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Dr. Margaret Ebert Interviews on: June 4, 1978, June 7, 1978, August 19, 1979, and October 8, 1979

Summary

- Dr. Margaret Ebert [nee Elsale] was born in Karlsruhe, Baden, Germany on June 12, 1898; her great-grandfather had settled the town in 1712-13; opened store; her father grew up in Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart; very religiously mixed community, mostly Catholic and Protestant
- Had one brother who emigrated to US and professor at Emory University in Atlanta; she married in 1925; emigrated from Germany on May 14, 1940 (or 1939); could not come immediately to US because of quotas
- She and husband, Paul, attended University of Heidelberg; she earned Ph.D. in social work and economics
- Husband was lawyer until Hitler's laws; husband emigrated to Scotland in 1939, shortly after the Kristallnacht (Nov. 10, 1938)
- One daughter, Hannah, went to Switzerland after Kristallnacht; homesick so returned and lived together in Karlsruhe; moved to Mannheim; Margaret worked as social worker for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Jewish Emigration Association
- As child, went to synagogue on High Holy Days; Seder; Hanukah; celebrated Christmas with maid
- She spoke French and German, and studied Latin and Greek
- Grandfather and father were well-respected men who served on the Chamber of Commerce, the "Reichpostrat" (council for the German mails) and the "Reicheisenbahnrat" (council for the German railroads); father told to resign when Hitler came to power
- Did not experience anti-Semitism prior to Hitler coming to power; after Hitler in power, some friend avoided her; believes her daughter, who was 13 at the time, suffered more; but also said that most people did not support anti-Semitism; no one realized how bad it was until Nuremberg Laws of 1936—and by that time, US had quotas
- Many in her Jewish community were taken to the camps in Gurs in unoccupied southern France, in hopes of being able to emigrate from there; but some ended up at Auschwitz after Gurs
- As part of her social work, she helped to get Jews out of Germany; 50 people who had been in her charge were on the ship, the St. Louis, which was turned back to Europe at Cuba, and its Jewish emigrants were taken to concentration camps
- Severe food limits on milk, bread and meat during war; on Jews and non-Jews
- Husband's parents committed suicide in 1933; they wanted their money to go to their sons to emigrate
- When she and husband arrived in New York, he became an optician; he spoke English; she learned it
- Had some Jewish friends in US, but when she tried to go to temple in New York to say the Kaddish for her parents, was not allowed in because she had not bought a ticket; joined the Unitarian Community Church because it was liberal and did not require that you believe that Jesus was the savior; husband "not Jewish" even though he was born Jewish; family "absolutely" did not practice and did not consider themselves Gentiles; considered his family considered themselves without a religion; however, when Hitler came to power, her husband began attending synagogue out of solidarity; now she and her husband are Quakers
- From New York, moved to Yellow Springs, Ohio, where she got a job at the Felz Institute with Dr. Sontag
- Because citizen of US at first opportunity in 1945

- After Kristallnacht, every Jew had to give up his driver's license—big handicap because I went to the Gestapo nearly every day, for one reason or another. Then, asked to move out of our apartments if they were not in Jewish houses. Then, not allowed to have maids under the age of 45, if they were not Jewish. Then, could not buy new clothes—even a black dress for mourning when parents died; not allowed to attend any concerts or theaters, or lectures; had to wear then yellow bands; and, had to use surnames that consisted of own name then (if woman) "Sarah," (if man) "Abraham"
- In 1939, Germany still allowing Jews to leave, but had to pay all money that you had as "duty" to Reich
- Daughter Hannah was present when synagogue was destroyed; she was very traumatized
- Christmas 1939—at Lake Constance (Konstanz), city on the lake; German and Swiss cities together, no border; everything like peacetime because planes could not distinguish between soils
- Was very clear that, before Hitler, felt like an "absolutely" equal citizen; "we were all Germans"; being Jewish did not supplant being German; never felt anti-Semitism until Hitler came to power; did not taken Zionism seriously; after Hitler came to power, felt "stateless"