otherwise, to make friends, it was much easier in Israel.
- Q: Why do you think this was true?
- A: Probably because we were much more open minded than the American or the German Jew is. I think the people here are much more selfish than over there. Even nowadays when people have all nice apartments and I hear still how can we have visitors – we always have room here, we always make room because whenever we went in Israel places, these people had just as little room as we had at home, but you made room for everybody. In Haifa, we had a three room apartment, small rooms but we had two terraces which have to be built in Haifa. If there was not enough room in the bedroom – both were bedrooms – they slept on the terrace and we had enough to eat. If we had little, you stretched it. And this I found here at the beginning very hard to accept here. Not to me, everybody was very nice but the selfishness of people. This I almost couldn't accept and therefore I would have liked to go back to Israel. Also, this being together constantly with the Germans. I don't know if at the time the German Jew was not accepted by others but they stuck together which I thought was wrong.
- Q: You had the experience of Israel.
- A: Yes. In the building where we lived, it was 12 or 13 apartments and there were people from all countries and we were friendly with all of them.
- Q: Do you feel yourself today more a part of the American mainstream or part of the German Jewish community in New York?
- A: Now I'm probably more a part of the German Jewish community – at my age now because I didn't get into the other but I would have liked to. But now I'm married to a man from also German Jewish background and hoping that my son will have it different. He will – there is no question about it.
- Q: In what sense do you hope your son will have it different?
- A: Because I think it is absolutely ridiculous to live in a land and stick together with your own people only. Sure, he has the background and often he says he is glad he has this background because culturally he has now the European and the American – he is the only one of his whole group of people who goes to classical concerts which comes from us. We took him very early in life to museums and gave him this of what was our German – Jewish background and he said this is an advantage, But his friends come from different countries.
- Q: I wanted to ask you about some of the things which you did with your free time when you first came here.

- A: In the beginning, I went to lectures very often to widen my horizon because really I missed out in school so much and here you have the opportunity to learn and I was very often at the Y on 92nd Street when I wasn't tied down yet. I wasn't bored here – I was sometimes lonely but there are things to do.
- Q: Did your parents partake in the cultural events in Germany?
- A: Yes. They did.
- Q: Were they able to do this also in Israel?
- A: No. They didn't participate in Israel.
- Q: Did they find that hard?
- A: Yes. Especially language wise. I mean if they went to the theater, they didn't understand most of it. My Hebrew was not too good either, unfortunately but I could manage. My brother's Hebrew is fantastic. It is still his best language.
- Q: Have you ever been back in Germany?
- A: We were back – four years ago, my husband decided immediately not to enter Germany, absolutely no. But I wasn't sure. I had a friend in Strasburg which was directly over the border – one hour from the town in which I was born – and they go every year once to Germany when she has Yahrzeit for her father and she wrote me that time – I had written to her that we come to Europe and that was the first time that I saw her since 1935 because they left earlier. We were children but we still correspond every few months. So I wrote that I will make sure I will see them – we were in Switzerland, Italy and my husband wanted very much to go to Austria, the idea just killed me, I don't know why, and he wanted to go to Innsbruck where he always spent vacation when he was a child and whether you believe it or not, Innsbruck made me physically sick. It was the clothing – I don't know if these Austrian or Bavarian dresses – dirndles and the knitted jacket which in Germany in my class – the children wore it for celebration – they called it Berchtesgartner Jaeckchen and when we entered Innsbruck the first thing I saw that and then the hotel was just as unpleasant as I had it in my memory as Germany was and in the evening he called me down, they were dancing down there and on the stage, there were these – to me they looked like the Nazis. Actually this is an Austrian tradition and has nothing to do with Nazism at all but to me it brought back the memories – the clothing of these people, the dancing and I nearly threw up. And I said let's get out of here. We had anyhow only planned to stay one night and a day and he had to show me what he remembered. He was a child and they were his memories and he enjoyed seeing it again. But then he said to Germany – no. And then my girlfriend said that she had postponed her visit to Germany until I came and we will go over just for one day

and I have two relatives buried there and I said okay, I'm coming along. My feelings were very mixed but I felt what could happen – one day. And then it happened that my girlfriend had a very serious operation just a few weeks before we came and she was unable to travel and I had already written to these people who had driven us out of Germany at that time. He worked for my father and she worked in our house. So I called them from Strasburg and she said she would really be hurt if I didn't come and I felt that this was one person I would really like to say thank you to and so I went by myself and I was there two days and I would say two days too much. These people were very nice, they couldn't have been nicer.

Q: Did you go to your home?

A: I couldn't. I was standing in front of this house and a woman said to me 'willst du herien gehen?'. But I couldn't. I just was standing there and my heart was beating. And I went to our cemetery which was partly alright and partly thrown down and then I went to the synagogue which was still in a ruin. They are building it up now for a cultural center. I went all by myself – I said to this woman, let me go by myself. I want to go through the city the way I remember it. First of all, it was not as I remembered it anymore. It is not a big city but it is more city – like than when I was there. I went through the streets as I had remembered – I mean I found everything I wanted to see and there I remembered all these people who I knew and now they were all strange faces, and nobody knew me. I didn't even want to see them.

Q: Did you have any contact with them at all?

A: One girl came to see me, one woman. She was one of the girls in my school. She talked with me – there was nothing left anymore. It just left me very cold.

Q: Did you ever speak about what had happened?

A: I went with this woman in one store and she introduced me by saying this is Trude Wolf, do you remember her? And he said oh yes, sure. His wife happened to be one of my classmates and he called her immediately and she came down and she was very pleasant and then I had a very interesting conversation with a man who seemed to be very bright and he asked about some Jewish people who came out alive and he did not want to speak about the things which happened there. He only said you know we were all in the Hitler Jugend as you know and it was so much fun, you must understand. This was in the way of a sort of apology. You must understand this has nothing to do with Jewish people. It was so nice to march and to sing and have campfires and it was very appealing to young people but we didn't know what it led to – that it led us into a war where we lost thousands and thousands of our people. There was no mention of Jews. And I said and how about the people we lost – six million. He said yes, unfortunately, but he came back again about the war. Hitler brought us (Germany) into that war

and I was so disgusted with that. He said why don't you come over for an evening and I said no, thank you but I am leaving in the morning and that was all I could swallow.

Q: How do you feel about the Wiedergutmachung?

A: My parents accepted it. I have no part of it because I didn't get anything because I was too young. I would say it helped my mother. She on the other hand, also always called it blood money but she accepted it because especially, she did not get it while she was in Israel still. She got a very small amount until it came so far that she came to the United States. It helped her and I had the feeling that they owed us something. But I would have had mixed feelings too. My husband did not want to have any part of it and when we got married, I said don't be stupid, take it. I say I was not 100% true to my own feelings because how can money make good if you lose your parents as he did. On the other hand, they took away everything we had and it was my mother's only income here.

Q: How did your mother feel about coming here after having lived in Israel?

A: Mother came here after our son was born. I went over to Israel to see my mother and took the baby along and that made her come. Before she said absolutely no. She had nothing to do here. She had her friends there. And it was a big decision on both parts – on our part because we didn't know how she could adjust here. She refused that time to live with us - she wanted to be on her own. She always was a very strong woman. We wanted to get a larger apartment and have her live with us but she wanted to be on her own. It was not easy for her. She missed her friends.

Q: How old was she when she came here?

A: She was 69 and at that age it is not easy. She had all her friends, so many friends. And here it took a while but she adjusted as she had done in Israel. She adjusted fantastically.

Q: What so you think helped her adjust so well?

A: That we were all here. She was somewhat lonely in Israel. My brother didn't live there anymore either. I was always worried what was going on there – whether she was well and I felt it was better if she was here and I could look after her.

Q: In looking back, what do you think affected you most of that Nazi period?

A: It's a hard question. The insecurity and fear especially the fear for my father – this was something I just couldn't forget. Little events that come back to you – if you see a film – I remember I saw a film once "The Shop on Main Street" – there was one thing when the barber wrapped his things, put them away, hoping that

someday he would be able to unpack it again – it reminded me so very much of my father. And I remember when we saw that film, it was not in New York and some people took us and on the way back, I started to cry and they looked at me and were shocked and I couldn't say why I was crying. Certain things bring back memories.

Q: Speaking about insecurities, how do you feel about Jews who are in exposed and prominent positions like Kissinger, Javits?

A: We are people like everybody else and we have good Jews and bad Jews and I'm not afraid that somebody who is a Jew gets into a high position. If he is decent and I think Kissinger is decent – I may not agree with everything he does – but I do not think that his being a Jew would bring bad luck to us or to Israel.