

Renate Harlan, 8/13/1984
Interview conducted by Julie Orenstein.

Q: This is an interview with Renate Harlan by Julie Orenstein. It is August 13, 1984. We are in the family room of her home. Tell me your full name please.

A: Renate Wasserman Harlan.

Q: In what city were you born?

A: I was born in Koln, Germany [located 50.56N, 6.57E].

Q: What was the date of your birth?

A: March 7, 1928.

Q: Did you grow up in Koln?

A: Yes! Yes I did.

Q: What kind of city was it?

A: It is a very large metropolitan area, in the Western part of Germany.

Q: Was it an industrial town?

A: I am sure that there was some industry [it is located on the Rhine River, very close to the Ruhr industrial area]. I was rather young when I left so I really don't remember.

Q: How old were you when you left?

A: I was ten.

Q: How long had your family lived in Koln? [Cologne, by its English name] Do you know when or how your family came to be in Cologne?

A: My family had always lived there (there were Jews in Cologne at the time of the Crusades) or at least for some number of generations.

Q: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I have one sister.

Q: Is she younger or older?

A: She is two years younger.

Q: Were there any other family members other than your parents who lived in your house?

A: Yes, my maternal grandparents lived with us, in the house.

Q: What did your parents do for a living?

A: My father was a physician and my mother helped him in the office. Other than that she was a housewife.

Q: He went to medical school then?

A: Correct.

Q: Do you know where he went (to which medical school)?

A: You know, I am not sure.

Q: What kind of education did your mother have?

A: My mother went to the University in Bonn. [50.44N, 7.06E] She majored in History of Art. She did not get her degree because she married before she finished.

Q: Was there kind of a family tradition like that about education?

A: It was not customary to go to University back then (during the previous generations).

Q: What did your grandfather do?

A: My paternal grandfather was in the lumber business. He owned a lumberyard. My maternal grandfather was a dealer in imported fabric, mainly yard goods for men's suits.

Q: And their wives were pretty much housewives.

A: Yes.

Q: Was your family religious?

A: My paternal family yes, but my maternal family not at all.

Q: Were our paternal grandparents Orthodox?

A: There was only Orthodox. [Reform Judaism was not prevalent in that part of Germany but Conservative Judaism, as is know [sic] in Dayton had more adherents than Orthodoxy.] In other words there was no Reform movement in Europe at that time.

Q: Had you been living in an area which was more or less a ghetto?

A: No. There was no more ghetto at that time, in Cologne, when I was born.

Q: I thought that many of these neighborhoods were Jewish neighborhoods. I guess that I am wondering what the difference was between your grandparents. Were the ones assimilated?

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, they [the maternal grandparents] were rather agnostic in their attitudes. The paternal grandparents would still go to synagogue occasionally. They observed the Holy Days, Passover [anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt] and that kind of thing.

Q: Did they keep a kosher home?

A: No.

Q: Did your parents attend synagogue?

A: Not to my recollection.

Q: On the High Holy Days (the Jewish New Year)?

A: No.

Q: What was the principal language spoken at home?

A: German, until 1934. At that time my mother engaged an English-speaking nurse for the two children. She felt that the only way to learn a language is to speak it. From then on we spoke English at home all the time except when we addressed the grandparents, who lived in the house, and when we went to school.

Q: So your parents had decided that they were going to go to the U.S. already.

A: Well, my father wasn't ready, but my mother saw the handwriting on the wall. It was customary to have French-speaking personnel, [Koln is fairly close to France and Belgium] but she decided that there was no future in learning French and that the language which we would need would be English.

Q: Did your parents speak any other languages other than German and English?

A: Not to my knowledge. No.

Q: Did you think of yourself as amongst the rich or the poor?

A: I would say upper middle class.

Q: You had a nurse, but I guess that this was fairly common amongst the upper middle class?

A: No, not the middle class. I think that upper middle class families had someone for the children.

Q: Socially, did your parents relate to Jews or did they have non-Jewish friends?

A: They also had non-Jewish friends.

Q: So the family had all kinds of friends?

A: Right.

Q: Were they closer to Jews than to non-Jews? Were most of their friends Jewish?

A: I would say so, yes.

Q: Was the synagogue the cultural center for them?

A: No.

Q: They didn't belong? Did they belong to any other kind of clubs?

A: Let me go back. Belong, in the sense that American Jews belong to a synagogue also was not known, because the synagogues didn't operate on a dues structure. In Germany, all religious organizations, all churches, are subsidized by the state. So, either you went or you didn't go. You see it is an entirely different structure than what we are accustomed to in this country.

Q: Did they belong to any social club?

A: they might have; I don't remember because I was too young.

Q: Do you recall if they enjoyed the theatre or concerts?

A: Oh yes! They were very culturally oriented.

Q: I realize that you probably won't remember this, but were you at all aware of their political beliefs?

A: No.

Q: Can you describe your childhood? What sort of a home did you have? Did you live in an apartment?

A: When I was born, my parents lived in an apartment and by the time I was five or six, my father built a very large, elaborate home. It had five stories. His office was on the main floor. The second floor was living room, dining room, kitchen and quarters for my maternal grandparents who lived with us, because my mother was an only child.

The third floor contained the master bedroom, the children's bedrooms and playroom as well as a room for the girl who was hired to take care of the children. The fourth floor was maids' quarters and there was a large laundry area and a sun deck on which we could play. I guess that it was really only four floors if you don't count the basement. That was a really large home.

Q: Was it located outside of town?

A: Yes, it was located in one of the suburban areas. On one of the main streets of the suburban area. That was because my father's office was in there. [This means that this home was ready just about the time Hitler came to power.]

Q: Did you play with your sister mostly or did you have other friends?

A: We had friends in the neighborhood. You know, kids whose parents were friendly with my parents, relatives, whose children were playmates.

Q: In other ways, how would you describe your childhood; was it a happy one?

A: Oh yes! Yes. A little more structured than we would structure our children's lives now. That was my mother's personality, mainly. Everything was very compartmented. We were very programmed, such as music lessons, dancing lessons, gymnastic lessons, and art lessons.

Q: Are there any special incidents which you recall from your childhood?

A: I remember traveling with my parents.

Q: What sorts of places did you travel to?

A: The first trip which we took was right after I had had the measles. It was thought at that time that fresh mountain air was good for recuperations. My parents were going on a trip to Switzerland and they decided that that was just what I needed, after having gotten over the measles. So they took me along.

Q: What other kinds of places did you go to?

A: We had relatives in Amsterdam [52.22N, 4.54E] so one summer we went to the seashore in Holland. I remember that trip. The English girl who was taking care of us, who lived with us, had her family near London. One summer her parents asked her to bring us children with her so we went to England for a couple of weeks to visit with her family. She had two younger sisters, so the sisters came back to Koln with us and visited with us. We have retained our relationship with all of them to this day. As a matter of fact, my husband and I were in London two years ago and we went to see them.

Q: Did you attend school in Cologne?

A: Yes.

Q: Was it a public school or a private school?

A: No. By the time I was in school, Jewish children were already restricted to having to go to Jewish schools.

Q: What year was that?

A: It must have been in 1934.

Q: So you went to a school which had been set up by the Jewish community?

A: I don't really know that, but it was a Jewish school. There were only Jewish teachers and Hebrew was taught. I learned to read and write Hebrew.

Q: You also learned the usual academic subjects?

A: Yes, right!

Q: You stayed in that school until you left Cologne?

A: Yes.

Q: You were five when you went to school?

A: Six.

Q: So the school had only Jewish children?

A: Yes.

Q: What languages do you speak now?

A: German and English.

Q: When you were not in school, to what extent did you associate with non-Jewish children?

A: I do not recollect.

Q: At this time, were some of your parents' non-Jewish friends beginning to reject you?

A: I don't remember. I had heard my mother speak out. My mother had a teacher whom she was very, very close to. This was a friendship which

lasted throughout their adult lives. This teacher married a clergyman. By 1937 or 1938, they had been very close. They traveled together – really a close friend. I remember hearing my mother say that she had run into this clergyman and he did not acknowledge her on the street.

Q: So that friendship had collapsed?

A: Well, she felt that it was not the friendship which had collapsed, it was the political pressure which had been put on it.

A: Did you notice any anti-Semitism outside of school; in other words with all the Jewish kids going to one school, did your school become a target?

Q: Oh, I can remember one incident. The school was downtown, so I had to take a streetcar to get there, and I remember one day, walking from school to the streetcar. That was a distance of several blocks. Children chased me yelling insults and throwing stones, and that sort of thing.

Q: Did that happen often?

A: Only once that I can remember.

Q: That is enough!

A: Right, right. You know that is a lot for a six or seven year old to have to deal with.

Q: But there was not a regular gathering, or anything like that?

A: No, no.

Q: What year did you leave Cologne?

A: We left Cologne right after Kristallnacht [the night of November 9th and 10th, 1938, when all the synagogues and Jewish owned stores in Germany were looted and torched; some residences desecrated and Jewish males arrested] which was in 1938. I think we left right then, but there is an entire story there. I don't know if you want me to go into it?

Q: I would like to ask you a couple of things first.

A" All right!

Q: Do you recall your first awareness of Hitler and the NAZIS? [NAZI stands for National Socialist party which was the official name of the party led by Hitler.]

A: My first awareness was – and it is funny the kind of things which you remember – when the Rhineland, which after WWI was ceded to the French, or part of that area was, then it reverted back to Germany. [Actually the Treaty of Versailles which ended WWI determined that the French, the British and the Belgians would station troops, each in some area of the Rhineland. One of Hitler's early and most popular successes was to ask these troops, who were to assure Germany's disarmament, to leave German soil, and they left.]

I can remember my father shaving early in the morning. He was standing in the bathroom and he had the radio on. I can remember that he was listening to the speeches when that reversal was made, but I really didn't have any idea, you know. I was five, six or seven years old and then you don't have any awareness of political activities.

Q: Was your father someone to be afraid of?

A: No, he was a very kind, gentle man.

Q: That is interesting. Where did you get that impression from that he was that kind of a person?

A: Just his manners.

Q: I never heard him described like that.

Q: Oh, you were speaking of Hitler? Oh no! I thought that you were asking how I got the impression that my father was a gentle person. Oh no! I am sorry! We were talking about different men.

Q: I thought that you saw Hitler tapping children on the head and thought that that was your impression!

A: Oh, no, no, no! He was just a name to me. I didn't know who Hitler was. Until Kristallnacht there were no camps. [Actually that was not the case, however, before Kristallnacht, Jews were arrested for personal or political reasons, generally not just religious.]

Q: I believe that camps started in 1933, some of them, maybe not in any widespread way.

A: Well, very surreptitiously maybe.

Q: So you were in Germany then when the Nuremberg laws went into effect, some of the specific laws, having to carry on identification and having to adopt special names [Sarah for women and Moses for men. These were laws which were promulgated in 1935 at a NAZI party conclave legalizing anti-Jewish discriminations.]

A: I believe those laws came after we left. I remember that one day they said that my father can't practice medicine any more. [That was a law promulgated in 1934.]

Q: Do you remember what year that was?

A: No, no. I just know these things from hearing my mother talk about them. My recollections, such as they are, started with Kristallnacht.

Q: What happened that night?

A: My father was arrested and my mother called a surgeon friend of my father's who had two young boys who were the same age as my sister and I in order to warn them. However, he had already been arrested, so my mother, who drove [a rather unusual capability for a woman at that time], she was one of the few women who, at that time drove an automobile, went to pick up these two boys and took us, four children, way out of the city to gentile friends of my parents.

I remember that these friends hid us up in an attic. The four kids spent the day after Kristallnacht up in the attic. Of course these people were laying their lives on the line, because, you know, if someone would know on their door and they would be found out, it was going to be their neck. While we were there, my mother was busy. My father had been the – maybe because he spoke English – house physician to both the U.S. and the British embassies. [She probably means consulates, since the embassies were in Berlin.]

He knew the consuls at both consulates very well. As a matter of fact, the U.S. consul had a little boy our age who would come over and play, and we would go over to his house and play. When the arrest happened, my mother went over to the embassy [meaning consulate] and told them what had happened. She said: "You just have to get us

papers to get out of Germany, so that I can get my husband released!" [In 1938, the Germans freed any Jew who was not held for specific charges, as soon as he obtained the necessary papers to emigrate to some other country.]

They indeed did this. She went to the authorities with these emigration papers. Of course the U.S. had their quotas, so you couldn't get any place with them. [These were numbers of allowable immigrants from each nationality set up to maintain the makeup of the U.S. population which existed first in 1921 and 1927, except for people from Japan or China as stipulated by law.]

The British consulate [she still calls it the embassy] did give us entry papers to England, on a temporary basis, basically until we could move on to the U.S. My parents had already applied for immigration into the U.S. before Kristallnacht, but the waiting list was three or four years long at that point.

My mother was able to get him released. A few days later – I don't remember the number of days; it may only have been the next day – but after he got home, I remember that we all go on the train and went across the border to Amsterdam [that is in Holland at 51.57N, 5.25E]. I believe that Amsterdam was a five-hour ride by car from Cologne and we would occasionally go there for a weekend.

Whenever we went, my father took money across the border. [That was a highly dangerous process since it was illegal and searches both body search and disassembly of cars including such things as the spare tire were frequent and neighbors were bribed by the Nazis to spy on people hiding things and then report them. Attempts to export money – even your own – this way was a criminal offense and resulted in immediate, lengthy prison sentences. Otherwise, by 1938 individuals were allowed to take very minute sums, around \$25.00 per person with them when they left Germany] and left it with some relatives in Amsterdam. You know that was being saved toward the day when we would need it.

I remember very distinctly -- I was talking about it with a friend recently – going to the railroad station with some friends who saw us off and with the grandparents. Everybody was weeping copiously because they knew that we would never see one another again – at least that was most likely. It was a very traumatic parting.

We got on the train going to Amsterdam. We spent maybe a couple of weeks in Amsterdam before we took the boat to England. There, there

were also already friends and relatives. The two children lived with the family of the girl who had worked for us. This girl had been told several years before that she no longer could work for Jewish people. [That was part of the Nuremberg laws of 1935.] She had gotten a job in a boarding school in Italy and she was working in Italy at that point. However, her parents took us children in and my parents lived in a furnished room. You know that we had a little money, but not much. They just sat there and waited for about one year until our number came up to come to the U.S. [It was always most difficult to be allowed to work in a country not your own, since unemployment in Europe was still excessive, except in Germany where a lively armament industry as well as the paying by the state of the Nazi storm-troopers was distributing paper money.]

Q: Now the night on which your father was arrested, did they give a reason for the arrest? [The arrest came right after Kristallnacht when all Jewish males were rounded up.]

A: I don't know.

Q: They just came to the house and arrested him?

A: Yes! They said: "Come with us!" and that was that. Interestingly though, my father enjoyed such a fabulous reputation and he was so loved by his patients that the house was not touched on Kristallnacht. You know that they went around smashing windows and destroying property. [All synagogues and stores owned by Jews were looted, etc. That was more than three years after he had been allowed to practice medicine legally in Germany, since in 1934 a law came out that all Jewish doctors were, from then on, downgraded to "Jewish healers" and that no Aryan could be treated by them.]

Q: What happened to the house after you were gone?

A: Well it was purchased by somebody, however no money ever changed hands. [Actually Jewish business and properties were bought for whatever the buyer wanted to and the money was deposited in a bank and sequestered. By a law issued around 1948, all these forced sales were called back and legal disposition of properties was made.] Then there was no settlement made until long after the war when restitution payments were started. Then it was only a fraction of what it was worth, because it was a forced sale. The house is still standing. I have gone back and I saw it.

Q: Did you go to school right up to the time you left?

A: Yes!

Q: Even after Kristallnacht?

A: Yes!

Q: This family that you hid out with, what do you remember about them?

A: They were a childless couple who were near my parents' age. How they became friendly with my parents, I have no idea. I know they had traveled together. I remember that he had lost an eye during World War I, and that he had a glass eye. When my husband and I took my children to Europe in 1961, I believe, we made a stop in Cologne. We looked these people up and we had lunch with them one day. We also had dinner at their house, but subsequently we really lost touch with them. My mother died a couple of years ago. She was sort of our link to them, so now I don't know where they are and whether they are still living at this point.

Q: When you spent those two weeks with them, would you say that that was the time period?

A: Yes, about that.

Q: Did you have the feeling of being on the run?

A: No, we were kids; that was a lark! We had been there before. You know it was like another vacation.

Q: You had no feelings of fear then?

A: No.

Q: You were saying that when you were in England you and your sister were with the family of your English girl and your parents lived in a furnished room?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you live separately from them?

A: Yes, we lived separately during that year.

Q: Where did you go to school during that time?

A: You know, the English have a different school system than we do. "Public schools" are really private schools. What we would call public schools are "Downhick/Somwick" [It sounds like this but transcriber is not certain.] The family we were with were devoted Catholic people and their children attended private Catholic school. So they went to the administration at their school and talked to the sisters and explained the situation. So the sisters said yes, that we could come to school with their children.

We did that. I remember that that was sort of a weird situation because we had to attend catechism in classes and I always sort of had a feeling that the sisters were proselytizing me. You know, they were trying to sway you toward their religion and their way of thinking.

Q: You were not receptive?

A: No, you know, I sat and listened and that was that.

Q: You had a pretty sound sense of yourself as a Jewish person?

A: Not really! However, I didn't consider myself a Catholic.

Q: So you went to school there for a year. How often did you see your parents?

A: Oh, two or three times a week. You know that we would see them on weekends and maybe once during the week. They weren't too far away.

Q: What city were you in?

A: The little suburban area where we lived was Harrowfield -- [At least that is what it sounds like.] -- which is maybe one hour subway ride outside of London.

Q: That is the London subway. They lived in the same area.

A: Yes, they were in the next little suburban area.

Q: When did your number come up for emigration?

A: We came into the U.S. in December 1939. [The war between England and Germany had started in September 1939.]

Q: Were you pretty much aware when you were in England that this was just a stopping off point? That you were going to be leaving soon?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: What were your feelings about leaving Germany and going to to America?

A: I really had no strong feelings. At that age, you take whatever comes! Children then were so much more sheltered. Children were raised to be seen and not heard. I know few adults talked to children. Nobody talked to children or explained to children. They were told: "This is it; this is the way it is going to be," and that was that.

Q: Did you come to the U.S. on a boat?

A: Oh, yes! The war had already started. I can remember the blackouts in London. We did leave before the air raids started. When we left Southampton [50.55N, 1.25 W], the British waters had already been mined. I remember the first two nights out of Southampton my mother wouldn't let us go out of bed. She was up late at night because if we were going to hit a mine, she was not going to be up on deck somewhere while we were down in the stateroom where she would have to come looking for us. So we got to stay up late the first couple of nights. That was a big thing.

Q: So that seemed more like fun to you.

A: Right, right!

Q: Were you very much aware of your parent's feelings during all of this time?

A: No, no. As a matter of fact, as I mentioned to you, my mother died two years ago and I really didn't have a whole lot of understanding until I went through baskets of correspondence which I found in her house. What we were going through was amazing. I found letters from after they got here. We arrived in December to the U.S. and we went to Cincinnati where my father had a cousin who was a physician.

So my father decided to come to Ohio because that was one of the few states which still allowed foreigners to take medical boards. We lived in a very small apartment in Cincinnati and he studied with other immigrant friends whom he had made for the medical board exams. The exams were to take place in June. My sister and I went to school. All this time, things were getting worse and worse [in Germany].

My mother, of course, corresponded with her parents and my father corresponded with his parents and with his brother. My father passed the medical boards in August and went into practice in the suburban area of Cincinnati. By September 1940, he was not feeling well. My mother took him to the doctor and the doctor said that he had leukemia and that there is nothing he can do. So my father was in the hospital for weeks and then they sent him home. They said that he was to check in as an outpatient every Friday, and that they would try to transfuse him. This went on until about March or April. Then he died.

Q: This was in 1942?

A: No, in 1940, the year after we arrived. No, it was 1941, because in 1940 he went into practice. However, in this correspondence which I found when my mother died, they were trying to make arrangements to get my uncle to Cuba [at that time you could purchase visas for Cuba, Panama and China] anywhere where we could get him out to. Evidently things didn't move along. They were terribly frustrated at every turn because there were no agencies in existence to facilitate things other than, maybe, the JDC [American Joint Distribution Committee which at times worked together with HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which attempted to assist people to emigrate from Germany and all Europe at the time] which was not very helpful at that time.

Q: Let me go back just a little bit. Where did you arrive in the U.S.?

A: In New York.

Q: Did your family pick you up there?

A: Yes, we had family in New York. We stayed there for a couple of weeks.

Q: Do you recall your impressions?

- A: It was December and it was cold. That is all I can remember. As a matter of fact, it was colder than that in Cincinnati. The Ohio River was frozen. My first impression of Cincinnati was that the people could walk across to the Kentucky side. I just can't believe how bitterly cold it was. That was before pantyhose. We just had knee socks. I remember that our knees were so cold, we cried.
- Q: Did you stay with your relatives in Cincinnati at first?
- A: Just for a few days, until we were able to find an apartment.
- Q: Is that where you lived during the rest of your childhood?
- A: Only until my father knew that he had passed his boards. Then he bought a house.
- Q: What was the apartment like? In what part of the city was it?
- A: It was on Rockdale Avenue in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was a one-bedroom apartment. We, the children, had a bedroom and my parents slept on a convertible sofa bed in the living room.
- Q: So they came without much money?
- A: I don't really know.
- Q: How long did it take before your father passed his medical boards?
- A: That was six or seven months and it is August before they get the results.
- Q: During that time, did your parents do anything to make money? Did they have any income?
- A: No.
- Q: Do you have any idea how they made it?
- A: You know, the money which they had been able to get out of Germany over the years, wasn't much. I think that they got some help from our relatives.
- Q: After he passed his boards, did he go into practice soon after that?

A: Yes. The office was in his house, and he was able to start out. There was a need for a doctor in the area where he opened his practice and he soon had a nice practice.

Q: Where did you go to school in Cincinnati?

A: Walnut Hills.

Q: So it was a big advantage knowing English.

A: Oh, absolutely!

Q: You had no language problem?

A: No.

Q: What did you find different about this country? Did you find anything difficult to get used to?

A: Oh, it was very different. As I said, we were used to a very structured existence. You know, everything was programmed for us. Children were never asked or nothing was discussed with them. They were told: "This is what you are going to do. This is the way it is!" and that was that. You know, we never thought to question it. Things here were much more relaxed. I don't know whether my mother ever got used to it, at least she didn't until very much later in her life.

Q: Just the attitudes of other members of your family.

A: Right! Right!

Q: Did you make friends very quickly?

A: I think so, yes.

Q: Were there a lot of children in the neighborhood?

A: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, the house which my father bought was right across the street from the high school. Yes, we both made friends.

Q: It was pretty easy for you to fit in academically as far as subjects you already knew?

A: Yes, as a matter of fact, we both ended up a year ahead of where we should have been age-wise, on the basis of their testing. This did not bother me, but it did bother my sister. Socially, she was not able to handle it.

Q: When did you meet your husband?

A: Oh, when I was in college.

Q: What college did you go to?

A: To the University of Cincinnati. I was able to get scholarship aid, scholarship loan. I met my husband during my second year at the University.

Q: How did your mother make a living after your father passed away?

A: She got a job.

Q: Doing what?

A: Factory work.

Q: So, that is a big change in life-style.

A: Oh yes. My mother had been used to living with a silver spoon in her mouth. She had had a houseful of help so this was a real come-down for her; but she had to support two kids.

Q: Did she cope well with it?

A: I don't know whether she coped well with it, but we coped. She was a very strong, very determined person.

Q: Did you or your sister work at all to help out?

A: We always worked summers, once we were old enough so that we could get work permits.

Q: Did your sister also go to college?

A: Yes, also to the University of Cincinnati.

Q: What was your major at the University?

A: My major was Applied Arts. My sister is a Research Chemist. Chemistry was her major.

Q: Is she married also?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you find that after this experience, that your parents' attitude toward the Jewish people and their attitude towards religious practice changed?

A: Yes, my father, of course, died within a year or so, so I can't speak for him. He had always been a Zionist while in Europe. My mother, is she wasn't Jewish herself, you would say that she was anti-Semitic. She felt that the Jewish agencies, such as they were, were very unhelpful. She was very resentful about the fact that she became a widow almost as soon as she came here, and that when she wanted to send us to Sunday School, many congregations in Cincinnati wouldn't accept us because we weren't members. There was not way that she was in a position financially to become a member of a congregation. She held that grudge till the day she died.

Q: So you really kind of found yourselves not being in any way taken into the arms of the Jewish community in Cincinnati?

A: No.

Q: They didn't have any groups who reached out for refugees? [i.e. people who fled Hitler]

A: I think that it was a classic case of total misunderstanding. I remember hearing my mother talk about going to a meeting. I don't know whether it was a JCC [Jewish Community Council] or a meeting which had been organized to help refugees, and she said that it was the most ridiculous thing. They were teaching these people to sing American songs like "Mother's baby likes shortening, shortening," and she said we are worried about how we are going to get our families out of Europe and they are singing songs.

I can see both sides. I can see that the Americans were totally unaware about what was going to happen and what was happening and that, although they were well-intentioned, it missed the mark completely.

Q: What kind of efforts did your mother make in trying to get her family out of there? You said that both sets of grandparents were left in Germany, and an uncle.

A: Yes, my father's brother was still there and so were my mother's parents, and my paternal grandparents.

Q: Any other close family members whom you know about?

A: No! My father's older brother had been killed during WWI.

Q: Does your family have any idea what happened to these people?

A: My maternal grandfather died at home. My paternal grandfather and my maternal grandmother and my uncle were all taken to concentration camps. The grandparents did not survive and we really don't know any details. They just perished.

Miraculously my uncle survived. He got in touch with my mother after the war, when the Russians liberated him. I do believe that he was in the camp of Theresienstadt. [That, presumably was the concentration camp which the Nazis used to show to the Red Cross, etc. how humanely they treated inmates.] Even at that time my mother wanted him to come to this country. However, he was a bachelor and he felt that he had lived out his life. At that point he was already in his mid-fifties.

He thought that it was just too late for him to start in a new country. He met a woman whom he had known as a young man in Cologne, who had also been in a concentration camp. Together they made their way back to Cologne. Eventually he married her. He has been dead for some years now. She is still loving although she is in her nineties and totally senile.

Q: Did you see him again when you were in Cologne?

A: Yes. I saw him for the first time again in 1951. My husband was drafted during the Korean War, you know, in the draft of doctors. Fortunately my husband was sent to Germany rather than Korea. However, that did take a little manipulation on his part. He explained to the army that his wife had lived in Germany, that I had business to transact in Germany, and that he would like to be stationed there. They let him.

My uncle and his wife came to the airport when I flew over with Margie, my daughter, who was about one year old at that time. They met us at the airport in Frankfurt [50.01N, 8.41E since this was undoubtedly Frankfurt-Main, the large U.S. base in West Germany]. My husband had gone over, of course, when his orders were cut. That was about three months before I could go over.

He had to have housing for us before we could go. He had already been in Cologne to see them before I got there, because he had gone to Bremerhafen [53.33N, 8.35E] to pick up his automobile. He drove the car back to where he was stationed, which was just south of Munich [48.09N, 8.35E]. On the way he had detoured through Cologne. He had found them in some little walk-up apartment, on the third floor. They were living in very primitive conditions.

Q: Have your religious beliefs changed any or are they just as they were?

A: I belong to a congregation and have done so as long as I have been married.

Q: Were you married by a rabbi?

A: Yes. Interestingly is the fact that disinterested as my mother was in anything religious, I remember that she always told us: "Girls, when you get married, I would prefer it if you would marry a Jewish man." Yes, we did have a rabbi.

Q: Was your husband religious?

A: Yes! He came from a Conservative background.

Q: Did his family keep kosher?

A: His mother did. Yes!

Q: Do you keep kosher?

A: No. I don't.

Q: Are you Reform?

A: Now I am. My husband died. I was a widow for four and one-half years before I remarried. By that time my children were both in college and

away from home. My second husband is a member of Temple Israel, so I also became a temple member. There didn't seem to be much point in having two affiliations.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Two.

Q: Are they both girls?

A: No. A boy and a girl.

Q: Your son was Bar Mitzvahed?

A: Yes.

Q: So you were Conservative until your second marriage?

A: Right.

Q: Was it just the fact that your husband was religious which made you join a temple or synagogue? Do you think that you would have been more like your parents – unaffiliated – otherwise?

A: I don't really know. My husband's family were always very careful to include my mother in all the Holy Days. She got up to enjoy the tradition, you know, the family getting together; although, from the religious standpoint, she had no involvement.

Q: I guess everyone whom I have interviewed so far had a family background which was very assimilated and are now members either at Beth Abraham [the Conservative synagogue in Dayton] or Temple Israel [the Reform synagogue in Dayton]. I guess that it is a generational thing, but did you find that you needed some kind of affiliation which your parents didn't need?

A: No, I think that it is a matter of different customs and my husband, as I said, grew up in a Conservative synagogue in Cincinnati. He came from a kosher home, and all the holidays were observed. It was just a pattern which I fell into.

Q: So you think the religious customs are different in America than they are in Europe?

- A: Oh, I think so. My mother, as I said earlier, saw the handwriting on the wall back in 1933. My father, however, had been an officer in the German army during WWI, and thought that this was just another political phase which they were going to go through. He felt that once this phase ended, there would be another phase. He believed that nothing was going to happen. That changed in 1938 when – I would say before 1938 because they had already applied for immigration to the U.S. before Kristallnacht. [After all, father could not function as a doctor after 1935. Other anti-Jewish laws were progressively imposed all the time, including the Nuremberg Laws of 1935.]
- Q: So your mother never affiliated with a synagogue? She just got to enjoy the traditions.
- A: Right!
- Q: And your children are both married to Jewish partners?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Are they pretty much Conservative?
- A: Yes. My daughter's husband belongs to the temple in Cincinnati. She is very unhappy with the temple services. She feels that she grew up in a Conservative synagogue and, with Sunday School there, she feels that their services are not adequate. Oh, she just isn't happy with them.
- Q: Are you content with Temple Israel here in Dayton?
- A: Yes! I am very comfortable.

END OF INTERVIEW

Please note that interjections by interviewer are set off by brackets, i.e. []

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