

**Lehner, Emmi**

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**One Audiotape**

**Recorded July 9, 1992**

*Side A*

**Interviewer:** I am Anthony Di Iorio. I am at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and today is July 9, 1992. I am about to interview Mrs. Emmi Lehner of Miami, Florida about her recollections of life in Austria before the war and about the story of her sister, Helene Lebel. Okay, Emmi, could you begin by telling us something about yourself and where you grew up and--.

**Emmi Lehner:** I grew up in Vienna. In the third district.

**Interviewer:** Third district.

**Emmi Lehner:** In the Vordere Zollamtsstrasse. This is a very nice section there because the Kriegsministerium is there and one arm of the Danube, a canal which is very pretty, very nice. I got married when I was very young to the owner of the Imperial Hotel, the son of the owner of the Imperial Hotel and lived there for three and a half years until '38 when Hitler marched in. I was at the hotel and Hitler was already in the Furstner Apartment, we called that on the second floor where always the royalty would stay. It is a--was a royalty hotel. They asked us to leave, you know. When I was standing outside, they asked me to--Mr. Hitler would come on the balcony and we should sing the Horst Wessel song which I didn't know. I didn't know anything about Hitler too much because in Vienna, we didn't know so much about it. Then they didn't let us go there. There was an SS man next to each person who stood in front of the Imperial Hotel. It took approximately an hour and a half and then we left. I could not get in because they took the whole hotel over.

**Interviewer:** This was in March, 1938?

**Emmi Lehner:** 1938, yes. On the 13th of March, 1938. No, I think it was the 11th, correct. The 11th of March. When I was married, my sister was out of the hospital. She was six months in the Allgemeinen Krankenhaus at the Potzel Clinic.

**Interviewer:** Six months, she was in which --?

**Emmi Lehner:** In the Allgemeinen. It is the biggest--.

**Interviewer:** General Hospital.

**Emmi Lehner:** General Hospital, yes. She was there six months, first under Wagner Jauregg, then Wagner died, during the time Helli was in the hospital. Wagner Jauregg is one--was one of the biggest psychiatrists in the world. Then Professor Potzel took over and Helene was there maybe three more months and then she was released.

**Interviewer:** This was in 1934?

**Emmi Lehner:** In 1934.

**Interviewer:** 1934. Was that the first time she was in the hospital?

**Emmi Lehner:** That was the first time she was in the hospital. As a matter of fact, it was actually before that because Helli and I, we went every Sunday to the old Danube to swim. That particular Sunday, Helli acted very strange. She said, you know, I hear constantly voices. She says, I'm going home. I said, I just came here. I don't want to go home. If you want to go home, go alone home. When I came home, that night, there was a letter on the dining room table and it was addressed to my mother. I couldn't open it; I waited until my mother came home. That letter she was not home. In that letter she said, I'm very much afraid you will be killed and I'm going to take a train. But she didn't say exactly where she's going. But around 12 o'clock at night, she came back. She was very restless and very strange. My mother called her sister and her sister was very friendly with a doctor who worked at the Allgemeinen Krankenhaus. She called and said what should I do? She said bring her in immediately. That was like a crisis center here. Where you take people---like a--where you take people when they are, you know.

**Interviewer:** Do you know when this was, this first time?

**Emmi Lehner:** Helene was 19.

**Interviewer:** Nineteen.

**Emmi Lehner:** Born in '11.

**Interviewer:** 1930.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, that's what it was. I was already with my husband, I wasn't married yet.

**Interviewer:** You had a fiancée. Then?

**Emmi Lehner:** Helli went in and was six months in the hospital. After the six months, she came out and we decided to get married and Helli was at the wedding.

**Interviewer:** So there was a four-year period from this first --?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, she went to Graz to my grandmother and went to the university. In Vienna, she went to the university and then she got a job during the time she went to the university she got a job in a lawyer's office.

**Interviewer:** This is in Vienna?

**Emmi Lehner:** In Vienna.

**Interviewer:** So she went to Graz with your grandmother?

**Emmi Lehner:** With grandmother and stayed there. I was already married. She was at the wedding. We had a very, very large wedding, 400 guests.

**Interviewer:** She was there for a long time, in Graz?

**Emmi Lehner:** In Graz, well she was there, I would say seven or eight months. She came back and came to my house and smoked a lot. At that time, I didn't know anything about smoking. Helli smoked and Helli said to me, I'm going home now and bring you all your books, the schoolbooks. I said, no; don't bring me that because I don't want them here at the hotel. I lived at the hotel, the Imperial Hotel. I said no, no, don't bring it. She left. Then in the evening, my mother called and said Helli was taken to Steinhof. There she was maybe--. In 1938, we decided to leave. We decided actually already in January to leave but

we didn't leave and didn't leave, and then Hitler marched in. We left at that night when he marched in. We wanted to go to Hungary where we had very good friends but they did not let us go in there. The Hungarians made it plain; we can't go back to Vienna. It was very exciting because there was the SS and the SA. We were very lucky. One of the men, who belonged to the SS, my husband didn't know, was an employee of the hotel. He recognized my husband and he made a cordon and said: It's Mr. Walter Lehner, its okay, let him go out. He didn't ask us where we wanted to go, we wanted to--. My mother was with us and we said we are going on vacation to Hungary, to Budapest. That man didn't think anything, was one of our detectives from the hotel, that he was already a Nazi. So we went back and my husband immediately tried to get out because my husband was of the military age. Twenty-six or something like that. We heard already that the Germans would start a war and he would be called up. They wanted to take the Austrians first so he tried and went before I left. A month or so before I left, he went to Switzerland. We had--the daughter of the hotel was owned by a friend of his father He went, left; and I, on the 14th or 15th of July, I went to see Helli, my sister for the last time. I went to the Steinhof and didn't say goodbye to her because I didn't want her to know that I'm leaving for good. But she had some kind of premonition. She was not bad; she was very good-behaved, very well and looked very good. I said goodbye and she said, well, when do you think I see you again? I didn't answer that very much; I said very soon and left. It was the last time I saw her. It was in '38.

**Interviewer:** July of 1938?

**Emmi Lehner:** July of 1938.

**Interviewer:** How long had she been in Steinhof?

**Emmi Lehner:** She was there for about--she came out in Christmas when I was already married. Just a second, can you hold that--- (interruption)

**Interviewer:** Yes, I will. We were talking about you leaving in July, 1938 and you visited--.

**Emmi Lehner:** On the 15th, on the 11th, 13th or so. I went to see her, to see Helli to say goodbye--in my own mind, but not to her.

**Interviewer:** Right, right. And you said she looked good and she was well-behaved.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, she was very well-behaved. I don't know if you are familiar- all mental hospitals have pavilions. In this pavilion, the people move around. For instance, if you are very bad, you go to another pavilion. When you are very good, you can go in a pavilion where they have typewriters, sewing machines, whatever you want to do, you can do there. They have their occupy the patients quite a bit, you know. Only if they're good. So Helen was at that time--number one is very bad and number--up to numbers--she was in number nine which is a very good one. But there were many times when I was there when she was not, when she was in number two. But this time she was in nine and I felt very good, that she looked good, her hair is nicely done and she looked good. Then I--.

**Interviewer:** How long--the question I had asked when the doorbell rang, was how long had she been at Steinhof?

**Emmi Lehner:** Well, from--when she was nineteen, it started. She went first to the Allgemeinen Krankenhaus for six months. Then she came out and the next time she did not go to the Allgemeinen Krankenhausi she went directly to Steinhof. My mother took her but I was with her. We had the hotel car and we took her. She was very disturbed. She was very difficult.

**Interviewer:** When would that have been?

**Emmi Lehner:** That was in, I would say, '34. I was married already a year. In, '35.

**Interviewer:** '35. so that's the first time she went to Steinhof?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Before that, it was the Allgemeine?

**Emmi Lehner:** Allgemeinen Krankenhaus, yes. Potzel Clinic. It's called the Potzel Clinic which is the psychiatric department. Then Helli came out the same year for Christmas but she couldn't stay. She said take me back. I can't stand the noise and I can't stand the lights, I can't stand the furniture. She did not want to stay and that was the last time she was out. We had to take her back to Steinhof and then we visited her. We had to restrict our visiting times. I went three times; my mother went three times, to see her sometimes four times. Then '38 came along. That was a very tragic thing and I didn't think that anything would happen to Helli because she was in the hospital. When--the moment the war broke out, I had no more opportunity. As long as there was no war, I was in England for two years, you know, we could not immigrate to the United States right away. We were waiting for a quota number. We stayed in England with friends. I had always letter from Mother and Helli put always little notes in saying, hello Emmi, how is it? Like it in England? And I'm fine. Things like-- Very short notes. Then when the war broke out, there was no communication until I went to the Red Cross. They were only very short note and all of a sudden I didn't hear anything from my parents, or from my sister, or anything. That went apparently into '40 when they started to empty out the Steinhof, took all mental patients out and killed them. But I didn't--my mother never wrote me that.

**Interviewer:** She was in--.

**Emmi Lehner:** The letter which I gave you. I found in my mother's desk, after my mother's death. She had never sent me that letter, nor did she tell me anything. She said I cannot visit Helli, it is so far away. My mother was at that time in Poznan.

**Interviewer:** Poznan, I know.

**Emmi Lehner:** She had no opportunity to go and visit Helli. But it happened very fast because in '40 when the war broke out, they took them all away because they needed the Allgemeine, the Steinhof for the soldiers. That's what my mother told me when she came to visit me the first time in America. She never elaborated on Helli's death. You know, I was very much anti-German, always. Because I knew what Germany wanted from us. My mother knew that and she didn't want to elaborate what these Germans all did. My father had a position in a German hospital in Poznan. She never elaborated on that. She never said, I guess that Helli is still alive, did you hear from Helli? Until that letter came, that letter she never mentioned to me. I found it in her desk when I came the first time to Vienna.

**Interviewer:** So Helli was in Steinhof from early 1936 until she was transferred to Germany? She was never released again?

**Emmi Lehner:** Never released again. Apparently she had gotten worse. I really don't know. My mother never talked about it very much but she knew how much I-- Helene and I were very, very close. We were just like twins. She knew everything she would tell me which is negative, she would know that it would hurt me very much. So I didn't hear it until when I went in 1971, I went to Vienna because my mother was very sick. Four weeks later she died. Then I cleared out the apartment and I found the letter. The particulars what she had from Helli, her birth certificate and things like that.

**Interviewer:** Now, I've seen one photograph of Helli and she's holding--?

**Emmi Lehner:** Lydi, our dog.

**Interviewer:** Liddy?

**Emmi Lehner:** Lydi was our dog. L-y-d-i.

**Interviewer:** L-y-d-i. And it looks like a terrier.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, she's a fox terrier. My father had a kennel. We had quite a bit of them and my father sold them. She was our dog. Helli's and my dog. She came from England, a female. She came from England, from one of my cousins and we loved her to death. Till she died.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, so that was--?

**Emmi Lehner:** Helli and I, we were every summer in Grimmenstein. This is a very famous lung sanatorium. My father was a business with the pol--, like a director. He had, himself, lung trouble and was not supposed to be in vienna. So we went every summer for two months there. All the time we were off school. Helli and I we had a wonderful time there. There was no sign that she would be mentally ill. That was when we were maybe, I ten, and Helene, eleven. We were sixteen months apart. From that time on until I married, I was always in Grimmenstein with her. Then when she was nineteen, she got sick. That was the first time she got sick.

**Interviewer:** Did you just spend the summers there or--?

**Emmi Lehner:** We spent the whole summer there. We could not stay in the lung sanatorium. We had to be in a separate house with a Fraulein, you know. We had wonderful times; there was no sign that she could ever be sick.

**Interviewer:** The first sign was that --?

Her birthday's in September. They said summer we were on the old Danube. Before we were supposed to go to Grimmenstein. But it started when she was 19 years old, September 15, she was 19.

**Interviewer:** So Lydi was your dog and --?

**Emmi Lehner:** Was our dog, Helli and my dog. I loved--we loved--Helli too, loved the dog so much. She was in Grimmenstein many times because, excuse me sir, leave me that form there please. I cannot sign it right now. Just a moment.

**Interviewer:** And we were talking about Lydi was your dog and I was going to ask you, how long did you have--when did you first get Lydi and how long did you have her?

**Emmi Lehner:** When I was married one year, I married in '34. In '35 I told Helli when I visited her that Lydi is now in Grimmenstein because she had an eczema which went all over her body. She was ten years old at that time. I was married already a year and I said to my husband, I'd like to go to Grimmenstein one more time and say goodbye to Lydi because we heard about all the things which were happening that maybe Germany will get into Austria, you know. I went up; I wanted to see her one more time. She was very sick at that time and, I think, a few months later she died.

**Interviewer:** Lydi died?

**Emmi Lehner:** Not in our house, not in my mother's house, but in Grimmenstein. My father had a kennel there which had a man and woman took care of her.

**Interviewer:** The reason why I was asking that, was Helli especially attached to Lydi?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yeah. Helli always walked her. One day, this were the signs which come to my mind now, that when Helli started--. You see, this type of sickness Helli had starts usually in puberty from girl--.

**Interviewer:** Thirteen years old?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, no, it didn't start that way. It started, I think, around when I was sixteen and Helli was seventeen and a half. There were signs. Signs like she took Lydi for a walk to the inner city of Vienna which is very crowded always. Lydi had to wear a muzzle because in Austria it was the rule; all dogs had to wear muzzles. She took him and then she went into a department store and left the dog outside. She was very well-trained. You didn't have to have her on a leash, you know. She was always walking next to you. My father knew dogs very well and she was very well-trained. Helli went out another side and forgot the dog. We were besides ourselves. I was already married at that time. But the dog came home and you know this is maybe half an hour walk from the inner city to the address where we lived. She came by herself and the muzzle was on the side. Was not on her.

**Interviewer:** She hadn't been arrested?

**Emmi Lehner:** No, she was not arrested. She walked by herself home. Helli was naturally very happy that she came. But Helli was always with the dog. I got married and I had my own dog. I bought my own dog, another wire-haired fox terrier.

**Interviewer:** Yes. I was going to ask if there was any connection between Helli's worsening situation in '35 and the death of the dog?

**Emmi Lehner:** Well, it was not really connected because she had the eczema, she had this very bad skin rash because she was plucked all the time. We trimmed her all the time, what she should look like. She was a very beautiful dog. I don't think it had any connection with Helene, no. Helene started with like forgetting the dog. This is -you can do this but as a rule, you don't. Very little signs which started. When she was at this lawyer's, when she took this job at the lawyer's office as part secretary and went to the university, we had a--each of us had a ring from our father, a black pearl ring. Helli came home and called me. I was at the hotel and she called me for a moment and said, you know, I was so sad today, there was a lady washing the floor in the university. She's there, I gave her my ring. I nearly dropped dead because this ring was the only thing we had from our father, our real father. I went to call my mother right away and said~ what happened? She said Helli is so strange. She goes out in the middle of the night, around one 0' clock, two 0' clock, all of a sudden I hear the door go and Helli's gone. My mother was very concerned. Young girls don't go out at night, you know. She took her clothes; she looked around; she couldn't find her. Around two o'clock, she would come back. Then she walked at night. She went out--we had a very large hallway from the entrance to the living room. Helli would walk up and down, up and down. That's when my mother called her sister who had a friend in the Allgemeinen Krankenhaus, a doctor. And she said you have to bring her in, we would like to test her and see her. From that time on, she got worse and worse,. Then came that Sunday, when we were at the Danube and she disappeared and she said I hear such voices. What are these voices around me? It was the beginning of her sickness. When we talked to all the doctors, they thought it was schizophrenia.

**Interviewer:** From that time on, schizophrenia?

**Emmi Lehner:** At that time, let me tell you, knowing so much about mental hospitals because Peter had-- that really had no connections with Peter. Peter had a brain-damage when he was born.

**Interviewer:** You're talking about your Peter?

**Emmi Lehner:** My son, yes. Because many people think because Helli had that, that this is inherited; it is not. It has nothing to do with Peter. We found out, my mother found out that when she was a year and a half old, she had a very--we went on a Danube trip on a Sunday. You know with a ship on the Danube. Helli got a high fever, a very high fever and was very, very sick. The doctors at that time knew very little about mental illness. They know Freud and they know Wagner Jaurich studying the sicknesses in the mental patients. But they know not really as much as they do now, that there is some balance in the situation in the brain, you know. They know so much more now than they did when Helli was sick. I really don't know. They treated them very nice in the hospital, I have to say that. Because Helli was always very clean, very neat. You could not go in the room where they slept. They had many people, there. There were no single rooms or two-bed rooms like you have here. It was more like 10 or 12 people in a hall, they call it a hall, you know. When we went there, Helli would come out. You'd never go to the bedroom; you never saw her bed or anything like that. She came out and then there were little rooms where people were allowed to go with the patients, the patients who are behaving well. You know, there were patients there who attacked their mothers and fathers and visitors. I was attacked once by a patient who was just let out from the sleeping area. I wore a hat and she tore my hat off. I was scared to death but then Helli came and Helli was always very good. She behaved very well.

**Interviewer:** She would only be with female patients?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, yes. There were only--male and female were separated- separate pavilions.

**Interviewer:** I thought we'd go back a little bit to the beginning. Mention that Helli was born in September, 1911 and you were sixteen months younger?

**Emmi Lehner:** Thirteen, 7th of March 1913.

**Interviewer:** March 7, 1913 and you were the only two children?

**Emmi Lehner:** Only two children, yes.

**Interviewer:** Were you at that time, living in the third district or --?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, no. We lived at our grandmother. My mother became a widow when she was 21, when my father went to war and was shot in Russia. We lost our father.

**Interviewer:** That was in 1914?

**Emmi Lehner:** No, my father was--didn't go to war. My mother hid him. He didn't want to go to war. He never wanted to shoot or do anything like this. He had no training in it. His father was a--had a most beautiful store in Vienna of antique pictures like Van Gogh's and very, very famous painters. My father was supposed to go to America to deliver a Van Gogh, I think it was, to the Vanderbilt's in America. He was a gambler. My father was, unfortunately, not on good terms with his father because he was a gambler quite a bit, roulette, you know, casinos in France He lost that picture and came back. The war broke out and my mother did hide him for two years. In '14 the war broke out, in '16, they got him--they sent him on the Russian front; and one month later he died, he was killed.

**Interviewer:** So he was killed in 1916?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes. We were very young and my mother became a Red Cross nurse. During the war, everybody had to do something. She became a Red Cross nurse and met my stepfather as a patient. He

was shot in the shoulder and lost a lot of blood. My mother was one of his nurses there. They fell in love and married when they were very young because my mother was around 21. She was 16 when she got my sister.

**Interviewer:** Your stepfather was a patient in her hospital? He was a soldier?

**Emmi Lehner:** He was a soldier, a regular soldier. Even so he had Matura, had very good schooling and should have been an officer. But because he didn't answer the call of his duty right away, they made him as a regular soldier. One month later he was dead. So that was the beginning of a very hard time for us but we were very lucky because my stepfather was wonderful. He was a very, very--he loved us; he was very good to us. I would say he preferred me more than Helli. Helli always criticized him, you know, you're not my father, don't tell me this. You're not my real father, things like that Helli would say. But he was very good to us, all his life until he died.

**Interviewer:** When did he marry your mother?

**Emmi Lehner:** He married my mother in 1926.

**Interviewer:** His name was--?

**Emmi Lehner:** Artur Celebrini. Like A-B, C-e-l-e-b-r-i-n-i.

**Interviewer:** That's an Italian name.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes. His father was from Fiume I think, and his mother was from Austria.

**Interviewer:** Your mother, her name was also Emma. So you were named after your mother?

**Emmi Lehner:** Emma? Helli and I, we had one godmother and her name was Melani. We have both our middle names are Melani. Helli was Melani Lebel, L-e-b-e-l and Emma--

**Interviewer:** Melani, can you spell that please?

**Emmi Lehner:** M-e-l-a-n-i. Melani. The girl like in Gone With the Wind.

**Interviewer:** So Helene Melani Lebel.

**Emmi Lehner:** Helli, that's H-e-l-e-n-e. She was probably in when she was in the hospital under Lebel. You know there's an accent sign on the last "e". That's why we say Lebel, and not Lebel.

**Interviewer:** Yes, so there's an accent on the last 'e'?

**Emmi Lehner:** The last e, an accent sign on there.

**Interviewer:** French style?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yeah, well he came from French descent.

**Interviewer:** Now what religion were--?

**Emmi Lehner:** We were always Catholic.

**Interviewer:** Catholic.

**Emmi Lehner:** Always. When I married, I married-in the, what you call it, not in the Church because my husband's father was Jewish, his mother was a Christian. I did not want to become Jewish or anything like



that. I was seven years in a convent and they were--in Vienna. I just didn't want to change my religion. I wasn't a religious person but I didn't want to change it.

**Interviewer:** You were baptized in the Catholic religion?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, I was baptized.

**Interviewer:** Both you and Helli were raised as Catholics?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, as Catholics, we were in the convent together.

**Interviewer:** Your mother was also Catholic?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, Catholic, my stepfather was Catholic too.

**Interviewer:** Your stepfather was Catholic. What about your father?

**Emmi Lehner:** My father was considered--in his birth certificate which I found in my mother's desk. He was "confessionslos" (without religion) since he was sixteen. He was from Jewish parents but confessionslos.

**Interviewer:** So he was of Jewish ancestry?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, absolutely.

**Interviewer:** This is Alfred now.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, Alfred. I never met his mother. My grandmother I never met because they were divorced, my grandfather and my grandmother. She went to Germany and I never met her.

**Interviewer:** Would Lebel have been considered a Jewish name?

**Emmi Lehner:** I think it would be, yes.

**Interviewer:** So the people at the hospital would have known?

**Emmi Lehner:** They would have known but I tell you frankly. I have a friend who was half-Jewish, half-Gentile and nothing happened to them in Austria. I don't think they did anything to Helli because she was Jewish, I really don't know.

**Interviewer:** Even after the Nazis came in?

**Emmi Lehner:** The Nazis decided all mental patients should be killed. They had not enough food, not enough shelter for them. Didn't want to use the hospitals for mentally sick people. You see that the bad part was that she was a lengthy there. There was no interruptions, that she was better, she could come out or things like that, you know. She was constantly there and decided probably that she was really mentally ill.

**Interviewer:** I remember although I don't know if it was from you or from Trudy, that she was supposed to be released?

**Emmi Lehner:** That I don't know. Trudy knows more--. I'll tell you what happened. Trudy knows more about my parents during the war because she was in Italy and my father, when he finally got out of jail, he was arrested by the Russians and was a year in jail when my mother got him out. He went to Italy--he spoke fluent Italian and he went to Trudy, stayed with Trudy. Then my mother came from Austria to him.

This period is very dark with me because there was a war on you know and we had--there was no possibility to talk lengthy with them, or see them or anything.

**Interviewer:** Yes. The news that I heard was that they were told that she was better and that she would be released soon. Instead of being released, she was--the notice was that she was transferred to another hospital in Germany.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes and my mother really thought it was a hospital.

**Interviewer:** In fact the name of the hospital was Niedernhart, which I think is in Bavaria.

**Emmi Lehner:** My mother said it was very far from where she was when they were in Poznan. She said there is no chance for me to travel there.

**Interviewer:** Although they really sent her to Brandenburg which is near Berlin.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, that is what I heard. In one of my letters from the Red Cross that Helli is in Brandenburg. That's what my mother wrote. But I thought it was a hospital. I didn't know Germany.

**Interviewer:** The reason I was asking, those questions about your father was that in July, 1940, the Nazis ordered that all Jewish patients in mental hospitals, and in wards and in clinics and so forth, be removed and sent to be killed. That included Mischlinge.

**Emmi Lehner:** I guess that's probably so.

**Interviewer:** Yeah and I would think that they would have known--

**Emmi Lehner:** I tell you frankly when my husband decided right away to leave because he had a Jewish father and he was brought up in the Jewish religion. In the end when we left, we were remarried in a very little church in Grinzing somewhere. I really can't remember where that was because when he decided, he does not know yet, he goes to England or he goes to Australia. His sister went to Australia, my husband's sister. To Australia, you could not come in as a Jew; you had to be a Catholic. -- Lily, who was Jewish too and married- had a Jewish husband; they decided to become Catholics. My husband became a Catholic too but the reason before, he was a devout Jew actually, but the reason he became Catholic was only for getting into some place. Then we decided to go to England. We had friends in England which we had no money so we had to depend on our friends. But it is possible that what they said before and what they do afterwards is entirely different, you know, and they probably did know that Helene was Jewish.

**Interviewer:** The name, yeah. They didn't pay attention to religion. They looked at it as heredity, race--.

**Emmi Lehner:** Probably and if I would have stayed, because in the beginning we wanted Walter to go by himself, and then I come when he sees what he is going to do, if he is going to stay in England, or if he can go to America or things like that. We didn't know that. We were very lucky, we had a very good friend here in America who gave us the affidavit but you couldn't. You see the difference now here and now everybody can come to America. I don't understand it. We had to wait two and a half years before our quota came through. In these two and a half years, we had no money; we were solely supported by friends. Selling whatever jewelry I had to wait for the affidavit to come to America. Actually, you know, in America, my husband really got a job maybe after six weeks being in the United States. He got a job in New Jersey but we wanted to go to Florida because my husband is a hotel man, you know, was a hotel man.

**Interviewer:** When did you come to America?

**Emmi Lehner:** In 1940, April, 1940.

**Interviewer:** So right in the middle of the war?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, we were escorted by U-boats and planes on top and secret service which we didn't know the name of the boat or anything. We were sent to Manchester. We went from London to Manchester and from Manchester we were with secret police to the boat. It was very exciting, we were 14 days on the--we went from there to zigzag to Greenland. In Greenland we went back, it was a long, long trip. The reason for that was because the English sent all their pictures from the galleries and the gold in that particular boat. We were not escorted because we were Jewish immigrants. We were escorted because of the jewels and the gold and the pictures which were in the same boat where we were. Very bad trip, we had to have gas masks, the whole thing all the time because we were chased by German U-boats.

**Interviewer:** What could you say about growing up? Little girls?

**Emmi Lehner:** Growing up in Austria--you see, I'm here now 51 years in the United States. I came in April '40.

**Interviewer:** Fifty-two.

**Emmi Lehner:** Practically 52 years, yes. I can tell you I have been never so happy as being here in the United States. I love this country, I think Austria is a great and beautiful country to travel through but I couldn't--. When I was back, I was back every second year to see my mother, you know, after the war, when my mother came back, when Peter was born. But for some reason, I felt always as a stranger there. I can't understand Trudy. I cannot understand it--that she would prefer to stay there. I think Trudy would prefer to stay there because I can't imagine going twice a year to Austria.

**Interviewer:** Well the latest word is that she's lonely and homesick. And wants to come back.

**Emmi Lehner:** I can't believe this. Well, you know what she's homesick for? Trudy loves New York and she loves the opera. Really this is her biggest thing. She goes to it two or three times to the opera. I don't know what it is in Austria, what she sees there. I mean here in America where you have freedom and where you have everything. You know Austria is a very small country and very -- I didn't feel at home. I was there three times after I left. I tell you frankly. I was always so glad to come back.

**Interviewer:** Well you and your sister, you grew up--it must have been difficult because your father died and then it was a war going on?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes. We were really supported by the Americans after the war.

**Interviewer:** This is after World War I?

**Emmi Lehner:** After World War I, the Americans gave us food. Without these packages which my mother picked up every week, we wouldn't survive. It was so bad. My mother had to go with Trudy's mother and another sister to the country and give them their rings and whatever they had. The farmers had eggs and chickens and things like that.

**Interviewer:** Who took care of you and Helli when you were little girls?

**Emmi Lehner:** Well, you know we had a pension, Helene and I had a pension after our father was killed in the war. We had a small pension which my mother really lived on until my father got a job in Grimmenstein where he was a Verwalter.

**Interviewer:** He was your stepfather?

**Emmi Lehner:** My stepfather. Then things were much better. We had a very beautiful home which was my grandfather's home and we lived in a very good neighborhood.

**Interviewer:** Grandfather Celebrini or--?

**Emmi Lehner:** Grandfather Lebel. We had a very nice apartment. We had my mother's--I don't know how she did it--I tell you frankly I thought it over what she had to do to survive. But when my father got a job, he had to stay away from Vienna. You know the cobblestone tiles where we had to walk horses and things, the concrete splintered off. It was very bad for people with lung trouble. He had only one lung. One lung was taken out and he was very, very sick. When I was seven or eight and Helene was nine or ten, my father was maybe seven months in the hospital. He nearly died there of tuberculosis. Then he was sent to Grimmerstein, to a sanatorium there and there he got his job. His uncle was a doctor too. His father was a doctor and he had very many friends in the medical center. We survived. When I was 14, things were more normal. Since we lived in a very good neighborhood, we went to a good school. I went to Ursulinen, the Catholic school--.

**Interviewer:** You went to a Catholic school?

**Emmi Lehner:** I went to a Catholic school.

**Interviewer:** And Helli?

**Emmi Lehner:** Helli too.

**Interviewer:** Catholic grade school?

**Emmi Lehner:** Grade school. I was there until I was in the--what you would call--

**Interviewer:** Junior high?

**Emmi Lehner:** Junior high. Junior high I went to the center of the city, to a public school but a very good public school. Because, you know, in Vienna things are very divided. For instance, working-class people live in the tenth district and white-collar workers in the first and second, third districts. Second district is completely Jewish.

**Interviewer:** Yes, the Leopold Stadt.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, the Leopold Stadt. Completely Jewish. It was still rather segregated there. The reason for that was mostly that many of the girls--these girls married Jewish men. These Jewish men came either from Poland or Russia, there was a--

**Interviewer:** Or Hungary?

**Emmi Lehner:** Hungary or Czechoslovakia. There were so many mixed marriages here. The Jewish people had, I don't know, made more money, I always thought they had more money than the other people. We did not have anything--I belonged to a club. I played land hockey when I was 14. In that club, were I don't know what, were regular people, I never asked a person what religion are you. You know, that was not--we never spoke about it. I was not prepared in religion when I was 14 so I was seven years in a convent.

**Interviewer:** A convent.

**Emmi Lehner:** I hated that, going to church on Sunday. My mother never forced me to. So when Helli and I, we were both from religion, had many Jewish friends. From the club where I belonged to and they are saying that all these people, I heard they left Vienna after Hitler came. But they were all probably Jewish or part-Jewish or whatever. We never really talked about this very much.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Did you have any--?

**Emmi Lehner:** We found after Hitler that maybe 50% were for the Anschluss. I tell you frankly, my father would say to me look if things will be much better when we are annexed to Germany. In our time, schools, first grade schools, junior high, you were always anti-German, why, I don't know. I wasn't politically informed enough to know why Austria was so against Germany. I loved Vienna naturally and I didn't want to get together with Germany. The Germans are really very different than we are. We speak maybe the same language; also I cannot understand the Berliner. They speak a different German.

**Interviewer:** But you and Helli attended grade school and junior high Catholic? And then afterwards--?

**Emmi Lehner:** After that, we went to public school.

**Interviewer:** The gymnasium?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, we went to gymnasium. I went only three years and then I switched to a--I was very good in drawing--I went to Kunstgewerbeschule. This is where you learn drawing and things like--and anything to do with painting and handcrafts and things like that-. I went there and then I went to the hotel school. One year at the hotel school; there's where I met my husband. Her father was the--. He was the ---. When I married, I was the --. His father thought I should do something.

### Side B

**Interviewer:** I just want to ask a little bit more about Helli's studies.

**Emmi Lehner:** Well, Helli was an especially bright person.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Emmi Lehner:** Very, very bright. She was not good in school, but she was very good in geography, whatever I wanted to know about homework and I didn't know what to do, I was not a good student, I went--I asked Helli and Helli always knew. Helli was another one who went to the opera all the time. She loved opera. Naturally we could only afford stehplatz like Trudy did when she was a young girl. But we were very close to Trudy and Otto, very close because we were (the children of) the two youngest sisters and they were always together. We went to Sommerfrische, vacation, outside of Vienna. Tante Melli was very well-off. She married a very rich man, had a very good business. We were always together. We had one Fraulein together, we were always together. Sometimes when we were little, we spent--. Trudy left, Trudy left for Italy. I think it was the year before.

**Interviewer:** '37.

**Emmi Lehner:** '37, yes. Then naturally everything broke apart.

**Interviewer:** Now did Helli want to be anything in particular?

**Emmi Lehner:** She wanted to be a lawyer.

**Interviewer:** A lawyer.

**Emmi Lehner:** That's why she was in a law office and went to the university to study law.

**Interviewer:** So she finished gymnasium and then she attended the university. You said in Graz and in Vienna?

**Emmi Lehner:** In Vienna. In Graz, I understood that when she went with my step grandmother, she went to the university for lectures and things like that. She was always intellectual, I have to say that. But then, you know, after I married and she started--she became sick.

**Interviewer:** So she was a student until '35?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And she was a part-time legal secretary?

**Emmi Lehner:** A legal secretary and she started there--the lawyer called my mother and said you know there's something wrong with Helli. She sits all the time on the window and talks to the people outside. She would go to the window and call people who walked by. He said if she doesn't change that very much, I don't think I can keep her. I think Helene came home and it really started with her. Because the day my mother took her when we were told to take her to the Allgemeine in the car from the hotel and I took my mother and Helli and Tante Melli to the hospital, to the Allgemeinen Krankenhaus. There she was six months, very bad. Very bad then--now this was really very bad. For Christmas we came with Christmas tree and presents and all that and she threw it out. She had a bad spell and she was very bad--had to put her in restraints.

**Interviewer:** This was after you had married?

**Emmi Lehner:** I was already married. Everything was bad. Broke my heart because--.

**Interviewer:** There was little you could do?

**Emmi Lehner:** Very little I could do but one day I--really a few months before we decided to leave, I went there and it was summer and Helli said, let me have your hat and gloves and bag. And she had a dress on; they allowed her to when she went out. She was outside the perimeter of the place where she lived. They allowed her to go into the park. They had a park and in the park there were always two nurses who walked together and watched people who were on the outside. You couldn't walk away because there was a gate. At the gate, you had to have a pass to get into the park and get out. Helli said all of a sudden, don't I look nice. She looked beautiful. Had a hat on, gloves on, and my bag and she took my arm and said let's go out now. As we approached that gate, and the gate, two nurses were walking around right there. She screamed and then she was very bad for a while, for a few weeks. But she wanted to get out.

**Interviewer:** She never paid any attention to politics, did she?

**Emmi Lehner:** Unfortunately, we all didn't. We should have but we didn't have television yet. We didn't read the newspapers. Young people were not interested. Those at the university did. The university students, as a rule, did.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that's why I asked, because she was a law student.

**Emmi Lehner:** She was not. Helli was not political, not at all.

**Interviewer:** Was she engaged at any time?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, she was. She was engaged when she was 16 to a man who loved her very much but she had somebody else in mind. This man was a drug addict and was killed on his motorcycle. This other man always wanted to visit her but my mother didn't want it to continue. She liked men very much, very fond of boys. She always warned me, you know. We were very close and she would always say, Emmi, never go with any man, never do anything until you get married. Very religious in her way. When she was in the hospital, she became very religious. But she wasn't when she was normal.

**Interviewer:** So she became religious in the hospital?

**Emmi Lehner:** In the hospital. It was always stages, three weeks of this, three weeks of that.

**Interviewer:** This would be Catholic religious?

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Even though the hospital was not Catholic?

**Emmi Lehner:** The hospital was not but it was a county hospital. I don't know what they were but they had a chapel in there. You had to have a chapel. You know, like the Allgemeine, there's a chapel in the compound but it doesn't need it. They ask you when you--whatever. But they do the same here. You know that here all the time, you have to give your religion; they ask you what religion.

**Interviewer:** And hers was given as Catholic?

**Emmi Lehner:** Catholic, yes. You see when my mother remarried and he was a Catholic, there was no other way. We were not brought up—my father was “confessionslos,” he did not want to be any denomination, you know. I mean, I can remember, I was little, I was so small when he died but --. I was glad that I have this Catholic religion, very good religion.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Emmi Lehner:** But that's the story. I think you're right when they find out she is partly Jewish, officially they--. I don't know what happened to her officially. Officially in Vienna, that I can't tell you. Trudy was away and her mother was married to a Jew. So she wouldn't go back, it was March. She wouldn't go back for anyone because she did not know what happened. She was too, she was Evangelisch. Trudy was not Jewish she was Evangelisch because her stepmother was Evangelisch.

**Interviewer:** Yes, she said that her father was Jewish, her mother was Catholic and they were brought up as Protestants.

**Emmi Lehner:** As Protestants, yes, I know about Trudy and Otto. That was already so crazy in Europe, you know. Once here, I'm living--, I don't know if you know Miami--.

**Interviewer:** Never been there.

**Emmi Lehner:** Well, you know if you would be here, there is--people are religious in this country, far more than we were, ever, even now. They are going to church on Sunday, I don't but I--people around me, all around me neighbors and all that. They are going to church and the Jewish people are going to the temple. You know when my husband was here, I go--went with him once a month to the temple. I don't know nothing about Jewish religion but I mean I--my husband wanted to do this for his father. You know, very fond of his father. He went every month to the temple. Had a very beautiful temple here, Second Place in Miami. My husband always went there. There were- but here people are very religious, far, far more religious than anybody I knew in Austria. Austria, you don't go to church much. Because there are

so many Mischlinge there, an enormous amount. You know I understand now probably Trudy will tell you that Vienna is overrun with foreigners. You could have Romania, Hungary, Poland. Everything is good in Vienna. It is in one way good because business is very good. The hotels are all sold out. This is apparently good. The dollar is very low and I'm very happy about that. As soon as I get my pension from them. I found my husband had a pension from Vienna, through his father. I don't know what happened now that I am--I don't think the churches are overrun in Vienna.

**Interviewer:** No, no, only by tourists.

**Emmi Lehner:** Only by tourists and they only want to look at it because they are old and they are beautiful. Vienna is beautiful, there's nothing to say about it but I have no feeling toward it, not to--.

**Interviewer:** And the other cities aren't bad. Graz. Salzburg--

**Emmi Lehner:** Salzburg is beautiful, beautiful. You know, the first time after 25 years, after I was away for 25 years, and I came to Vienna. My parents stayed in Graz because my mother's mother died there and she left the apartment to them. I was there with the children and I tell you I was impressed. I had never seen Graz before. Very impressed, very nice. Salzburg is special nice but it's a tourist town. Graz is not a tourist town.

**Interviewer:** No, which is one reason why I like it.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, have you been in Graz?

**Interviewer:** Yes. I've been to --.

**Emmi Lehner:** How come you didn't go to Vienna?

**Interviewer:** I've been to Vienna. Oh, yeah, I've been to Vienna several times.

**Emmi Lehner:** Did you see the Imperial Hotel?

**Interviewer:** I can't say I've been inside, no.

**Emmi Lehner:** You should have seen it inside because the staircase goes up and the pictures there--.

**Interviewer:** I went to the Hofburg and the Schronbrunn and the Belvedere but--

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, very nice. I lived out there. We lived with my grandmother when I was very small, right after my father was killed, we lived there. My mother went back home and we lived and every day I was- I loved animals, I used to go there every day when I was little at my grandmother's. I loved it, it's really beautiful there. I have to say the outskirts of Vienna and all that, it's very beautiful. But it is not now because of this--you know, there's a lot of foreigners walk around there, speak different languages. Hard to- can't stand it.

**Interviewer:** Well, in that way, it's a lot like New York.

**Emmi Lehner:** But New York is still America. You know, it's--I don't know. I love New York myself. I lived there six months and I loved it but I wouldn't like to live there. I prefer to live here. You should come one day to Miami and I take you around. It's beautiful.

**Interviewer:** My brother lived there for a couple of years. He went to med school in Miami.



**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, well I think it is very nice. It's very bad everywhere, you know, because of the crime and all that. I go to the big hospital where I have--Peter in now. I'm so scared to drive there, I can't tell you because there are--when you cross northwest, northeast to northwest, all black and when they are going like you see on television, one of our anchorwoman, with a gentleman, was attacked.

**Interviewer:** I didn't know that.

**Emmi Lehner:** They broke the window and they were cut. They were in the middle and there were cars right, left back and front. They broke that window and hit them, hit her in the eye. She was very lucky that she saved her eye but they took the purse. You see, people leave their purse on the other side. My car doesn't have air-conditioning, I have to have it prepared. I have to have windows open, very little but it is so hot here in Miami; yesterday 96, I thought that I would die. The weather has changed greatly. We had so much rain before but apparently the pollution and all that is affecting the air right now. It is really hot here, not the way to come here. Trudy was only here two days, unfortunately. I can't wait until she comes back.

**Interviewer:** Well, in two weeks, three weeks.

**Emmi Lehner:** We talk on the phone a lot.

**Interviewer:** I just want to check now that I have the right spelling. Helli, H e-l-e-n-e and then Melani, the middle name, Me-l-a-n-i and then Lebel; there's an accent ---

**Emmi Lehner:** L-e-b- and the last e-l--

**Interviewer:** Accent grave, right?

**Emmi Lehner:** People say always Lebel, you know. It is Lebel.

**Interviewer:** Then Hellie is H-e-l-l-y.

**Emmi Lehner:** No, no "y".

**Interviewer:** No, no "y"?

**Emmi Lehner:** H-e-l-e-n. Her name is Helen.

**Interviewer:** No, I'm talking Hellie. When--

**Emmi Lehner:** Oh, we call her--my nickname was Emmi and my real name is Emma.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Emmi Lehner:** Helli was Helen like your name here, Helen. Same name but we called her Helli. Called her H-e-l-l-i.

**Interviewer:** "i"?

**Emmi Lehner:** "i", not "y". Just like my Emmi is "i".

**Interviewer:** Okay. Cause I had an envelope here and it said Helly Angelegenheit and it had a "y" on there.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yeah, then she misspelled it. Her birth certificate is Helene. Melani, we both have the same middle name. Trudy's mother was called that name.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and then, let's see. Photos, I have, as I said, we have the copy of Helli with Lydi.

**Emmi Lehner:** Yes, I have the same thing.

**Interviewer:** That's the photo that we'll use on the ID card.

**Emmi Lehner:** The only other picture I have of Helli is at my wedding. She was at the wedding.

**Interviewer:** A group shot?

**Emmi Lehner:** A group shot. Helli is on there. She was just out six months when it started again.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I thank you very much.

**Emmi Lehner:** Thank you very much for taking the time and all that. I appreciate it very much. Thank you so much and I hope I see you when I come to Washington.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I look forward to it.

**Emmi Lehner:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** Goodbye and good luck.

**Emmi Lehner:** Thank you.

**Interviewer:** Bye.