

This interview with Carmen Appel. This is Julie Orenstein.

You said that you been in [Norman] for eight years?

I'm sorry. I didn't understand what you--

You had been in Norman Avenue for eight years?

Yes. right.

And then where did you move?

We moved [INAUDIBLE]. And that was a house that started to being built. My husband saw it coming up and always telling me how he like this. And we bought it from the builder. It was entirely new.

So your husband was making pretty good money then?

Yes, fairly good. Considering.

And he was still working for the [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, for the company. Yes.

And then at what point did he start his own business?

When, as I said, this company folded up. And he-- in fact, he quit when he saw, he was well-acquainted of course with the conditions that he knew that was coming, and he quit.

Then my daughter got married and her husband had done some similar work, not exactly the same. So the two of them got together, and opened their own company. Now-- the two grandsons are in the business. They're old enough to [INAUDIBLE].

Now your son-in-law you said came from Poland?

Yes.

What were the circumstances of his being in Poland?

Very unfortunate circumstances, and he has really a sad story to tell. His two sisters and parents were shot and he was underground. He was fleeing from a train where they wanted to deport him, and got shot in his leg. And considering his background, I'm always amazed what he made of himself.

He must have been very young.

Yes, very young. I think nine years.

When he was shot?

Yeah.

How did he survive?

In the underground, and I think the older people took more or less care of him, and he learned the tricks of the trade, so

to speak. So with the farmers trying to get the chicken, or whatever. I don't know. I hate to ask him. I feel it brings back the bad memories. I really never question him too much about it.

And how did he finally make his way to America? You said your son-in-law had relatives here that gave him an affidavit.

Yes. I assume that he got in touch with them or from the agency got the address. I don't know anymore. But they had him come to Dayton. And he lived with them for a while.

What kind of agency was there in Europe for this sort of thing?

Well something similar like the HIAS. And I fortunately had no dealings with them. We came on our own.

What was-- the HIAS, you said?

Yeah.

What was that exactly?

Something like international-- I don't know the association for the displaced, or --

But they were just an independent organization that helped people?

Yeah. So many people didn't have relatives, and wanted to leave the country. And maybe they were helpful in sending them to South America or to whatever country was willing to take them in. With my husband's parents-- by the way, when we left, it was the day of the pogrom, when they lined up the men on the streets, the Jewish men, and threw the prayer books and burnt them.

And when we came to the railroad station, and the Nazis were standing around, telling us that the last train had left, which wasn't true. But we left in such a hurry, even if we were prepared to leave in the near future, that my husband had no time to say goodbye to his parents, which was also very sad.

And the older people, many of them didn't believe that this can happen. And they thought they will live out their lives where they were born, and didn't make an attempt to get the necessary papers. At that time you had to have a number, to meet the quota, and all this involved going after these papers. They were not used to it. And this was the reason that they were not prepared.

Then when we came here, we tried to get their papers and whatever was required. And that was dragged out, because the Jewish agency here was not informed. The most important places were in New York. Until they got here, the necessary information sometimes took too long.

And they were very slow with even writing to the places. And they just didn't realize the seriousness of it. So my husband's parents were waiting then for some papers in addition to what we gave or mailed them. Of course, we had made out-- the same affidavit was made out for us. But our income was by far not, but it was requested. And my husband's brother lived in new York, and we often go to him. And he didn't-- he had to worry about his daily income, and didn't go after. His sister lived in Chicago and about the same story. So it was mostly left to us.

By the time we had then an affidavit ready for Cuba, where they would have entry maybe, due to some very sad circumstances the papers were not notarized here, which they should have known. And then they had to send back. And then more time elapsed, and it was too late. He didn't get them out. They were deported like my grandmother, to Theresienstadt and never heard from.

Did you ever find out what happened?

Well, through Si Burick, the young sportswriter. He went to Europe, and we asked him at the time. This was many years ago, if he could find out any information. And he-- maybe he knew more than he wanted to tell us. But they were deported and that was all. They perished like so many others.

I was listening to another interview, a man who was in Theresienstadt, but so close to the end that really shortly after he arrived, the Germans were rattled by the Russians, and he was able to leave. He didn't know much about conditions earlier when they were very bad. But did you hear anything about that Theresienstadt? What--

Well, we were aware that if they take anyone to these places that they would not come out alive anymore. We knew that. And but being here, we couldn't do anything about it. And even those that were close, they couldn't. [INAUDIBLE]

You were telling me, when you still live in Frankfurt about the air raids.

Yeah. Well when they pinpoint what airplanes came over English or French, I don't know. As soon as the sirens sounded, if we were in school, we were herded into a hallway or whatever as schoolchildren, and told what to do. And when we get home and it happened at night, which happened frequently, it was a frightening experience for a child. And I saw the fear in my mother's face, and my grandmother too. We ran into the cellar and sat there for hours, with the bombs falling, and the-- the sirens, and the airplanes very close.

One time, they hit the opera house. And they hit houses close by where we lived.

So you had that fear to deal with. But what other things did you feel? I mean you were aware of the camps, and were you afraid of being arrested?

Of course. I had a tan color suede jacket that I wore when Hitler came into power, to give the impression that this was matching their uniforms. And people were afraid to look around on the streets, or congregate on the streets. When two or three people were standing, they were looking around, who was behind them. You had to be always afraid you were watched, and your conversation was watched, and all this.

And I think I mentioned to you when we got married in 1933, this was the year when Hitler came into power. It was in the neighbor's building, and we had police protection outside. That time they still gave us protection. Later on, it was out of the question.

And then when we made the list that they requested of items that we want to take with us, anything that was just newly purchased, we had to pay the same amount to the government as a fine, or whatever you want to call it.

Well, the police protection you had, what were you afraid of?

Of Nazis coming in and disturbing, or making trouble, or--

Nazi party members?

Yes. Yes, that I remember very well.

Did you-- let's see, I think the wearing of the yellow star, did that begin in about '36, or was that later?

I think so, yes. They requested to wear the yellow star on the sleeve. The names in the passports were changed. Any woman's name was Sarah. And the men's name--

I think it was Israel.

Israel.

And I know this may be difficult, and it's a little difficult for me to ask. But how did you feel when you had the yellow

star on?

Terrible. I mean you know before that, you felt like you're a citizen like all the others. And then you never knew anymore who was your friend in Germany. You didn't trust anyone anymore. The stores, many had the signs, Jews not wanted. Everything was rationed, also for the others, not just for Jewish people.

But this is why Hitler decided to make more of what he called lebensraum more space. Germany is not large. And the people were hungry, and the situation was really bad. And this is why he got so many to follow him. Because he promised them, you will get the better life, and you will have all the things you miss now in camp and so on.

I don't know if I asked you this question before. But after you arrived in America, did you experience any antisemitism in New York City?

I don't think so. No. We felt people were kind. And I cannot complain about any such incidents. Of course, we still had that fear that we did not provoke anything, or make statements in public. We are not that kind of people. And you know, if you get up on a soapbox and you make speeches, that maybe find that out in certain people. But we avoided crowds. We're just dealing with that fear in us.

And the other thing I wanted to ask was you lived with a great deal of fear in Frankfurt. Was there a moment when you knew you were safe?

In Frankfurt?

After you left.

Well, I think as soon as we arrived in Holland, we felt safer. But we still had the urge to leave Europe as fast as possible. We had booked on the [SHIP NAME] And because we were fleeing, we couldn't go to Hamburg and get on the ship. So we went to Holland first, and then to England, and waited in Southampton for the date when this boat would arrive.

While we were safe in London, we still as I said, wanted to get away to the United States. And we rented a furnished apartment, and our own furniture came that month. It was still allowed. Well, the ship was [BACKGROUND NOISE] in a huge wooden box lined with parchment paper, and our furniture was very well wrapped and everything. And we were notified about it, by I think the port authorities that it had arrived.

In-- in new York. We had rented an apartment on the fifth floor, a walk-up house. And they brought it on a huge truck, and unpacked it on the street, and the custom officer was standing by. Now, one of the items they brought out was a small safety box. And the customs officer was holding it, and it made a noise. He said I have to know what is in there. I had no idea. I just couldn't remember anymore. After all, between the time we packed it and there were six months had lapsed. I couldn't remember.

So I had to call my husband. Excuse me. I had no keys. But he had the key. He open it. Was a thimble in there.

Terrible.

Then there came some empty boxes. He asked me, why did you bring these empty boxes over? I said, they were not empty when we left. The Nazis confiscated our silverware. They left us a spoon and a fork and a knife for each person in the family.

And later on, as strange as it might sound, they made it known that we can claim what they had confiscated. And they had given us receipts, which is also unbelievable.

That they stole.

Yeah, stole, but they still right So we made that claim, and they reimbursed us by no means the real value, and we never

bought silver in addition to what we had. If you want to, I can show you some pieces. And that was the experience with the custom officers.

And we lived there, in that. That was facing the back-- the back side of other apartment houses, and also in close by was a swimming pool. I watched, as a child of course, a young child, my child I should say. She watched the people who went swimming there. And there were some in costumes as the clowns. And they jumped from the diving board. And she had the best time watching this every day.

Here?

In Manhattan, yeah.

So you had your son then when your daughter was already about to start high school?

Yeah.

And so you--

My son was born here in Dayton.

And so you had the experience of raising another-- a whole other child.

Yes. It's different, right?

And your son-in-law is in the business with your father?

With my husband.

Oh, with your husband, I'm sorry, as well as two of their sons?

Yes.

So your daughter has how many children?

Four, two sons, two daughters. And they're all married now.

And they live in Dayton?

Three. The youngest one who just got married a month ago, who lives in Indianapolis.

Now, you were telling me that the older of the two granddaughters is an advertising person for a radio?

For a radio station, yes. She writes commercials, right.

And do any of them have children?

No, not yet, not any of them.

And your son [INAUDIBLE]?

Yes. He's not married.

You were telling me also that he's studying--

Physical therapy. Yeah. He just called and said he wants to come over here and study.

Oh.

He didn't [INAUDIBLE] yes, he is going into the finals next week, so.

So most of your family is right around here, except for the one granddaughter.

Yes, fortunate, yes.

That's very fortunate.

We consider ourselves very lucky that they're here.

Now, is your husband retired?

No. His work is his life. And he's eager to go to work, and he enjoys it.

And you do a great deal of volunteer work?

Yes. I call myself a professional volunteer.

What types of things are you doing now?

Well, after I was in touch with many newcomers, I gained a great deal from doing that. I feel I really met people, different backgrounds and so on. And I joined organizations. The first one I joined was the YWCA, because I took additional English lessons here, conversations, till they said I graduated. So then they even arranged speaking engagements for me, volunteered of course, at churches and other groups to tell some of my experiences.

And then I joined some Jewish organizations. I was president of the B'nai B'rith women's group, and I'm now co-president of the Covenant House, you know, the home for the aged.

I'm just curious. What does B'nai B'rith do in this area, what kinds of activities?

The major project is fighting antisemitism, the anti-defamation league and they support the home for rehabilitation in Cleveland. They have a children's home in Israel. And mostly helping, if necessary, they give scholarships to young people who couldn't afford otherwise go to college, things of that sort.

I'm curious also you said that you gave speeches in churches. There is a big difference in the attitude of religion such as Catholicism, Protestant, Presbyterians rather, and Methodists. They seem to have a better attitude toward Jews than the more fundamentalist religions like Baptist, Nazarene. Did you find out, or did you even speak in any Baptist and Nazarene or the more fundamentalist churches?

I don't recall that I did.

I was just curious to hear. I've heard from--

I didn't make a point of advertising this. If people asked me, I was glad to do it. But I was not trained for it. And I found they were very kind to me to ask me, and sometimes it ended up in question-and-answer session, you know. That was all right with me. But now because I also have a 97-year-old mother. I have to do a lot for her. And that takes some of my time.

And I'm corresponding secretary for one of the organizations, True Sisters. We had a very nice boat ride this week. We do a lot for cancer research. They support the Children's Hospital.

This is B'nai B'rith?

No this is True Sisters.

True Sisters?

United Order of True Sisters is the title. And a few years ago, I don't know if this interests you actually, one woman was membership chairman, and she had what I thought an outstanding idea, also a very cooperative husband. He dressed up as a chauffeur, with a chauffeur cab. And they drove to houses where they expected the women to join eventually this organization, True Sisters. And they presented on a silver tray, an invitation to attend a meeting.

She got 28 members this way. Now, I was voted as the membership chairman the following year. And I thought I cannot top what she was doing, impossible. You know, I said, I really don't know. I have no husband who would dress up as a chauffeur. And he's not that organization minded. He always says, I'm doing too much. And he's not too much in favor. Anyhow, I enjoyed.

So I sat down and composed a short letter, and mailed the letters, about 100 of them, all handwritten. And my ending sentence was True Sisters needs you. We hope you never need us. Thinking of the cancer work they do. I got 64 members that way. So they had never experienced anything like that.

Wow. That's very good.

I can sell what I believe in. I learned it from my father. I give him credit for that. I am, of course, active in our sisterhood from our synagogue. I'm a life member of most of these organizations, Hadassah also, life member.

What does Hadassah do?

Mostly for Israel. And of course, the hospital in Israel is supported by Hadassah, you know. And this is their main project.

I would like to say that we are very grateful to be in the United States. And we always think of, of course our background, and we don't forget the country where we came from. But we every day appreciate to be here, and have met wonderful people. That's-- I'm not sure.