

Gerda Marcus, August 17, 1989

WH: . . . you were born where?

GM: Berlin and I was married in Czechoslovakia to a Czechoslovakian citizen who lived in Prague. I was married in December, 1932 and I came to Prague in January, 1932 . . . and my mother and sister came in March, 1933 . . . to Prague . . . my father died in the First World War . . . I was born in 1910 . . . my husband had a general agency for (?IFOT?) is like, for – British Empire, what Kodak is for America and we lost the agency and all the other agencies when Hitler came to Prague in March, 1939. My husband had just returned from England just a few days before. We had a permit . . . that we could come any day, but we didn't get an exit visa. So December, 1941 . . . my husband was drafted in Terezein . . . and I went there in July, 1942 and my mother 3 days later and my mother was set away with 10,000 old people . . . and my mother-in-law went (also) . . . and I got sick, and my husband got typhoid fever, then he was sent to Germany . . . to build barracks for the Nazi's . . . and he contracted t.b. and then he was sent back to our camp, then he went to Auschwitz in 1944. But I survived. I worked as a typist in a very important place and I survived.

WH: And you worked in a camp in Terezein?

GM: Yes . . . and I wrote my memories last year. ?Moishe Korn? Didn't get a (?trophy?), but one of this colleagues who writes also for the Jerusalem Post, Ernie Meyer, got a copy. He had interviewed me before and he had wrote a whole article in the Jerusalem Post on Terezein, and he mentioned me, so he induced me to write my memories.

WH: Do you feel good that you wrote them?

GM: (sighs) Yes, well, eh, because I think I wouldn't have been able later to read my stenographic notes which I still wrote in the camps . . .

WH: . . . after the war, your husband did not make it?

GM: No, he was gassed right away.

WH: And you didn't have any children?

GM: No.

WH: After the war you went to America?

GM: No, I first went back to Prague. I had a sister living in America . . . I sent a telegram, she never received it. But after she knew that I was alive, she wrote to me that I must come to America. Which was not my intention. My intention was to go to Israel, to Palestine at that time, directly from Prague. She said, "No, I am all by myself now, you have to come." Okay, fine. So, in 1945 . . . I went on the second boat . . . S.S. Gripsholm . . . and I arrived . . . the first of July, it was a Monday . . . and I was picked up by the sister-in-law and brother-in-law of my sister who knew me very well from Prague, because they traveled every second year to Europe . . . they had also

given me the affidavit. The first three nights were interesting. They were staying at the St. Moritz . . . then we moved to a friend's house on Riverside Drive, a six room apartment.

WH: Nice, that's very nice.

GM: No, I came from Prague, from after the war, everything, not that Prague was the (?best stated?), I wouldn't say so. Only the Russians did the job. But there was nothing to be had. And then I came to New York, beautiful apartment, I wasn't used to it any more. And then later on we went to Cleveland, that's where the relatives lived and my sister came over, but she didn't recognize me because I was 140 pounds. Meaning that when I came out of the concentration camp, I was 90 pounds. But, I went from the Chariters, it was a Catholic organization who feed the people who came back from the camp, and there I had one meal and then I went to the Jewish Community House and I had another meal . . . and the first things was, my sister sent me to a doctor to check me out, and he said, "Everything is okay with you. You just have to go on a diet." Which I did. Came down to 125 pounds. I went to St. Louis, that's where my sister lived at that time.

WH: . . . why did you go to Cleveland?

GM: That's where my relatives lived. The relatives who picked me up.

WH: . . . how long did you stay in Cleveland?

GM: A few weeks.

WH: What were your first impressions of America when you first came?

GM: Well, I was born in a capital . . . and Berlin was really the cultural capital, so I couldn't say that New York gave me too much . . . I was used to a Metro, I was used to a subway. But what really got me, was that these relatives in Cleveland took me one night to a night club. Which was not permitted in Cleveland itself. Mind you, it was 1946. It was out in the country. And I saw people having a very good time, they were drinking and so on. Night club life. And I asked, "Was this open during the war? And they told me, "Yes." That was something. And I cannot forget until this day. That while the war went on, and so many people perished, they had a night life. Okay, then I went to my sister, and stayed there, and I went back to New York, got myself a job. Before the war I spoke English fluently.

WH: And when you typed, you typed in German and Czech?

GM: Yes. Typed and I spoke . . . I had a knack for languages.

WH: How did you get that job?

GM: Well, I'm going to give you the memories and you'll -

WH: You have the memories here in English?

GM: Yeh . . .

WH: I didn't know you had a copy here, that's terrific.

GM: Yeh . . . they are very personal memories, but it answers your question.

WH: It certainly does, I see that. (WH looks through her book)

GM: So in New York I got myself a job because the English came back very quickly, with Rescue Children, which was a branch of the (?Bat hatzalah?) . . . I went to the Young Israel employment service.

WH: In Manhattan?

GM: In Manhattan.

WH: Where did you get a room when you came back from St. Louis?

GM: I had friends, I had relatives somewhere always . . . once you speak the language, there are no barriers.

WH: . . . so you took an apartment . . .

GM: I took a room . . . in Manhattan . . . Haven Avenue (Washington Avenue near 168<sup>th</sup> Street) . . .

WH: . . . Rescue Children, was -

GM: That's Rabbi Novak. He is today . . . from Chicago. We're still very good friends and my son became good friends, I write about it also.

WH: . . . you worked for Children's Rescue-

GM: I was a person whom they needed there. (language, typing ability)

WH: What did you do there?

GM: We rescued children who were in camps. And who were with goisher families and so on. And I had the background to make up information sheets and tell people that we had an adoption plan. The (inaudible word) and other groups individually had to pay three hundred and sixty five dollars to maintain a child, so they got a picture of the child whom they adopted and information about the child, and we even go together some relatives. We found some relatives of one of the children. It was also possible through our efforts. And on the last page, I'm telling a story about twins whom we brought over from France, in order to show to the America sponsors what kind of children we are dealing with, and the children were adopted . . .

WH: It didn't matter if they were going to religious homes or not?

GM: No . . .

WH: How long did you work for them?

GM: About a year, and then I went back to my sister in St. Louis, and then I came back again, and the Joint took over with the children . . .

WH: When you worked for Children's Rescue for the first year, that was in '46, '47?

GM: Yes.

WH: . . . did you work directly with the children?

GM: Yes . . .

WH: You stayed in New York, and then you went to St. Louis -

GM: . . . I came back to New York and I stayed in New York. And I . . . had two other jobs with commercial firms and I moved to Forest Hills, I was looking for a job that would be close to the Eighth Avenue subway. I lived on ?Dartmouth? Street . . . Continental Avenue and - . And, I think I put an ad in the papers and I got a number of offers, and I went for an interview and it turned out, the job that I took afterwards, that, I met this man, the owner of the firm, when he was the European traveling representative for a large (inaudible) but it doesn't exist anymore . . . he became independent and he opened up a business already before the war. I didn't recognize the name because he Americanized it, and somehow, during the interview, I find out that he was in Prague and he was visiting with us, because we were the general representatives in Czechoslovakia for the firm and I went with him to buy ties. And he remembered it, so I worked with him for four years in the capacity of an importer of machinery for big - actually for blue chip factories. I was able to translate from German and from French, the instruction sheets, information sheets . . . I was actually, completely independent. I had a very good job. During these four years, I received my first money from Germany, which I used to go to Israel and I spent three months in Israel looking around and was also in Europe, and I said, "I'm going to Israel." So, that's what it was. I'm to this day, I was offered a partnership without paying in money. So I said, "I made up my mind to go to Israel. I wanted that before, and now I'm going to." In the meantime, I was able to buy a little house, on Dartmouth Street in Forest Hills, I sold the house."

WH: If you went to St. Louis to be with your sister, your sister said to you, "Come to America because I'm all alone here. You come with me. But you didn't stay in St. Louis. You stayed in New York.

GM: I stayed for a couple of weeks, but my sister worked. And, I did the house.

WH: . . . was that good enough for her that you would come to America, but you wouldn't be in the same city. Then she wouldn't see you anyway.

GM: Well, look. My sister unfortunately, (long pause) - it didn't work out. Let's put it this way. I was on very, very good terms with my late brother-in-law, but the third didn't work.

WH: So, then, if that's the case, why not leave for Israel right away? Why not leave in '47 or '48?

- GM: Well, I was there already - . . . look, I was married before, and I was looking around to get for marriage.
- WH: When did you get married?
- GM: In New York . . . in 1950 . . .
- WH: . . . is he here?
- GM: No, he died.
- WH: So you stayed in New York until 1962?
- GM: Yeh. Sixteen years.
- WH: You had a house.
- GM: I had a house, and I had friends, but my husband was dead, and I wanted to give the child –
- WH: When did he die?
- GM: . . . in 1954 . . . we were married only three and a half years. The child was two and a half years old. All over Manhattan it was known.
- WH: Why was that?
- GM: . . . within 48 hours it was erev Pesach, on Shabbat . . . at that time I was living in Manhattan . . . on 307 West 116<sup>th</sup>. A brownstone house . . my husband (was from) Hamburg . . .
- WH: How did it happen, that you decided in 1962 to come on aliyah?
- GM: . . . I visited Israel for three months. The child went to school in ?B'havoret? . . . my son. And I decided I wanted to give him a real, I won't say a Jewish education, which he also got in New York, but another environment, and absolutely Jewish. I was a Zionist. I used to be a Zionist.
- WH: Were you a Zionist growing up in Berlin?
- GM: No, I wasn't. But my family was very Zionist inclination. My sister belonged to Mizrachi . . . my mother went to all the Zionist meetings . . . I was never –
- WH: Where did your spirit of Zionist come?
- GM: In camp. In camp and after the war, when I saw what happened in camp already . . . and when my parents got married in 1909 they already planted trees in Israel . . . and we had always the blue and white pushka . . . we were the biggest donaters in the whole neighborhood . . .
- WH: And you were Orthodox?

GM: Yes.

WH: When you came on the three month visit to Israel in 1962 did you come at the time with the intention of staying or you just came . . .

GM: I had many friends and relatives here, and the boy was so happy in the Moshav.

WH: Your son.

GM: Yeah. My ties (with) – my sister, is a sister of course, but unfortunately I can't stay in, - not even the same, in the same city. She wouldn't – she didn't like it.

WH: She was a tough person to get along with?

GM: No, she is – something - .

WH: Okay. Whatever.

GM: Something must have happened some time that made her afraid, so - .

WH: She's . . .

GM: So, I, look. She comes here, she's very nice. And we are together almost daily, but, I was in America this year, I called her up every day, but I didn't go there. So –

WH: Is she older than you?

GM: No, she's younger . . . she lost her husband. She has two children . . . my nephew came on aliya with four children.

WH: Were you sorry when you came here that you didn't come right away?

GM: No. Especially since I saw how the people lived here at that time. When I bought this apartment, it wasn't built yet. And at this time, this was the sea, the apex of a building in a neighborhood. Today, you know, today what you can have here. It's really, people are – move only in four and five room apartments, but nobody had a three room apartment at that time.

WH: In other words, you've been living in the apartment since 1962.

GM: Since I came here (in) '63.

WH: . . . when you came here was it an orthodox neighborhood?

GM: No . . . (but now) if I sell this apartment I can sell it only to Orthodox people, and we are the family who is an outcast. Nobody goes with short sleeves. Of course, I'm covered.

WH: How do you feel like an 'outcast'?

GM: (I don't but) in their eyes . . .

WH: Are they friendly to you?

GM: Well –

WH: They're polite.

GM: They are . . . (but) you can't get warm with them.

WH: Unless you believe exactly like they do.

GM: Yes.

WH: Did you ever think of moving to another part of Jerusalem?

GM: I would very much like to move downtown . . . but my husband want to go to a parent's home . . . there are some of them, which I would like to go into it, and so far, we are stuck.

WH: When did you marry?

GM: I married my husband within the first year of my being in Jerusalem. (I met him) from shul.

WH: And you're married a long time.

GM: Twenty-seven year, almost.

WH: . . . does he have any children?

GM: Two boys . . .

WH: . . . is your son Orthodox?

GM: Yes.

WH: You said to me before that you 'used to be a Zionist.' What do you mean by that?

GM: Well, the way I was treated here, by the (?Mizrot hatafleem?) was not inducive to being a Zionist. And, I'm quite sure that had I not been married to my husband who, at that time, was also a Zionist of the old – the real kind. Not today. I would have gone back.

WH: Where is he from?

GM: Also from Berlin . . . he came here in '34.

WH: What's a Zionist of the 'old kind.' How do you see the difference?

- GM: Whoever came here, he was in the Youth Movement, and the (?B'had) there. Mizrachi movement. And my sister, too, and my brother-in-law, to, and he came here early in 1934. He had a very, very hard time like all the new people who came here without money. A youngster, 20 years old. And he moved his way up. He was with the government. A very good position, and then he left . . . and (worked for the) ?B'av hatar ha-aliya? . . . the supervising authority (?inaudible – in the area). And there he worked until about two years ago. And even last year he worked as a volunteer. And now he's working for a volunteer in Hadasseh . . . but I am fed up (with what's going on here).
- WH: In what way?
- GM: With what's going on here. You see, - excuse me, I am not an Israeli! I never became an Israeli. I'm glad my husband, who wanted me to become Israeli, today he's so happy I never became an Israeli. If I see the (needs translation: spanzuf?) of Shamir, -.
- WH: What do you see as the problem?
- GM: You know . . . if we had followed at that time the ?Alon? Plan, we would have also had security. But what is going on today? It's terrible.
- WH: Meaning what?
- GM: All the money was put into the settlements. Instead . . . (of security) . . . (but) I'm so much Israeli bound already, that I can't image living in New York or Chicago. Impossible. Absolutely impossible for me. But we go every year abroad for quite some time. My husband says he can't take that (needs translation), that stress.
- WH: So where do you go, usually?
- GM: Well, we had to go this year first to Canada for a wedding . . . then we were a few days only in America.
- WH: When you came to Israel in the '60's, did you continue working?
- GM: Never. No. I very soon became acquainted with A.C.I. (Association of America) . . . I was in charge of (?peytar) here . . . so every newcomer from America and Canada I went to visit and –
- WH: Do you think that we ought to give back these territories?
- GM: No. No. I don't say that. But it was wrong . . . it was wrong to settle there.
- WH: But once we're there- .
- GM: Once you're there, you can't go out of there. How can you image that we give it up? Go out of it . . . it is impossible . . . Gaza we should give up.
- WH: How about the religious situation here in Israel. The intolerance.

GM: Here you have again, the (needs translation: the charadey) are not Zionist, they are not committed to anything . . . look, nobody wants to give back anything. Nobody . . . nobody wants to give back. But we are staying there already. We have investments there. I don't think so. But nobody can guarantee us peace . . . it's ridiculous. Who will make peace with us?

WH: What will be the future of this country?

GM: I don't know.

WH: You came here a committed Zionist. Do you still love Israel?

GM: Yes. Definitely.

WH: So you're just critical of the government?

GM: Oh, yes. Very much.

WH: . . . when you see the American olim today, do you think that they expect too much? Or do you think that they don't get enough?

GM: I don't know . . . (for example) my nephew, I don't think he has tried real hard to start from the beginning, the way they started . . . my husband and his –

WH: . . . and you are right, that here, a person who is – doesn't go with long sleeves, or wears a (needs translation) is not really accepted here fully. In this neighborhood. Because it all switched over to becoming more black.

GM: It's black! Absolutely black. You should see in the afternoon, the children with the, the-

WH: . . . when you look back, over all the things that happened here . . . since you came in '62, aside from the fact that you met your husband here, are you happy you came?

GM: I don't know . . . (GM's husband: The best example, her only sister came here together with her late husband, in '75, '76 and after her husband passed away, she returned. So did her son go. Her only son. He came back last year. But he returned, and he came back in order to find an occupation here. He didn't find it yet. Although he has got three degrees. He's a rabbi, he's a – and don't ask me who survived here 55 years in this country. I'm telling you the truth.

WH: . . . what do you think is the hope for the future of aliyah from America?

GM: It will depend on how the aliyah which is presently in, who will be accommodate itself . . .

WH: You were committed to Zionism . . . since the camps, and it was the events in the camp, not a particular person in the camp that made you feel that way. It was your experiences.

GM: Yes.

WH: You felt that the Jews had to have a home, that they had to have a place, now with all the problems that Israel has, don't you feel, or do you feel, that because there is a big difference here between here and America, in that here you are part of the majority, in your own country, and not part of a minority over there, isn't that a very important factor in how you feel about living here?

GM: No.

WH: Why not?

GM: It is just, here it comes again, my Jewish background. Do you understand what I said?

WH: I understand.

GM: Israel, belongs, it was promised to us, we should live there. It, it is very plain words.

WH: And that's it.

GM: That's it.

WH: . . . they (Americans) are always criticized that they send money but not themselves.

GM: Yeah, but not themselves. That's it.

WH: . . . you didn't come as a retiree. You came to make a life here . . .

GM: Yeah.