Paula Eppstein, Survivor, 5/11/1987

Q: This is Fern Niven in Sarasota, Florida. Today is May 11th, 1987 and I am at the home of Paula Eppstein. Ms. Eppstein has kindly consented to be interviewed about her experiences related to the Holocaust. Before we start talking about the Holocaust, I'd like to ask you about your early life, your childhood, family, and your education.

A: All right, I'll give you quickly. I was born April 13, 1913 in Marktbreit which was Franconia, Lower Franconia, Bavaria, Germany. We lived in the last house of a small village of little less than 3,000 inhabitants. My father was a merchant. Do you want any details about the kids of merchant he was? Or is this irrelevant?

Q: Yes, sure. That's helpful.

A: My mother helped him in the business. Parents were married in 1911. My father served in the First World War. He was an employee at that time for a – what do you call that? Dress goods merchandise that you use for clothes?

Q: Fabrics.

A: Fabrics, yes, that's correct. But also bedding and anything you need for your household in terms of that kind of merchandise. He was a salesman who visited the farmers in the neighboring community with a bicycle and he had his samples in front there. That was before he got married, before the First World War. And my father came back from the First World War. They decided that they would go into a business of their own. And they did this from an apartment on the first floor and my father was on the road with his bicycle up to 1923 or 1924 when he bought a little Opel car and he left early Monday morning and he came back before Shabbat Friday.

I went to school there, started school at age 6 and went for one year to the public school and then, though the village was small, the Jewish community was large and apparently quite oriented to the Jewish education. They had one teacher who taught all the subjects in that school. Now I cannot tell you whether that school was supposed to go up to age 13. I was in that school for 3 years, it was a Jewish school where you learned not Hebrew, you had to learn to read Yiddish.

I think, if I remember well, you learned all the subjects that you needed to go later on into high school. I went to that school I think for either 2 ½ or 3 years, maybe 2 years. My recollection is rather vague on that and it seemed to me it was one room classroom. And then at age 10, I went to what they call high school and my parents had to pay every month so that I could get a high school education. However, Germany high school was nine years and that school only gave me six years of high school and then the last three years of high school I had to go to Wurtzburg, that was the nearest town.

And as my grandmother lived in Wurtzburg and my parents didn't want me to go to take the train at 6:00 in the morning and then walk a half hour from the station to the high school, I stayed with my grandmother during the week. It was only six stations by train and then my father, for vacation, picked me up with the car. So at age 16, I moved from Marktbreit to Wurtzburg and took my three years of high school at what they call Oberrealschule. No reason translating it. That's the way it was called.

Q: Did you major in a particular subject?

A: You don't major in high school in any subject.

Q: I wondered if it were different there.

A: No, no. You take all the subjects. If you wanted to take, wanted to go later into medicine or some other subject, then you would have gone to the Gymnasium. Here gymnasium is something else, but Gymnasium is a high school in Germany that stressed Latin and Greek. Rather, the school I went to, I had Latin as an optional subject, an option for three years. The subjects they stressed were technical design and a lot of math and physics and chemistry. When I was done with high school – that was at age 18 ½, I guess, then I applied for the law faculty at the University in Wurtzburg and I was accepted. I went there from 1932 until 1933.

Q: That was about the time Hitler came in.

A: Yes, then the Jews could not re-register there and there was always a "numerous clause" restriction on the admission of how many Jews could be admitted at any one time to the University. But it wasn't much publicized, but it was there. But I was admitted and I even had passed because my parents worked very hard and I said if I could get some scholarship, I could go through some exams to have some

stipend. And I had just passed in Roman law and, I forget, in something else and I would have gotten a reduction in fee. Well, anyway…

To come back to the atmosphere in that small town of anti-Semitism (in that small town). Wait, I just want to give you a quick outline. I think from the moment that I could think, I was made aware of the fact by my parents that being Jewish I cannot, without punishment or without possible punishment to the larger group than just my family, do whatever I want. That a certain modesty and a certain restraint is in place. My parents were very different from lots of other people in that community. Some people in the community were more defiant. They felt we were citizens and we can do what we want and nobody is going to tell us. My parents felt very strongly that a little bit of tact and restraint would not heal the sickness of anti-Semitism but at least you would not be the one who provokes incidents.

Nevertheless, my mother did not want me, on Shabbat – you know people put on their best finery and the kids congregated and they went to the little village. It was the Jewish Sabbath and first of all I didn't particularly care for that kind of congregating with lots of other people and children, I really didn't care. And secondly, my mother was most reluctant to have me join large groups which show you hold different holidays, and you are different in some way. Let's just stress the common element and do our other things in private and that's what my parents did.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I had one sister. She was 6 ½ years my junior and we grew up in that small town. My parents later on moved, I think it was 1930-1929 from small told of Marktbreit to the next larger town, Kitzingen. My sister went to Israel with the Youth Aliyah and to anticipate something else my parents also immigrated to Israel in 1936. They left Germany December 7, 1936.

Q: We talked a few minutes ago about avoiding things that would provoke outbursts of anti-Semitism. Can you remember any specific anti-Semitic events that occurred to you?

A: Yes, we were, for instance in school, when I went to the high school in Marktbreit, the private Realschul, it was called. The kids never really called me by my name, they always called me "Yuda" which was an abbreviation for the Jewish pallor.

And I was the subject of being pelted with more snowballs than anybody else. I remember I went to the chorus, they insulted us, and there was another Jewish girl in my class and some Jewish boys, by just calling us vile names. "Dirty Jew," "Get after you," and "You just wait, you just wait, what we are going to do to you. One night we are going to come." All kinds of threatening things that maybe one didn't take quite as seriously because they usually came from teenagers, you know, kids of your age. But it was indicative.

My mother always said, "You know, we Jews are not considered like everybody else. No matter what we do, no matter how well we act, there is this innate hatred against the Jews." There was one family of grocers, they all had red hair, and they lived in a very, very small narrow little street next to an aunt of my mother's, and whenever I went visiting there those kids were outside. They first blocked the road, no passage for Jews and things like that. Finally, they let us through, but they tried to antagonize you in some way.

My father in his many travels, you know, to the small communities, he had a very good relationship with all his clients, they trusted him implicitly because he was an utterly honest man but, I sometimes went with him, you know, when I had my bike. "Here comes Arensberg, Jew Arensberg." They didn't say, "Here comes Albert" or something, the religion was named. I found that strange because you don't [do?] say, "Yes, the preacher is Catholic." But you don't say, "Here comes the Catholic Mr. Martin or Mr. Something."

Once I remember in the corridors they said, (I wore glasses already), "We'll get after you, you're going to see, we have a trick up our sleeve." And you know whenever they called Yuda, it just means that the Jewishness is in some -- otherwise my name is Paula. The Jewishness was in some way indicative of why they are so cruel. And one day before chorus they threw a hard crust of bread at me and knocked out one of my glasses…and I'm glad that I have both my eyes. Do you know that is finished.

Q: Do you remember, if you can remember clearly back that far, were you frightened?

A: Ya, sure you felt uncomfortable. Yes, you did. My parents made me aware of it, there was a reason for uneasiness.

Q: Were you or your parents, did they talk about the possibility of Hitler coming into power?

A: Yes, oh yes. My mother went to school only up to the age of thirteen, but she was a very wise woman. My father, he liked to tell jokes; he didn't take things seriously. My mother was very much afraid, and she said, "If Hitler comes to power, there is no room for us here." I have to tell you that Marktbreit, the little town where I grew up to the ago of, well really 16 – 17, where I spent all of my vacations was a fortress of anti-Semitism.

We had a dentist, his name was Dr. Hellmuth, he was one of the most rabid anti-Semites, he was an organizer of the party in all of Franconia. Later on he got a very high office in Munich when Hitler was in power and he brought all of the people from Nuremberg. You know, the adherents of Julius Streicher who published Der Shtermer. He brought those people to meetings to our small town, and we had storm troopers that were organized that walked through the streets and sang those terrible songs, "Ven Das Juden Blut Frum Messer Spritz."

Q: Even before Hitler?

A: Oh, way before Hitler, That was ten years when Hitler started with his anti-Semitism speeches, and there were storm troopers and the same goes for Kitzingen where my parents moved later. And I remember that this Dr. Hellmuth brought a woman, she was Mexican born but maybe of German parentage, her name was Ellat. I don't exactly know how to spell it, Ellat or Ehlat. She was a very flamboyant woman who liked to ride horses, she came from Mexico and she was used at these meetings to arouse the people against the Jews.

The speeches were that Jews control everything and the Jews murder children for the blood, for matzos for Pesach. All the sagas, you know, they were all publicized in these meetings that were meant to bring adherents to Hitler. One of his ways of getting adherents was his hatred against minorities and the meetings also in Kitzingen and the storm troopers were all over the place and we were threatened and we felt threatened. My mother said, "You just wait. If this man ever comes to power we have no leg to stand on."

Q: And they were so right. What happened in 1933? You said you were going to the University.

A: I was staying with a friend and that was on January 13, 1933, when those elections were and when he became head of the government. I would write home. Then came the moment they started legalizing, starting with the Nuremberg Laws. I said, "First of all, I'm not going to stay in Germany. I can't get into the University. I'm not considered a normal person with equal rights. I'm not going to stay here because if they can do that they can do lots of other things."

And my mother said to me, "Gey, kind, gey, kind, gey, kind, and prepare for us and we will follow." So at first, I thought I would go to Hachscharah and my parents would go to Israel and my parents were not Zionistically inclined at all. My attitude was slightly different because I was very, very good friends with the gentleman who later became for one term the head of the American Zionist Organization. So I had a very good indoctrination. My parents, not speaking any foreign language, where could they go? What could they do with the skills they had? So Israel was contemplated and I thought at first I would go to Hachscharah in Germany.

Q: What is Hachscharah?

A: Hachscharah is a two-year preparation which was organized, I think, by the Zionist organizations and also later in Germany. It also existed in France to give young people who want to immigrate to Israel, a two-year apprenticeship so they would be fit to be a good member of a kibbutz.

Q: I understand.

A: That was Hachscharah, a preparatory thing. Well, anyway, I found the situation very dangerous, and my mother had a sister who lives in Basel – that was supposed to be my first stop, to stay in Basel with my aunt and then take it from there. However, my father got terribly ill with meningitis, and maybe this meningitis saved his life. It was during the summer just about when I was to leave Germany, my father got very ill with a high temperature. And when the storm troopers came and they had a little cutout from the newspaper which was a joke that my father told and it was an anti-Hitler joke. "Where is that Jew, Arensberg, who made fun of our Fuhrer?" And they wanted to take him wherever they took people then, but my father was delirious in bed, so they took one look at him…anyway, my mother and I pleaded and pleaded with these storm troopers.

Q: Was that 1933?

A: That was 1933. That was summer 1933 or even earlier, spring 1933. And so they left him in bed and they didn't take him. And then when my father could stand on his feet, and I tell you this for a reason – you'll see the reason right away – we went to Nuremburg where my mother had a brother, to recover. He was afraid, he didn't want to stay home, he wanted to leave – some of the newspaper clipping and the joke about Hitler.

To recover, my mother sent him to Nuremberg. My uncle was away and one night they came to get my uncle. The Nazis came to get my uncle in Nuremberg – that was the summer of 1933 and because my uncle wasn't there, they said to my father, "Are you a Jew, too?" "Yes." And they took about 1,000 Jewish men, that was in Nuremberg, Germany in the summer of 1933.

They took them to a football field, and they had the men kneel down and instead of using a lawn mower to mow the football field, the Jewish men had to creep across the football field and eat the grass until it was mowed. And of course so many in our community had already disappeared. Some guys who had gone to school with me had already disappeared. They were taken to Dachau. So my father was very much afraid. Would he get home from that football field or was that the beginning of something? They had to eat the grass. From my father's account, and it wasn't a joke. So they were out there. I recall my father said they came around 5:00 in the morning and about 12:00 in the afternoon apparently the job was done, and they let the people go home.

So this is why I tell you about my father, about his illness and all that. I left Germany early August, 1933, and the reason was that the Nuremberg Laws had already been enacted and you were not a citizen; some of our protections had been removed. Some of the people from our community had been taken in raids, you know they call it "Radzia." They had been taken in the middle of the night and people didn't know where they went.

We heard rumors of concentrations camps where people were terribly mistreated and beaten and didn't have anything to eat, but nobody really knew anything accurately and I don't want to tell you anything that maybe my fantasies were stronger than the reality was. I think in one or two cases people got a package of clothes and they were told that they had died. That was in 1933 before I left. But if you ask me who it was, I don't remember.

I then went to Basel and from there I went to France. My history in France is only important in reference to what happened in France with those Jews of German origin. Because it seems to me if we are to learn anything from the Holocaust, we should learn one thing: that there are evil people not only in Germany. There are also evil people; fifth columns, cooperators, collaborators who'll see a golden horizon for themselves; who will sell their souls to the devil and to the Nazis and the Jew haters and the Jew baiters to make a nickel….. In 1938 we came back from Israel and that was [when] Atlee was in Germany and said "Peace Forever." But when we came back from Israel we were accompanied, it was a French ship.

Q: When you say "we?"

A: My husband and I.

Q: You met your husband…

A: I met my husband in Paris. He was also of German origin; he came from Freidrichshofen, in Germany. He also immigrated in 1933. Ya, but I didn't know him before. I immigrated alone. And I leave out everything else, the hardships in immigration and the treatment we got from the French, they saved our lives and so I say "Thank you."

Q: But you went from Basel…

A: From Basel I went in the middle of September of 1933, I went to Paris and the details really how I got a hotel and what organizations, how this all came about, I really don't know, because I didn't know anybody in Paris. But I do know that I was in a small hotel where there were other refugees, other young refugees. One even from my home, from Wurtzburg. And I got a job through an organization that arranges for interviews for the German Jewish refugees. The only jobs we could hold were as maids or baby nurses or things like that. We couldn't work in the store or anything like that or you could be a peddler from house to house. Or you could have a lot of money and live on your monies.

Q: How long did you stay in Paris?

A: In Paris only until I was deported in May 1941.

Q: Well you mentioned something about Israel in between.

A: Ya, I wanted to finish that. When we went home with whatever the name of the ship was –it was one of the Palestine Lloyds, under French registry—[we] were accompanied by warships, by battleships, by French battleships for protection because it wasn't sure there would be a way, or there wouldn't be a war. And at that time my husband said, "I'm going to volunteer. I'm going to the Ministry and volunteer for the French." We didn't know anything about the fifth column or all of that.

Q: Can I interrupt you for a minute? I'm getting confused on the chronology. You went from Germany…

A: From Israel. I visited in 1938 in Israel. I visited my parents in 1938…I went to Basel, Switzerland and I lived in France and I worked in France and my parents immigrated to Israel in 1936, 7th of December they took a ship from Marseilles and my husband and I visited with my parents in 1938 and when we came back from that trip…

Q: You were going to train…

A: The thing with Hachscharah did not work out. In Germany there were too many applicants and I didn't want to wait for anything in Germany. And in France, there was a two or three year waiting list to go to Hachscharah because they didn't expect such a large number of people who wanted to train for agricultural work to go to a kibbutz. And why I wanted the Hachscharah training is something that is not pertinent to the story. It was a very personal story as to my parents and my husband. So I did not go to Hachscharah and I planned to stay in France.

Q: May I take you back to 1933 again? Obviously your father's business must have been affected by boycotts.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What happened to your father's business when he emigrated to Israel? Was he allowed to take his business?

A: I was not in Germany anymore. I left in 1933 and it took my parents 2½ years first of all to get the certificates for emigration and to liquidate whatever they could liquidate. They tried to get the most out of the business. Also, they sent my sister with Youth Aliyah to Israel; I think it was 1935. My sister went to Israel with the Youth Aliyah project because my mother…my mother felt that once the hatred was

legalized, the people could do whatever they wanted to. There was just no…

Q: She was a great deal more farsighted than a lot of other people.

A: Very farsighted, because my parents didn't have that much money but what they had would have been a good insurance for their old age and they were married in 1911; they left in 1936.

So they were married how long twenty-five years, so my father was way over fifty and my mother was maybe close to fifty and so it is not easy to go to another country and start again, no matter what. Oh, I would like to say this. They were able to send me 300 German marks to France every month from Germany. That money I put in a savings account, the only thing I bought was one coat and one dress and the rest of the money, I earned my money for whatever I needed, and that money I saved for my parents and when they came on the 7th of December to leave for Israel, I had that money for them, so there is some money.

There may also have been other money because I think, it is my own personal interpretation, I think my mother felt that she owed no loyalty to a state that made her a pariah, and if she had any opportunity to get a few hundred marks out she would have done that. And then they could take, I think the Germans allowed them a certain amount to take with them at that time, they could take some money out. I'm quite sure otherwise they couldn't….

Q: Did your parents have any trouble getting into Palestine?

A: Oh, it took a long time because there was a quota. You had to be what is called a "Capitalist." That's what it is called in Germany. You had to have 1,000 English pounds per person if you wanted to get to Palestine on that particular certificate. That was a requirement the Germans had to give them that to get to Israel. It took my parents until the fall of 1936 to get out.

Q: You and your husband went to visit them in 1938?

A: But I visited them many times afterwards.

Q: And then back to Paris?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What was it like then?

A: Well, in Paris I had no inkling of any anti-Semitism or anything like that. We were very well accepted by Jews and Christians alike. My husband was a pianist and he had a lot of students and the students came from all religions in France, at that time, it wasn't such a big thing. And to me somehow I was brought up in the post…Despite the fact that I came from Germany and I felt the sting of anti-Semitism really very strongly on my skin, every day that I lived in this small community and also in Wurzburg at the university, you know there was the segregation of the fraternities.

There were no fraternities where Jews would be admitted. They had their own fraternities. Anyway despite the fact I always felt very much at ease with people that were not of the Jewish religion. I always did. But I do not return to Germany and I do not go to Austria. I was invited to go the unveiling of the bronze for my brother-in-law but, no, I sent my speech.

So in France, my husband felt very strongly that we owed the loyalty to the French. After all, they had saved our lives and had given us the carte d'identite and the "permit de sejour" and he enlisted.

Well, to make a long story short, with the French, after the war had broken out. Well, I have to say one other thing. The last year in France before the war, I lived with my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law stayed in Germany. And then when they had this terrible burning of the synagogues and Kristallnacht.

My brother-in-law who was with the Reichs vetreiner for Judes – it was the central Jewish Government in Germany he was in charge of the emigration to all countries, but Israel, and he was fortunately a liaison man with the German government, because he had to get permits to get people out and he had to find ot how many they let go and whom they let go where.

So my mother-in-law stayed in Germany, but then when they threw her down the stairs and knocked out a few teeth during that night, it was November 11, 1938, I think, my brother-in-law called and said mother has to get out. And then my mother-in-law lived with me in Paris. So when the war started or shortly thereafter all men who were born in Germany, I can't give you all the details, had to go to a big football field somewhere and my husband never got back because they

either had to engage themselves to go work in the fields for the, you know, to lend your working capacity, but they couldn't go home. Or, as my husband had volunteered to serve in the army, they kept him somewhere.

I forgot where they kept him; all I know is I met with, he was assigned…until they found an army division where they could use all these men, there were others who had signed up to serve, I met my husband November, 1939, in Sonnebonne, which was in the center of France. We lived with peasants and we cut grapes, but he could not go home. We had to go back to whatever camp he was in… where was he now… I can't remember.

Q: A big concentration camp in France was Drancy.

A: No, no, it was not a concentration camp, it was cordon d'assembles; that was not a punitive camp. It was a camp where they kept these men because they were born in Germany and they could possibly be a danger. The Fifth Column they left walking around and the poor guys who fled Hitler they put in the camp. Finally, they sent them to the Foreign Legion in North Africa. That's where my husband served.

But on May 12, 1940, when the Germans started to surround the Maginot Line – you [know] the Germans conquered France eventually in 1940, June 15th, I think it was not by conquering the Maginot Line but by going around the Maginot Line. Well, anyway, all women who were born in Germany below the age of 65 had to go to a village near Ville Ronde d'Hivers in Paris for what they called "triage." That was for some examination. I took a little knapsack, and I went to Ville Ronde d'Hivers, and I thought I'm home in the evening. I never saw my apartment again.

They kept us there for two or three days under this big glass dome, and were afraid that the Germans would come and bomb. And then we were shipped. Nobody told us anything. I cannot tell you how long I was in a train, a compartment, not a wagon like the other terrible camps. I landed in southern France with my knapsack and my little dress with thousands of other women, and we were told we are in Gurs which is right near the Spanish border.

Q: That's right near the Spanish border?

A: We were a very sad picture there because they had many of the "ilus" …courts, and it departmentalized – six cabins and a fence around, six

cabins and a fence around. They had the people who had fled over the Spanish frontier. They were there, these men who had fought against Franco.

All right, we were put there. The conditions in Gurs were just abominable. We were not in any way abused, but we had nothing to eat. I think we got thin water in the morning and twice a day cabbage soup and pate de fois, which is liver pate, out of a can.

Oh, it was terrible. We had nothing to eat and hygienic facilities were so terrible that you almost couldn't make the stairs it was so dirty and it was muddy. It was terrible. No blankets, nothing, just straw mats.

Q: Like barracks?

A: They were barracks, but they didn't have windows. It was southern France. But anyway, we didn't know from anything. We only heard rumors that the Germans were coming, the Germans were coming. And the people, they were non-visible. There were rules and regulations. This you can do; this you cannot do, and the gates were closed.

Q: What did you do during the day?

A: Nothing. No, nothing. I don't know…nothing. And I was in there only for, I think it was, I don't know when I arrived there. I know that the Germans won the war on the 15th of June, 1940, and I don't think it had anything to do with the Jews, though there were lots of Jewish people because there were so many refugees in Paris. And, then, I understand, the German soldiers came to southern France. That was before they made the Vichy understanding, you know, the peace of Vichy where France was divided.

Q: Southern France was more liberal than northern France.

A: The Germans were not supposed to be in southern France. And then all of a sudden an announcement was made. I can't even say over a loud speaker because I don't remember is there was a loud speaker or not. "Those who have visas to American can go out, and those who want to take a chance can also go out, and those who want to stay in camp can stay."

So I had no visa or anything. I left camp, and the mayor of the community accommodates us. The peasants gave us some eggs, and we

cooked outside. Well, that is another story – it has nothing to do with the Holocaust directly or with the persecution of the Jews. The only thing is that many of our friends in France went back. I never went back to the occupied zone.

I never went back to my apartment in Paris because we heard rumors that they started deporting the Jews from the occupied zone. I tried to make contact with my mother-in-law who, the day the Germans invaded Poland, early September, 1939, I had brought to the center of France where my husband's family and my husband had rented for the duration of the war and I evacuated my mother-in-law there and I tried to make contact with the family. I only mention this because the Gestapo came to this so-called non-occupied zone, that zone near Chateau Roux, and the department was Seine et Loire, and the little community was called Neuve sans Cette Bulque.

I finally made contact with the family and we, after lots of efforts, immigrated to the United States. We left my mother-in-law back because we couldn't secure an affidavit for her, but the Gestapo or anti-Semitic people, the French police – I don't know—persecuted the Jews even in that zone in France. Because when my mother-in-law, when she finally came to join us in the United States, in New York, told us that the doctors from the village, the butcher from across the street, and the baker – they took turns hiding her when they looked for Jews, especially Jews who were refugees.

Q: So there were some compassionate people? At least a few?

A: Some compassionate, courageous people. I think [of] course because you risked your own life. Yes, they hid her, I don't know behind what. So that was my mother-in-law's experience with persecution of Jews in the so-called Free Zone of France.

Whether the difficulties my husband had getting out of the Foreign Legion once the first part of the war was lost, and General DeGaulle went to England to continue the fight, one of the difficulties they made, my husband didn't want to continue fighting because the weapons they had, they shot their own way. You aimed this way and the outfit he was in [blank space]. Also the French had put these German born Jewish boys into the Foreign Legion and despite assurances that we had gotten and I knew some people in the high command, you knew they had five little pentagons in France and one was the commandant at Orleans, France.

I knew somebody there was a very high up and I had gotten his personal word that this was the policy that these Jewish boys would have their separate divisions, you and my foot!!! My husband's staff sergeant, or commander or whatever you call it was a German gentile, who had been sent over for whatever crimes he committed. He went into the Foreign Legion, and he was the one who drilled those boys and they were utterly cruel to them, so the high command of the French army put them where they found it convenient for them but they had no absolutely no consideration for whatever hardships these boys besides the normal hardships of war but by the commanders that came from these original Germans who were not kindly inclined toward the Jews.

And then the French Foreign Legion created tremendous difficulties for the release of these men. They said you can either go and fight with DeGaulle or you can go and help us build the Trans-Sahara railway or you can get out, but you have to show proof of carte d'idenite which means, proof that you had they call here the "green card," that you could leave France and do whatever kind of work they permitted you. And you have to give us other that you have, when you get out, somebody that will employ you for two years at livable wages. No, my husband could not produce his carte d'identite because the French authorities had collected them when they put them in the army and they were unwilling to give it back.

We had no duplicates of this permit, you know, the carte d'identite, which permitted him to be in France, that was renewed from two years to two years, at the Prefecture in Paris. So it was up to me to bring proof that my husband was in good standing before he went into the army and find him, under war conditions, a job that somebody would go down in writing for two years so that he could get out of the Foreign Legion.

Q: Meanwhile you told us you left the camp in Gurs but you didn't have any papers and that you tried to establish contact with your mother-in-law…

A: No, no, no. I didn't say I didn't have any papers.

Q: Immigration papers?

A: No, the first thing I did, I had some money on me, I sent a telegram to, I don't and uncle of my husband's and to a second cousin of mine in

America, to send affidavits. That's the first thing I did. I did not want to stay in France after that kind of treatment.

Q: but you were still in Gurs when you did that?

A: In Gurs from the post office in Gurs and then I went, I hiked to Orleans and went to the post office because the women, the French women whose husbands were in the army, they got 200 francs a month or something, because their husbands served and I wanted to get the money. My husband served in the French Foreign Legion for the, don't ask me, how it worked out, you know sometimes memories are so blurred that you don't know the details.

But, I do think I got monthly money then for my husband's service because that was the routine in France. I had my carte d'identite with me and I also tried to locate some friends to send me money. Somehow I got 3,000 francs from somebody and my little booklet of my savings account and I had my carte d'identite. It would have been very useful to prove that my husband also had, you know, permit to stay, and trying to locate witnesses under the conditions of war is really very difficult because how do you reach people if you don't go back go back to Paris and I was afraid for my life. Because with the Germans being there.

So the mayor of the little town of Gurs had given us a grange, a hayloft kind of where we could sleep in the hay, because we had no place to stay. And I had my carte d'identite and the money that I got then from friends, these friends were people from Leipzig, Germany who lived in France. He was in the fur business. They were later deported by the German Gestapo. The Gestapo sought them out and deported them.

Anyway, one morning I wake up and my little satchel which I carried on me was gone. One of the women, maybe who had no identification, I don't know, had stolen my money and my carte d'identite and I had absolutely no proof who I was.

Q: That must have been a terrible feeling.

A: And therefore it was very difficult for me to prove that my husband had a carte d'identite and my only salvation was to hitchhike back to where my mother-in-law was and the French family. And then with the help of some local people in this small village in the center of France, they testified that they had seen that my husband had a carte d'itentite. That was the only way to get him out of the Foreign Legion.

Now how do I get him a job for two years? I had a friend in Paris, she was a good friend of, you may remember there was a professor at the University of Wurtzburg who got a Nobel Prize in 19?? I don't know: '13, '15, 17? I was very friendly with his daughter-in-law and a friend of hers had found my mother-in-law in this small French village because she had to flee from Paris. And she had a friendship with a very high officer at the airport in Chateau Rue which was about 25 kilometers from where my mother-in-law stayed. And that officer at the airport who was a friend of my friend, he was in charge of all the purchases so he went to a wine merchant who supplied all of the wine to the airport in Chateau Rue and said "I need a two-year contract for a poor guy who is in the Foreign Legion," and that wine merchant gave me a contract for two years for my husband. So with the affidavits from the doctor and from a school teacher from the family that he had a carte d'identite, they swear to it and with this contract my husband finally came out of the Foreign Legion in October 1940.

Q: And joined you in France?

A: Yah, he joined me in that little village. And then we got affidavits from, one I got from a very distant relative of mother's who had gone to America in the early twentieth century or the end of the nineteenth century. And my husband had family in Los Angeles, a sister of his, she was dead, but the husband was still alive, he gave us the other affidavit. And then friends of ours wrote and told us that you have to go to Marseilles consulate. If you don't go to the consulate and camp outside, you'll never get a visa. So we left the family and went to Marseilles and we didn't have anything because we never went back to Paris. I knitted for people but anyway…

Q: Your little money had been stolen.

A: That's right. I want to mention Marseilles only in our immigration because the whole of the Gestapo was not only in the occupied zone. Every Jew, every Jew who lived in France had come to the consulate was afraid for their lives and some people were caught by the Gestapo or their huntsmen in Marseilles. You heard rumors that this one didn't come back at night; this one was gone and this one was gone. So we were, when we got there, advised right away. The only place you are safe is near the harbor in small hotel where the people are very much to the left, maybe even Communist the owners of the hotels because they won't sell you to the Gestapo that you are Jews.

I give you that for whatever good it is. But, these people don't sell you down the river, wherever else you go you are never sure that they don't work together with the Fifth Column in southern France. We did get our visas and came to the States. One more thing and this also reflects on governments. There was a question that I think the Americans gave you the visa, the definite visa only if you could provide transportation to get to the ship, to get passage on the ship in time of war. This was almost impossible. We didn't have any money so I had to cable to America for the money on a loan so that we can pay the ship. But you go to Portugal only if you bribed somebody in France who would travel to Madrid and give money to the Catholic diocese, the Archbishop in Madrid so that he would get a transit visa from France because the Spanish government wouldn't give you any transit visa.

Q: You said Portugal?

A: In order to get to Portugal you have to travel through Spain. So we had to pump American people twice for money because I think it was $300 bucks, $300 American dollars a person, for the Catholic Church in Madrid, I guess also got some money to get the visa. So it was complicated because we had twice passage on the ship but we couldn't get the transit visa through Spain.

Q: The Portuguese gave you visa when you could have a proof of passage?

A: Well, it was very complicated. How we ever pulled it together, I don't know. But the government[s] were not helpful to say the least.

Q: Do you remember when it was you got to the United States?

A: Yes. The ship was called the Montezuma and I think we arrived here, I think it was June 25, 1941 and we landed in Hoboken. Excuse me, but we didn't have a cabin or anything. All the way down in the……..

Q: In the steerage, it would have been years ago.

A: Ya, I guess so. Normally you carry freight and there's no windows or anything.

Q: How did you work the immigration numbers you needed to get a visa to the United States? Did you have to come in on a German quota?

A: Yes, we were born in Germany, I guess so. You know those details, I really don't know.

Q: They weren't easy to come by.

A: No. All I know is that we were day and night for almost 6 weeks. Always in the street and always looking for people who might persecute you in Marseilles.

Q: How long were you on the ship?

A: I think it was 7 days.

Q: It must have been an enormous relief to get to Hoboken.

A: Well, yes, of course.

Q: Where did you go from there?

A: We lived for 6 weeks with a cousin by marriage of my mother's who had an apartment on Ft. Washington Avenue. They were German. Her family was from Mienstocken, Germany, but she, the woman who was not a blood relative to my mother, her husband was, she had relatives in America as a young girl. She spent 2 years in America, so that had immigrated here after Hitler came to Germany and they gave us shelter.

I would like to go back because I think I forgot something quite important. During my stay in Wurzburg, to get back to this point and interrupt there, at one time and I can't give you exactly the year, it must have been 1931, 1932. The Habimah group from Israel, are you familiar with Habimah Theater? At that time of course there was no Habimah. It was originated and founded in Russia, Hebrew speaking. They came to Wurzburg to give a performance of the Dybbuk and they had rented the theater of the town.

It was a lovely theater in which opera and stage plays and concerts were given and that was one of the most horrible experiences of my whole life. I had taken standing room, you know all the students who had special cards could get cheap standing room in the back and you stand throughout the performance.

All of a sudden, in the first rows, people got up and said the most horrible things, "Kill the Jews," "Jews are the downfall of Germany," and so the stormtroopers, who were not dressed as stormtroopers, I guess, had rented the first rows and wanted to make things impossible.

There were fights breaking out between people and they did not want the performance to take place. And they sang all the Nazi songs and everywhere were people fainted. It was just horrid. Outside it was surrounded by Nazi, the outside of the theater. I think, I have a vague recollection, I think finally the performance took place.

But when we got out, many of the men got beaten up and the police didn't let us take the main streets to walk home. We had to go through small little streets to get help. All the big streets were "occuspet" and many people landed in the hospital. It was horrible. I was so afraid, I thought I wouldn't get out alive.

Q: I can imagine. I'm amazed that the Habimah group would go to Bavaria. Bavaria was a hotbed of anti-Semitism. That they would ever go there. It is a very amazing thing.

A: Wurzburg was a very Catholic town and after all anti-Semitism wasn't official. It was just a hatred that was well organized and people weren't ashamed of perpetrating some of their cruelty to Jews. But the theater was. They wanted to give the Jews some identity because you know the German Jews were in some ways more alienated from what the Eastern European Jews called Jewish culture and Jews this and all of that. I must say I have noticed it here in the United States much more that there are very deep differences between the way German Jews look at their Judaism and Jews that come from the shtetl look at their Judaism.

Neither one is bad, neither one is particularly good. It is just a fact of history that it developed that way. So I think the Habimah wanted to give the Jews a feeling that Hebrew is a language. There is a tremendous amount of literature that is worthy of attention and they wanted to give the Jews a coherence. I don't think there was demonstrations, at least that hadn't come to our attention anywhere else.

Q: I wanted to ask you, not apropos to this, but would you have described your family in Germany as Reform Jews, or Conservative Jews; how much Judaism was practiced in your home?

A: I come from grandparents on both sides, first my mother's side very Orthodox. My grandmother wore a sheitle and said her prayers and believed strongly in the Jewish God and Jesus was the "Dolor," He was really not very much liked because somehow my grandmother always felt that some of the fate that befell Jews in Germany was due to the

interpretation of the fate that befell Jesus of Nazareth at the hands of Judea.

Well, anyway, my family, my grandparents were Orthodox. My father and my mother, we had a kosher home but it was not terribly meaningful to them because my parents worked very hard and I know that when others went to the Temple, to the Synagogue on Friday evening and Shabbos morning my father had come home, then closed their doors and they did their work, they made the packages so they could be sent out on Monday morning and they worked on Shabbos.

But my mother kept a very strict kosher house and I kept all the Jewish commandments, my mother wanted that so I wouldn't offend my grandmother. I didn't carry a handbag, I didn't go any further than we were supposed to go for our walks and all of that. So, and on my father's side, it was also Orthodox but my grandmother did not wear a sheitle. But they were more Jewish oriented than strict religion on my father's side. But neither my father nor my mother was very impressed by the omnipotence of God. I'd like to put it neutrally.

Q: Moving back to when you came to the country, were any of the Jewish agencies helpful to you at that time? HIAS or Jewish Welfare Fund?

A: Well, let me say this. No. I did not, I don't think that I even went there. But, I must say that when we were……..after the war, after I got [out of] the concentration camp and my husband came back and we went to Marseilles, I did go to the HIAS in Lisbon. Probably also in Marseilles, I don't know. Because my brother-in-law was in a very high position in the Reichful training in Deutschgard and though I never pulled strings, when it comes to my husband's life and my life, then you pull any and every string under the sun you can pull in order to secure that passage on that Montezuma and to get some help in Portugal, I went to the HIAS. They were most accommodating and I, very much of course due to the fact that my brother-in-law had so many negotiations with the HIAS in Paris and Joint Distribution Committee in Paris. In my years, in 1933, when [I] came to Paris, yes, a Jewish organization was very helpful but if you ask me the name, maybe I have a little recollection.

Q: It's really not important.

A: A Jewish organization who brought job seekers and households who needed maids and butlers all that kind of stuff of Bonne Enfant, they were very, very helpful.

Q: Well, I realize you can't cover so many years completely in so short a time but is there anything that I haven't asked you that you wanted to add before we end this?

A: Well, to make a little bird's eye view, I lived under Hitler's aegis only for a few months and they started legalizing those terrible, that treatment of, that the Jews had been exposed to for a long time, and they started legalizing that, I felt then that it was time to leave and I did not want to stay. But I have never been free of some kind of oppression or persecution in Germany from anti-Semitism even before Hitler was in power. There was always this feeling that you [felt] hated, really hated and threatened.

When we arrived in America we had to start once more from scratch with $1,200 debt and no money in the "kitty" and we worked hard and I would like to add for the benefit of those who want to hear it, despite all the mistreatment that society has given us and the government has given my husband and I have stayed DOWN RIGHT HONEST and not cut corners in reestablishing another livelihood and making a new life in the United States. That's my ending comment.

Q: Well, that's a good thing to be able to say about yourself and your life.

A: I feel very strongly about it.

Q: I want to thank you very much for sharing with us, your memories and your experiences. I realize that it is rather traumatic to recall those times. Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.