

Interview with Helga Silbermann

Series Survivors of the Holocaust—Oral History Project of Dayton, Ohio

Interviewer—Rose Mary Lawson

Date of Interviews: January 25, 1979

A: I was born in Berlin Germany April 23, 1927 and I was youngest child. I had one older sister, seven years older and my parents were middle class people. Both of my grandfathers were pretty well off. They were both self employed. It was the time when you worked and wanted to get somewhere you could get where you could accomplish something. They operated stores and they were pretty well educated and worked very hard. I never met my mother's father. I met my father's father and I knew he was what you call in German a tailor master. It took nine years to become a tailor master. Then you could have your own business, which he had in an apartment building. He spoke French, English and German and was rather strict.

My father was the youngest of the three sons he had, and his wife died rather early. My father was a typical young German Jew of his age. He was in the military, at first he was educated in what you call the gymnasium, not as an officer but for the people who were more educated. He had a rather good time, they all did, the three brothers and they all served as very proud Germans. They were good Jews. They were what you call here, maybe, conservative. They did keep kosher at home, but since their mother had died, things were not observed that strictly.

Q: But they did attend the synagogue?

A: Oh, my grandfather was kind of a big wheel at the synagogue and it was very important to him that he had his name in the records. He was a very aware Jew and that was the thing in Germany and Berlin, anyway the southern part of Berlin. My family comes, not only my grandfather, but my great grandfather comes from there. They were a really old family and were very well thought of by the people who very much accepted the Jews. On the High Holy Days, everybody went with a top hat and morning coat and striped trousers and their prayer books and everybody wished them happy holiday and happy new year. They were accepted.

Q: And you lived then in a neighborhood that was not primarily Jewish.

A: No. We didn't have that sort of thing except in the part of Berlin which mostly contained very Orthodox Jews. These Jews came mainly from Poland. This was like a little ghetto so to speak, but the rest of the population lived in segregated

sections. But, anyway, my father and mother got married and my mother is from South Germany, from Darmstadt and from about the same background as my father, as was customary.

Well, it was kind of an arranged marriage like they used to do. Both of my sets of grandparents went for a vacation to the sea and they met and found out one had four daughters and the other had three sons. My maternal grandfather had a business selling women's clothes and such. He owned the building where it was. My other grandfather sold men's clothing in Berlin. He came to Berlin to do the buying and took a daughter along. Different daughters met different sons and my parents met. My mother didn't want to get married, but I guess she finally broke down and thought well, all right. She met him and they corresponded. Then they got engaged. She never even knew how old he was. But, in those days she was about twenty-six and practically an old maid and she turned down everybody, so she finally said OK. They got married in February 1914. My mother was not in love. She was never very happy. It was such a very different way of life. July my father had to go to do active duty, since he had been in the military, he had to go once a year and serve for a month, like here in the National Guard. July he went for his full time and the war broke out and he never came back for four years.

Q: Your mother was pregnant?

A: She was pregnant, of course. He came home when the baby was about a year old. He came home on a leave and left my mother pregnant again. Then he didn't come home until the end of the war. The second child died during the war when he was a year old because he had problems. My mother went to South Germany to stay with her sister and then they had almost no problems compared to the last war. They had a little bit of air raids and such. The baby caught pneumonia and died. They didn't have penicillin. So my father came back after the war. Back during the war my mother gave up keeping a kosher house because of problems to get the food and she was a pretty helpless person anyway. She was spoiled, not like you would meet here in the States. She was very simple and very kind and a very unworldly person, but she was brought up to run a house. She studied music and had been in France for a year in finishing school. She learned to speak French. She knew how to tell the girl what to cook, how to set the table, to entertain, but she was very helpless when common sense came. She was just not able to cope very well. Especially being alone like that. She never had had to. She was kind of a dependent person. My father came back from the war and started to have a business of his own. He wanted to get away from his father and his two brothers. It wasn't too easy anyway. In 1921 he decided to take another honeymoon. For the first they went all over, Italy, etc. The second they went to the North Sea and Helgoland which is a little island. That's how I got my name. That's how I was born, so it's kind of an afterthought.

Q: It was just you and your sister, then?

A: Yes.

Q: About ten years difference in age?

A: No, seven years. When we grew up we didn't have anything special, really. We lived in a nice apartment in a very nice building in Berlin. I was born right in the house where we lived. We had hardwood floors and the big rooms in a nice section of Berlin. We went to school. We were then conservative and a little more liberal. We kept up with all the Jewish holidays. We had friends. My parents didn't have only Jewish friends. We did not have religious school like we do here. We had religion in the public school. Mostly the kids were Protestant and one teacher taught. We had two Catholic girls, so they had a priest come in and we had about ten Jewish kids. In elementary school we had a lady come in. She was terrible as a teacher. We went to Temple on the High Holy Days and my grandfather went every Friday night. My sister and I had to visit my grandfather. He had remarried then and we weren't too fond of her. We went Friday nights, had to go, didn't want to go because he wasn't exactly the friendliest of people. He gave us a blessing, religiously, it was sign of love. We loved the High Holy Days. Like I said everybody, just everybody knew about it. Everybody put on their best clothes and just went around, showing everybody how well off you were. You'd dress up and dress up the kids. The kids carried on a lot, of course.

We had dinner on Passover, everything was at our house because we were the only kids in the family. My older uncle, the one I was closest to, my father's middle brother, he didn't get married until later. He was living with a German woman. She was from the wrong side of the tracks. My oldest uncle had married a lady who was older than him, she couldn't have any kids, so they were always at our house. I remember Passover dinners when you drink a lot of wine, I don't know if you're familiar with that, but it's a big thing that you have to drink four glasses. Of course we got to drink a little bit of wine, but still we fell asleep on the floor before the whole thing was over. I guess we were rather spoiled. I was spoiled because I was the youngest and there were only two kids there.

We did go to my grandmother in Darmstadt once a year. Vacation time we had four weeks summer vacation, we did spend it there. I didn't like it there. She was very strict and she thought we were very spoiled. She had money, but she was very tight. To eat butter and jam on bread, that was already a sin. Don't waste it, and she still kept strictly kosher. She disapproved very much of our non-kosher home. She'd ask, we were just little kids, "What do you want for dinner?" I'd say, "Ham sandwich." She'd just say, "Ahh! ! Ahh! ! Gatz!"

We were pretty happy generally. I had, especially, one little girl friend that was my very best friend from the first day of school. She lived on the same street I lived, just about a block up. We walked to school together, came home together, stayed at each other house. I went to her's on Christmas, she came over on

Hannukah. You know it was really a very close relationship. She was a very cute little girl, all around nice. Then, of course, in 1933, it started.

Q: Were you still in school at this time?

A: Oh yes, sure! I was about eleven years old.

Q: It is hard to realize how old people are.

A: Yes, we heard my parents talk. We didn't pay much attention, but of course we heard that there were elections. One day my sister and I walked home from school. Of course we didn't stay home from school, but I remember my father coming home that night from business. He was ordinarily very calm and he was a very smart man. He was generally very well liked. He was talking about the SA (Schutz-Abteilung, these were the "Brown Shirts" i.e. the general type of uniformed Hitler party people) on the subway and collecting money to buy "knives for the Jews." This was the beginning.

Q: Before that you really hadn't felt anything?

A: No, no. Really and truly not one thing. Of course, maybe a lot of other Jewish people told us how we were too assimilated into German society. We were very proud that my father served in the war, in spite of the fact that he probably would not have had to go because his hearing was bad. He had been decorated with the Iron Cross (one of the highest decoration a combatant could receive for acts in the war). It had been in the paper, since it was a big thing. The religion was in the background as compared to anything like that, that had never been involved.

Of course, as I said, the religion was not so much except for the people who lived in the ghetto and who spoke Yiddish, which we did not understand. (Yiddish was a language, written in Hebrew characters, with words derived mainly from German, but also from local dialects and Polish and other languages which had been used in transactions between Jews of Eastern Europe). We did learn Hebrew in school and used it in our prayers, but we did not know Yiddish. We did not have any special language or anything like that. (Living in the ghetto was a different life). They (the Jews from the ghetto) went around and wore their own clothing. The black coat, and the black hat and the earlocks and stuff. We really had nothing to do with them, we just didn't have anything in common with them.

Q: Tell me exactly what part of town you did live in.

A: We lived in West Berlin, in Charlottenburg, which is a part of Berlin. My grandfather had his store in Charlottenburg in one of the larger buildings. My father opened his own store in town, in the downtown district of Berlin proper. We lived outside of town. My grandfather lived in the old part of Charlottenburg. We lived in the new part of it. The younger people moved out, just as they do

here. I had never in my life been subjected to anything as far as anti-Semitism went. I really hadn't.

Q: So when your father came home you were surprised?

A: It was very much of a shock. I was very shocked! There was always some kind of feeling amongst the German people against the Jews who came from Poland and tried to live their own way of life and did not try to fit into the existing society. I guess that you heard about them and subconsciously, as kids you disapproved of them. We also disapproved, especially my mother would, after all I did describe to you the kind of person she was, showing off their wealth, dripping with minks and diamonds and such, and talking loud. Anything like that was to her, just a horror, she couldn't handle that at all.

It started pretty fast. So when it started, because I was in public school, mornings, when we used to come in -- I don't quite remember how it was -- yes -- we didn't move anything, we used to say "Good Morning." The teacher said "Good Morning" and used to talk in typical German formal sentences -- so then we started the day by saying "Heil Hitler" and singing the "Horst Wessel song" (that is the marching song of the party of Hitler which was utilized). I remember my father taking my sister and me and telling us "No Heil Hitler" and you are not going to sing the "Horst Wessel song." You stand up when everyone stands up, but you keep your mouth shut. You don't have to (say that and sing that) this is a thing they want to do against us and we are not going to go along with it.

Q: How did the other children react?

A: The children did not react at all, at first. The children did not! It came home to me through the girl friend of mine I told you about. Her family were very nice people. Her father had bad luck, he couldn't make enough money. Times were bad I guess. Lots of people couldn't make it. My father had (financial) problems, but he could fall back on my grandfather. These people really had problems, he couldn't make it. He had four daughters and a wife who liked to live pretty good. The apartments were expensive. Everything was expensive, clothing for the kids, all that kind of stuff. So he was one of the first to join the (Hitler) party. I remember that on one occasion, the first occasion when you could fly the flag, he flew the Swastika. Of course, I told my parents about it. My father told me "Now I don't think that he wants to interfere with your friendship. I think that he just wants the Jews out who don't belong here in Germany. I don't think that he means anything against you. He wants those out who came from Poland, from Romania to leave. Your father is a war veteran and your family has been here for generations. You have nothing to do with that." He probably did believe that. I believe that he sincerely believed in this. I believe that my father did.

Q: So did you continue the friendship?

A: We continued the friendship. I said that I was eleven years old in 1933 and by the time 1935 rolled around it was not possible anymore. My sister, this is a thing you might be interested in, was ready to graduate from high school. High school is different over there. It is a lot more important and I guess a little more advanced than here. Once you graduate there, you have the Abitur, which is about equal to one year of college. Anyway, each student had to present a thesis on a chosen subject. Then the students were questioned by the teachers and professors from other places. It was an important thing. My sister, of course, being seven years older, realized a lot more of what went on than I did. She picked a subject which no one had ever picked before. The Jewish religion. At that time, that was 1934, she had a young rabbi helping her. She did just marvelously. They had to give her straight A on it. She wanted to make a point, which was pretty brave at that time. I think that the reason she realized it more than I did was she was older and therefore more exposed.

In Berlin we did not feel much, but in South Germany, where my mother was born they started immediately (to persecute) in 1933. They had immediately smashed stores, arrested people. My uncle was arrested. That was my mother's youngest brother. He was a physician, a very successful one. He was living with a German woman. That was the excuse they used to put him in a concentration camp right away. He was extremely lucky. They kept him in, but they told him that if he signed that he would leave Germany immediately after they released him, they would let him go. So he spent only about four weeks in the camp. He was able to take all his belongings with him and he went to Israel (Palestine at that time). His then girl friend followed him there and they got married and they are still alive.

My sister was more aware of these things as a teenager. She got to know some Zionist organizations and stuff like that. She got a little bit involved. So my grandmother from Darmstadt kept writing to my parents that they should take me out of school. It was about high time for that because teachers had their rules about what to say and how to say it and I guess maybe it was 50/50; some of them enjoyed it and some didn't. I can't judge. I was too young at that time, but it was getting pretty sticky. So I transferred to a Jewish school. There was a private Jewish school, the only one in Berlin, which was a high school. It was a super orthodox school. It was a very big adjustment for me. I didn't have much of a Jewish education and it was so much harder than the public school. It was so that you had to use your brain. Everyone talked and there was no discipline. I have to say that I missed the discipline. I always had top grades and I barely made it that first semester. I really had a rough time. Then I worried a lot. I learned an awful lot and I had to take extra Hebrew lessons, but everything else. French, English, etc. we had an excellent English teacher, who hit us left and right, but she taught us.

Q: How far away was this school (from your home)?

A: I took the El (elevated train). It took about fifteen minutes to get there and I was always late.

Q: You were by yourself, since your sister had already finished high school?

A: I was thirteen. I was old enough to go. It was on the Tiergang, I don't know if you ever heard of that, near the Zoo. That is a beautiful park. It is still in West Berlin, but it is closer to the center of Berlin. Of course (as is the custom in Europe) we had (separate) schools for boys and for girls in both the German public schools and the Jewish schools. They were super-orthodox and I became very religious there. Yes I gave my parents a terrible time. I would not ride on Saturday and I wouldn't eat certain things. I went to the really super orthodox synagogue, you know where the men and women prayed in separate sections. I prayed a lot. My parents were not used to this. Then I learned that when I had something on my mind I said that they taught us this in school and my parents let it go. You know the manners were the thing when we were growing up. You know my mother always said. "A girl has to be a lady." You know, that was it! They were not pious, but they got used to it. After that experience, I was an excellent student in school.

Q: How long did you go to that (Jewish) school?

A: I went there for three and a half years. I graduated with a prize, what you don't have here. When you don't finish school, they graduate you when you don't complete all the requirements. I went as far as "Oberskunda" (actually the second year of the two highest grades corresponding to eleventh grade). If I had gone for one more year, I would have finished and received the Arbitur, like my sister had; but I didn't want to stay in school anymore. I had had it by then. I wanted to get out, and I fought with my parents about it, but they let me do it. I was getting involved in Zionist organizations also.

Q: What year was that? The school was continuing?

A: The school was continuing. I quit in 1938! That was just when "Kristallnacht" took place. I quit before that. The school stopped right after that anyway. I couldn't have gone anymore. So I got out of school and my father said, "You have to do something. You can't just lay around." Of course, people were talking about that you have to leave, maybe leave the country. My father didn't want to. My mother didn't want to (leave the country). Neither one of them wanted to, but my sister wanted to and she did. She left in 1936. She went to my uncle when she was twenty-one.

Q: To Israel?

A: To Israel. She went, but my parents didn't want to and my parents had all these friends who said, "Why should you leave, because of this guy. He is not even a

German, he comes from Austria? You have been here for generations, you fought in the war, stick it out! Stick it out!” These were very smart people who said not to go anywhere. They didn’t want to go, they really didn’t want to go. As I said, I joined a Zionist organization, which upset my father quite a bit

Q: He really was not a Zionist then?

A: No! Neither was my mother. I belonged to another group. When things got bad in public school, I joined a German-Jewish organization and I made friends there. It seemed kind of pointless. When I got a little older, I joined the Zionist group. The Zionist group was kind of a radical labor group and my father thought that they marched with the red flag (symbol of Communism) and I thought that he would die. He said, “Never again are you going to go near these people!”

So he enrolled me as a tailor apprentice with somebody, in a really high class place in West Berlin, on Kurfuerstendam. I stayed there for about four months and I learned things. I got to know a very nice Polish Jewish couple, a young couple with two children. He was a furrier and she was a seamstress. It was a salon, really a beautiful place. I imitated them. They did not speak very good German. They were very nice to me and they were trying to get to Australia. They asked my parents, if they would let me go with them, because they had these two young children who had to be managed and they would take care of me and all that. My father said no. I wish that I could have gone. So that was it.

Then came Kristallnacht. We heard about it. That this fellow had shot this Herr von Radt (the German attaché to the Embassy in Paris whose murder gave the pretext to confiscatory fines being levied against Jews and finally to Kristallnacht), and we felt very uncomfortable. Some good friends, German (gentile) friends came to my father and said “You better get out for awhile because they will come to arrest everyone.”

Q: Your own area was not really attacked on Kristallnacht?

A: We had moved after my sister left, and our apartment was now in the old part of Charlottenburg, practically where my father was born, near where my grandfather’s store was. The store was of course damaged, not quite as bad as it could have been. At that time they did not destroy the apartments. They arrested all the men, except for the really old ones. We stayed with a real old couple, in their eighties, who were cousins of my grandfather’s.

Q: Your father and mother and you?

A: Yes, We stayed there for about a week.

Q: You left everything in your own home?



A: Oh yes! We left everything, we just took overnight cases and stayed with Aunt Jennie and Uncle Felix and we figured what is going to happen will happen. Then of course we heard that a lot of arrests were made. They still had a relatively hard time in Berlin because the people there were a little different than those in the rest of the country. They did love to make up their own minds so they imported troops from South Germany and from West Prussia and from all over to do their dirty work for them.

Q: Did your father still have his business at this time?

A: No, by that time he had given it up, because he had had a heart attack. We had great trouble with physicians. My father had a friend with whom he had been together in the war, a physician, and he treated him. We had, however, great trouble at that time. It was still customary to make house calls, but no (gentile) German doctor would come to a Jewish house. You were not allowed to have a maid anymore unless she was over 45 or 50 years old. The implication was that the Jewish men would, you know. That was truly ridiculous. My parents put on the wedding for the maid we had (when they got married) and everything else. We went and visited them and brought food from the country and everything. So we came back after Kristallnacht. That was when my grandfather had to give up his store. He was forced to sell. They said, "If you don't sell, they are going to take it."

Q: Was he able to sell it very well?

A: No, it didn't matter. They took the money and put it in a certain account that we had no access to. That is how my grandmother lost her place and that is the way my parents lost theirs, it was all like this. "We buy it but it goes into a special account." So you lost it. We had to give up our gold and silver and diamonds and whatever and even the pets. That was the only time my mother put up a battle. She didn't seem to care about anything else, but she would not give up her parakeet. She would not take it to the place where you had to hand it in, and she found a lady who did agree to take care of the parakeet and she would have visiting rights to the parakeet. She would not hear of anything else. My mother was so mild, so gentle, but with that parakeet she was like a tiger. She would not give her bird to the Nazis, no way! You know, she did not appear to care about anything else, let them have the silver.

Q: After you visited with the "aunt" and "uncle", after Kristallnacht, you came back?

A: We came back, and of course finally my father was a sick man by then. He had angina pectoris and he traveled around with a nitroglycerin bottle. He had had several attacks. I took care of him more or less. He was very nervous. He couldn't stand anyone around him except me. My mother got so flustered, she just would make him more nervous.

However, he realized then that there was no way we were going to make it (to outlast the Nazis). Finally, he thought that maybe we should leave. By that time, of course, it was too late. So they tried and tried. They finally found out that some people could go to Shanghai. We heard that quite a number of Jews went to Shanghai. Then all of a sudden he of course realized that I could go to Israel with the Hachsharah. That is a group of young people who proposed to live on the community farms in Israel, the kibbutz. Before that he would never let me go since "it was all so immoral there," that is what he thought. You know boys and girls together. Oh my! He didn't let me go before. I did stay in the country for a year.

Q: He did let you go then?

A: Oh no, no. I never got to Israel.

Q: No?

A: No, but I made preparations to go to Israel.

Q: Oh, and where was that that you made your preparations)?

A: Outside of Berlin. I was in several community farms.

Q: Oh yes, so there was actually still time to prepare to go to Israel?

A: Well we thought that there was time, but actually there was only one more ship going, and that was it. But we stayed on these farms and we learned how to milk cows and how to make butter and clean the barns and what have you. It was great. We had campfires and we had community singing and we had Jewish services. We had everything. We had a self-contained little community and it was beautiful. It couldn't get any better. We were away from everybody. We just lived there away from everything.

Q: No soldiers, no troops, came in?

A: No, they didn't come. We did have our own guards, because things did happen. I don't remember any particular things, that people would come, I don't know if it was SA or private people who were anti-Semitic. They would generally throw firebombs inside (our perimeter), but since we were pretty much isolated nothing much happened. My parents tried to get out somewhere. They tried to get out to Shanghai, but it was too late. So they stayed in Berlin.

Then the forced labor came in. They got my mother for forced labor. My father was certified too sick -- he couldn't work. You can imagine how sick he was if the Nazis told him that he didn't have to go. Of course, there was a lot of difficulties to live in Berlin then. I remember the one time when my father was

crossing this street and some SS (Schutz Staffel the black shirted or elite Nazi troopers) came and hit him because he wanted to and we all had to wear the yellow stars.

Q: They started that right after Kristallnacht? You had to do that immediately?

A: Oh yes. We had to wear the yellow star, after Kristallnacht. We had a lot of kids sneak by without it because we had the curfew at 8PM. You know they just made spot checks. They went just through the house and just grabbed what they wanted, a mirror, or whatever. You were just scared to death and didn't say a thing. You had a star on your door also, so they know where Jews lived.

Q: When you were at the farm, your parents continued to stay in the apartment?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you visit them at times?

A: Yes, I went there.

Q: Transportation. Wasn't that difficult?

A: No, it wasn't bad. We weren't allowed to go too often. They didn't want us to become too obvious.

Q: When your mother went into forced labor, where did she go to?

A: They made her work in the Berlin insane asylum. She had to be there at 6 AM and it was way out of town on the subway lines for about one hour. She had never worked in her life. She had to be on her legs all day long. She couldn't even understand half of what the people were talking about. You know she had never heard bad language in her life. The two of them were just so sweet, they just couldn't do it. She was just so sweet so they didn't even treat her badly. She was just so sweet and simple so that they didn't do anything to her. But she was so exhausted, she had never done anything like this. You know she had to do the hard work.

Q: So your father just stayed home then?

A: He stayed because he couldn't go elsewhere. And when I found that out I came home and I had bad frostbites. In had frostbites on my hands and my feet. My father said, "I think that you should have stayed home." So I came home and you know you had to register at the police office.

Q: They told you where to register?

- A: Oh yes. I did register and then I stayed with them until my parents were taken away. I worked in a factory.
- Q: How were you treated in the factory?
- A: I wrote about that. We were completely regimented. We had a floor lady. In the morning we had to stand in front of the building on a certain spot. Everybody had to be there. The floor lady came and she marched you up to your place of work. We sat there and you better not open your mouth. I believe that once I stood back. She watched us. At lunch we sat right there and you ate your sandwich or whatever you had. We didn't have much food, we didn't have any coffee or butter since 1935.
- Q: But you were able to buy food in the stores, what food there was?
- A: Yes, on ration tickets, whatever there was,
- Q: Almost the same as the other Germans?
- A: No, we didn't get all that they got, but if you had some good friends they were happy to help you. Our old maid came and sat there and tried to bring me something. When my father was sick and he needed something. Somebody came to help, you know with food.
- Q: Was everyone Jewish who was working in the factory?
- A: On the floor where I worked they were all Jewish, but they also had French prisoners of war on the other side. (If they were French this must have been after 1939 since France entered the war in 1939 and the "phony war" lasted until May 1940). They kept us apart though. There was a lot happening.
- Q: You marched?
- A: You marched in and you marched out.
- Q: How long did you work there?
- A: I don't remember. I believe that we worked about nine hours. It wasn't quite as far (from home) as my mother (had to go) so I was lucky. It was kind of bad we went on the trolley. We weren't allowed inside (the compartment), we had to stand on the platform. That was open and it was fun when it was raining. When it was really crowded, people pinched you whenever they felt like it. Our floor lady, (I believe it must have been as assembly line), made us work so much harder than I had ever worked before, it was so much harder.

Q: You must have been with it for two years. There must have been many people you worked with.

A: Yes, I don't remember the work we did. When I think back I remember one or two of the people I worked with. You just did your work and you waited for the day to be over and then you went home. Of course, the curfew started at 8PM so you didn't have much time.

Q: You just got back from your work.

A: Yes.

Q: What happened if you didn't make it?

A: Well you were arrested. But of course the young people we sneaked out, we went into the house, took the star off and sneaked out and tried to have a fun party or something. But I couldn't do that because I had to tend to my father. When I was five minutes late he was up and wild with worries about his heart. I knew that he had had several heart attacks and he was just very prone to problems. On the other hand I was lucky again my whole life was ahead of me. I don't know about lucky, I should have been killed right there and then. I would have been better off. But, you know, I loved my father and about three months later they arrested him and shipped him off.

This appears to be the end of interview #1. Interview #2 follows.

Q: I think that you can say as much as you want, because otherwise we may not have a (complete) story that can be related to.

A: My father's name was Martin Levy and my mother's maiden name was Gertrude Berger, which is a good German name. I told you that she had to work in a factory there. (That appears to be a slight discrepancy, but it appears obvious that the Jewish forced laborers were shifted around as ever the whim struck someone).

There was also a second cousin of my father's living with us at the time. She was a spinster, about forty years of age. She had been with us during the time when I was in the country. She worked of course also in the forced labor setup.

Q: She was conscripted?

A: Oh yes, yes! I don't remember where she worked. It was not so far as I did because I know that I was the last one to come home at night usually. Of course, by that time, we knew that people were taken (meaning deportation of Jewish people) every day. There were hardly any of our friends left -- if we didn't hear from them, they were gone.

At first people got notices, postcards, which said: "You are to appear on this and this day at this and this place. You can bring one suitcase." You were supposed to be there and German Jews were a lot like other Germans. That was an order. You did it! You did not question it! This is what people today, do not understand. "They were cowards!" "How come you did go along with this?" This is something, kind of instilled in the German people. You have rules and regulations in your life. You do live by these. You do not question them. It is not cowardice, it is just a way of life which is very hard to switch, especially for older people. To say all of a sudden, "hey, I am not going to do that why should I report?" (It is noteworthy that this is not just a German mode of behavior, as an example, if we receive a summons to be a witness or a jury notice, we obviously answer it. As long as a draft existed anyone who received a notice answered it or one violated the law).

Also, the notices never stated one's ultimate fate, but one's fate was known if one failed to answer the summons. The young people did what their parents told them to, they were not raised like today's children. When I met the first Americans, when I met a cousin of my mother's and their kids talked back to him and I thought "Oh wow!" You know, we would never have done that. It was really a different way of upbringing and raising than we had had.

Then it came to the point where they did not send cards anymore. People assembled and of course, they thought that they were being sent away to a kind of ghetto settlement where they would work. They thought, of course, that the Jews should not contaminate the Aryans, that they should live by themselves. They provided them a place to live where they could follow their trade or whatever. Well this didn't sound too bad, it really did not, and the foreign radio to which we listened even though we were not allowed to, (at least we tried to listen to it), did not say one word about what was going on. I do not know whether they did know what was going on. I am certain that the higher echelon knew about it later on as books claim -- but the radio did not tell us. It did not say "Go on, save yourselves, they are going to kill you. They are going to do something to you!" They didn't tell us that. Nobody told us that!

Q: Well you just assumed that?

A: It was a real location (stated on the cards) and we figured that the war would be over soon, and then the whole thing will be over, and later, if we can live through it, why not. Why not be with the others? Why not be with your own kind. There is nothing wrong with that (idea). You know what is there. At that time, I didn't believe anyone cared about the money anymore because they figured that they will take that away anyway. However, then it came to the point that they no longer sent the cards -- they just showed up.

This is what happened, it was on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1942 and I can never, to this day, I just hate Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. My mother had always been very superstitious.

We always laughed about how superstitious she was, but to this day I can never live through a Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> without thinking that something horrible is going to happen. Because it is what happened on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> and it started as a routine day, it was the end of the week. I came home and I knew that I did not have to go to the factory (the next day). My mother was home already -- and I told you that she had very bad legs -- she was lying on the couch and my cousin Lotte was there, and my father, of course.

We were ready to sit down for dinner. We were just getting ready for the Shabbat and we were sitting there and then somebody knocked at the door. When someone knocked at the door, your heart fell about down to your knees, or to your toes. My father opened the door, because none of us were brave enough to go except my father. My father was an extremely "together man", sick as he was, he was a smart man, he was a personable man, he was very dignified, he just looked good. He had been through the war. He had seen things. He went. Of course, there was the Gestapo (members of the "Geheime Stats Polizei" i.e. secret state police). There were just two average looking men in civilian clothes standing there. They didn't look any different than, maybe, your husband or some other fellow in the street. They said "Martin Levy?" "Yes". "We have the order for you and Gertrude your wife, to be ready for deportation. We are ready to come and get you." Almost everyone had things just about packed and ready, but you know, it is always unexpected. My mother, of course, started crying, just right away. She just couldn't handle it. So they said, "Well, you have about one hour. Get your things together. You know if you want to take warm blankets (go ahead)." You see, they kind of made us feel that it was a deportation. "So you probably will go to Russia, somewhere, so OK., you have about one hour. We will come back in one hour." This is how certain they were that you were going to go. They left you there, at home, for an hour. Naturally there were some people who killed themselves -- a number of people -- but I don't think anyone ran away. So they left. So we started, my mother, Lotte and I started like chickens with their heads cut off, getting things together.

We had the suitcases and my father wanted a picture of my sister and he wanted a picture of me and he wanted this and that. We got the things together. My father got things organized. My mother kept saying, "You should come with us, I don't see why not." I forget whether she asked him (the Gestapo man) right away -- but I think that she asked him right away -- "How about my daughter, can she come?" The Gestapo man said "We don't have an order for her." So they asked me where I worked and I said at "Siemens" and he said that they were not going to take me because that was the biggest munitions factory and it was most important that I continue to work there. My mother was determined that I should come. My father wasn't; I don't know if he thought that I had a chance, but he made some preparations for this eventuality (our separation and deportation). He had money which he had not reported and had bought some jewelry which also had not been reported. The other jewelry (the ones people knew we had) had to be turned in. So he had bought some gold items some of which we had given to several of our

German gentile friends whom he considered trustworthy. He had converted some stock into things which could be sold easily. Of these several people, some of them gave things to me and some didn't. He kept telling me again, "There and there and there I have a lot of stuff." If you need it it is yours, see what you can do." Of course, after an hour, the Gestapo fellows came back. I asked them if I could go with my parents for a little bit. The meeting point, where everyone had to assemble was at the synagogue, a beautiful old synagogue, about a fifteen minute walk from our apartment. Then, on the street, a number of young people were gathered who shouted, 'Dirty Jews! Get out! Get away!' You know, applauding the entire proceedings. So we came to the synagogue and they processed my parents through the door -- I wanted to go with them, but they wouldn't let me. I was getting pretty hysterical by that time, you know standing there. Then one of the guys got rough with me, some SS guy: "You are going to get out of here!" You know that kind of thing. So I went home and my cousin Lotte was there. She was not a big help, she was just there. We were not really close or anything like that. But at that time I didn't know what to do. I really didn't know what to do. We had a balcony as part of our apartment, and I really wanted to jump off from it, because I was so disoriented at that time. Even try. You know why should I keep going to that darn factory and then finally wind up the same way? But then I thought well, you know, you might as well go on. Then Lotte talked to me. I don't know I don't believe that I slept that night. I didn't want to go to bed. I stayed away the next day from the factory. I couldn't face foul weather, I couldn't handle it. I know that much. I didn't call in, I didn't do anything and the Gestapo came the next day and took inventory. We had beautiful furniture. That is most of it was handmade and there was so much china and crystal and stuff my mother had from her trousseau. Some of the things she hadn't even wanted to use, china and stuff like that. She almost killed me once when I took it out when kids came over as company. So they took the inventory and all the stuff was divided among the SS party official who wanted the stuff. They told me that it would be all picked up in about a week. They asked me what belonged to me and, of course, my cousin Lotte was older and was wiser -- she was a pretty smart cookie and she said: "this is mine" and "this is mine" and she could claim a lot of things (that way). I was too stoned and I was too hurt and too ignorant to even say anything so finally one of the Gestapo men said: I guess that bed is yours and that lamp is yours and that dresser is yours. I said yes, I guess so. Then he said you have about two weeks and then you have to vacate the premises. So that was it.

So I went back to work the next day. I had no choice. Furthermore, I had to find a place to live. It was pretty hard to find a place to live because Jews were assigned into small places for so many people. This one family I knew offered to take me in. They were some friends of my parents, but they were so overcrowded already that it was ridiculous. I was over at their house and they introduced me to a man. I guess that he was in his middle thirties. He had just been through the same thing. He had been living with his mother and his sister and they were both deported. They told him that he could keep the apartment if he rents to two more



people. He already had rented to one girl in her thirties and he said, "I have another room, if you want to move in that would be OK." I looked at the place and it looked all right, so I said that I would move in.

Q: Where did your cousin go to?

A: My cousin was an old maid like I said, she was forty and she was pretty ugly. She never really had had a good life. They were kind of the poor part of the family. Each child had to work, and all that. So she found herself a man whose wife had been deported and he offered her to move in with him. So she said, "Oh boy, that's my chance!" She had led a sheltered life before so she said, "Kid, you are on your own!" So she moved in with that fellow.

Q: What about your grandparents?

A: The only one who was left of the entire family was my grandmother in Darmstadt who was 78 at the time, I think. I had not been on good terms with her since I was thirteen because she didn't like my father and I loved my father. Anyway, I wrote her that my parents had been deported. She had lived with my youngest aunt who had never been married. All her other children had either been married or had died or gone overseas like my uncle who was in Israel. The other uncle had died overseas in Buenos Aires. So there was no one else left. And that aunt, who had been the youngest one had been deported already, which left my grandmother alone. She was not only 78, but also partially blind when I wrote her that letter about my parents. I got a letter from her and she knitted me three pairs of underpants with long legs for the time when I would be deported so that I would have something warm to wear. That was the last I heard from her.

She was deported to Theresienstadt, which camp was supposed to be the show place, but which really was no better as they found out later. However, that was the place where the Germans took the Red Cross and they reported that it was gorgeous and that everything was fine; that they had trees and that the people were walking around, dressed up. Naturally, behind the scenes they were killing the people in great numbers. Anyway, she was shipped to Theresienstadt at the age of 78. That was my maternal grandmother.

A: Your other grandparents were already dead?

A: They had died during the early Hitler period of natural causes. My other aunt and uncles had all died. So my grandmother was the last one. My sister was with my uncle (and his wife) in Israel. I had some cousins in Uruguay, Paraguay, Buenos Aires (Argentina), Cuba, etc.

Q: You were the only one still in Germany?

A: I was the only one left, that is right. So I lived in the apartment and I became friendly with this girl and this man I lived with. The girl was talking a lot. This is the first time I knew that people went into hiding. Nobody really talked much about it because everyone was kind of afraid of it. Nobody wanted to give too much away, because somebody might let something slip somewhere. This girl was kind of tough anyway. She was at least ten years older than I was. I guess she was an orphan, she was kind of rough. She knew her way around. So I heard that she tried to make connections. She worked too, of course, forced labor, all of us did.

Now I have to backtrack and say something which happened. About two months before my parents got deported, my father had met a German gentile man through some business deal. It had something to do with property. My grandfather had owned a house and an apartment building and my father had tried to save something. It was connected with mortgages. This man had bought some mortgages which became due. He could have called them in and we would have been without anything.

However, as it happened, this gentleman was very much anti-Hitler, a very devout Catholic. He was an old bachelor in his sixties. He had met my father and for some reason, the two men had really hit it off. They had talked together. I hadn't met the man. I was at work (when he came over). They had talked and they had decided that the man would call in the mortgage and, therefore, get the house, but on the sly, he would pay something to my father. That payment was some of the money which my father then converted in the gold and valuables (he told me about before being deported). Of course, this was just like a gift from heaven. So the man did that and, since he and my father hit it off so well, he said that he would come by again in a little while, just to talk to him. He did come back I think twice, just to talk to my father.

This man had properties all over Germany. His old parents were living on a farm near Berlin and he got some fresh food from this farm. You know my father kept raving what a nice man he was. So in the two weeks, while I was sitting in the empty apartment with nowhere to go, this man showed up. That was the first time I met him. His name was Emil Kreutziglor, (or something like this, the name is not clear on the tape). I saw this little grey haired man -- he gave me his name so I knew who he was. He wanted to know what happened and, of course I told him. He was absolutely put out -- he was terrified -- he seemed to blame himself (for the deportation). He was one of those German gentiles who was convinced that it just had to be over, it had to be over. It couldn't last much longer. He said, "I should have taken your parents to the farm with me. They could have been there." Now my mother looked like the typical gentile German, no one would ever have thought that she was Jewish, but nobody. My father did not look typically Jewish either. It would have been pretty easy for either one of them to get by (pass for non-Jewish), but my mother particularly. I know that you question that and I know that most Christians have a preconceived idea what a

Jew looks like and how they act in certain ways. My mother had none of the mannerisms you would expect, in her speech or looks, or anything. She could certainly have gotten by.

So anyway, this man said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I answered: "Nothing, I am trying to find a place to live and I am continuing to work at the factory. I guess they are going to get me one of these days and I hope that maybe I will hear from my parents. So maybe, if I am lucky, I will get to the same place." And he answered, "Well, I will tell you this, this is my card here. If you feel that the time is coming that they are going to deport you -- it can't last much longer -- I will certainly try to help you and take you to the farm. I will put you somewhere, if you want to. Get in touch with me, this is my address. This is my card." Well, OK. OK. I took his card and I kept it. I really didn't understand, you know, my mind wasn't on that. I just didn't know where I was going to sleep, what I was going to do, what was coming off. The only friends I had were a couple of young kids -- about my age. I had been in Hachsharah with, and they all didn't know what they were going to do. So anyway, I moved to the apartment and I went to the factory.

Well, there were just rumors every day. We went to work and we came home. We tried to listen to the BBC (British Broadcasting System). They furnished regular newscasts in all different languages to the various German and occupied countries at specific times every evening or night. This task was later taken up by the (Voice of America network) to try to see how the war was going.

I didn't hear a single word from my parents. We heard that some people had received news or about people who had been deported. We had reports that some of them said that everything was OK. That it was primitive, but that it was basically acceptable. Later on we found out that they were forced to give this news. Some of them of course got a letter which said that the ashes had been delivered. You know they all died (reportedly) of pneumonia. (The above all pertains to news received from the camps). Nobody died of anything else. So I lived there (in that apartment with that fellow and this girl).

It was August when my parents were taken and early the next year, we had a meeting at the factory where they said that they were going to get new workers. The German soldiers went through the streets in Poland and in the Baltic states, which they had conquered. What they did is that they drove around in trucks and they picked up women from the streets as they walked, they shipped them to Germany. They put them in camps and then they proceeded to use them as forced laborers, as we were being used. Therefore, a whole bunch of women had arrived and were put in a camp near the Siemens factory. So they said, "they are going to work here and you are going to show them what you have been doing" -- you know, us Jews. So these people could not speak German, they were pathetic! They had come from their own countries -- with just their coats on their backs -- without anything else. They were just dumped there.

I came home that night. Of course, I had discussed all of that with this man (the owner of the apartment) and that girl. He said, "You know, you got to do something. If you're ever going to do something you got to do something now! As soon as the people stop your work, you are going to be deported. The new people are going to be in so that the Jews are naturally going to be out."

I remember that night. We sat up all night long and he kept asking me, "Isn't there anybody you know who can help you, or do something?" I think that it was like two in the morning when I said, "Well there was this man my father knew. He gave me his card and maybe I should contact him." He said, "You write him!" and he dictated this letter. He said "mail the card" I wrote just "this is where I live and I would like to see you as soon as possible." I got an instant reply in the mail two days later. I received a card that he was going to come and see me the following Sunday. Of course this was extremely brave of this man, just to go into a Jewish house, with the star outside and everything. He did come on Sunday morning and I told him what was happening. I said that I felt it was a matter of maybe two weeks, or at the most four weeks, and that would be it. So he said "OK. Let me think!" This is the thing which is so strange when people think that you go underground and you read these books and see these movies. You think that they are spy stories with the code words, the raincoats and everything like that. It was nothing like that. This man had wealth, as I said, he was a very wealthy man with property all over Germany. He said, "Listen, I own an apartment building in Heiligensee," which is a good part of town, but it was far enough from where I had been born so that I was not familiar with these people, that no one would know me. "I have a tenant there, she is a sick lady. She has a three-year old child. She rents the smoke shop." Every apartment building had one smoke shop.

The residential neighborhood in Heiligensee was beautiful. The man told me that she had had a hard life, she had a rough time, the kid is three years old and she still doesn't know who the father is. She is incorrigible. She is hanging around with three guys. However, the war brought her some prosperity because a smoke shop -- of cigarettes, she had all kinds of black market cigarettes, she just had had everything so that she could pay her rent. But she was grateful to the man that he had let her go on for all these years without evicting her.

"Let's go there! I will call. I think that she has an extra room." She had a little apartment behind the smoke shop. We went there that same afternoon. We had decided that he would introduce me as his niece, from out of town who had been bombed out. This made a lot of sense because many cities throughout Germany had been bombed. A lot of people were running around in Berlin, they were from out of town, they had lost their houses or/ and family, they were kind of at loose ends. So we just went there and we met the lady. He introduced me. "This is my niece Burger." I had decided to take my mother's maiden name, because I couldn't very well continue with "Levy." He said, "Well she has lost her family

and things. I would like her to go into your spare room.” The woman said, “OK sure.” She shows me the room. It’s 10 PM and Herr Kreutz said, “OK here is the first weeks rent, and she will move in tomorrow.” That was all there was to it. So, of course, it was kind of strange. I had never seen anything like it. I don’t know if you want to hear any details about it or not.

I never met anybody like Frau Winneman. She had that little apartment behind the smoke shop. It was filthy, it was cluttered up and it was dark. She was a woman in her thirties. She could have been pretty. She was small. She had some nice features, but she had pockmarks all over and she had kind of yellow stumps for teeth. So she wasn’t exactly beautiful. She wore her nightgown all day long but she managed to buy a fur coat. She wore that over her nightgown and she wore her felt slippers and she had a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. Constantly she played solitaire. Then there was chocolate all over the house and smoked eel and everything. It was filthy. The kid was on the floor and she had the most expensive toys in the world. She sat on the filthy floor with her dirty torn underwear, just having a good time on the floor. The kid (little Karen) was a darling little kid. You know, a little blond blue-eyed child. Just as sweet as could be. There also was a big fat cat. That cat was fed better than anyone in the entire German Reich.

Q: You lived in a room within her apartment?

A: Oh yes, indeed. She had her bedroom, then she had one room in the back which she didn’t use and I found out that the mattress was full of bed bugs. This was not very attractive, you know. But, anyway, she did not ask any questions -- so I moved in there. Now my problem was where to spend the days, because nobody - - in those days -- could fail to work. It was just impossible for someone not to work. You know every man worked. If he was young enough they joined the army. If they were too old they were somehow involved in some kind of military thing, outside the home. Every woman worked unless she had children or something to do with children. So I had to tell her that I worked somewhere. So I had to invent an office which was super secret and that is why she couldn’t call me there. You know I couldn’t take a chance that she would call to check up on me. Of course everyone was afraid -- the Germans were afraid. You know, secret, secret! You got to stay away from that.

So, in the beginning I went back to the old apartment. You know I left in the morning at eight and didn’t come home until five or six. I do forget what time I set my hours. In the beginning I also went back to the old place where I had worked -- but that didn’t last very long because the guy said “Hey any day now they are going to get me!” He had no chance at all to go underground. His looks were against him. He had very long ears and a very big nose. You know that he would have been identified as a Jew anywhere. He just had no choice! He knew that it was going to happen. The girl was going to leave also to go into the underground. So I spent my days there for about six weeks and then he told me

“you can’t come anymore. It is too dangerous!” They had deported a couple of families from that house. One young couple -- the woman was pregnant, at the time -- and they had a three-year old child, they took them. So my problem was what to do all day long. I covered the city of Berlin. I went to movies, I sat through movies four times. I went into museums. I went into parks when the weather was nice. I stayed away from my old neighborhood. I had, at this time, no papers whatsoever, because I had had to throw all papers (with the name Levy) away, and I had not been able to get any others. I had no connections through whom I could have gotten papers.

Q: Were you ever afraid that you might be stopped?

A: I was constantly afraid of being stopped! Anybody looking at me half way, I thought that that is what they were getting ready to do. You know, I thought that they were going to get me. Another problem was that (without proper identification papers), I had absolutely no rationing ticket. You only got your food rationing tickets at the police station where you were to register. If you weren’t registered, you didn’t get any food stamps. So I had no food stamps (i.e. rationing tickets were needed to buy food in war time Europe, not like our food stamps to get food for free). Mr. Kreutz gave me a few food stamps and I had some contacts on the black market (those were the collection of places including some stores where you could buy things often at exorbitant prices, without the proper amount of rationing cards) but the prices were like 100 DM for one pound of butter and prices along these lines. It was very hard to get and it was not necessary. Of course my landlady thought that, as was normally done, I would give her the food stamps, since she cooked for me. So I had to make up excuses, or go to a restaurant or whatever. Of course she had so much food that it was spoiling, it was rotting and she fed me anyway. I guess she like me. I became so involved with her and the kid and they had no one else in the world. They took me in like.

Q: So you were able to manage (through her)?

A: They took me in like family. I didn’t eat there regularly, just whenever it happened. Then I kept on thinking, “What in the heck am I going to do!” I remembered a Chinese fellow who owned a restaurant, we used to go there for years and years, my father, my mother and I. The man had been born in China and he came illegally to Germany and he told us how he was against Hitler. He had been through hell and he told us how he always had been against Hitler, and stuff. I contacted him after his restaurant was closed and he helped me out. He tried to feed me, he gave me some food rationing tickets. So you see, I just snacked wherever I could, that was it.

However, the hardest part was where to spend the time. That was another danger. Very few, but there were some of the Jewish people who had made a deal with the Gestapo -- and I don’t blame them, if it saved their own necks; they went around

the streets trying to find people like me. I met one girl, now I didn't talk to anybody. I just looked at them, but I met one girl and I knew that she was one of them because I had worked with her in the factory. She saw me very clearly, just as I saw her, and for some reason she let me go. They got her in the end. I feel very bad about it. I can't blame her. No one can blame anybody, since when it comes to saving your own neck no one knows what he or she is going to do. No one can judge anybody. So the days went by OK. I tried to stay pretty far away from my landlady and all that, but it was impossible because you were suspect, if you weren't friendly. Then came the question, if you weren't friendly, why were you not friendly.

I got into a situation which I believe that it was easier. I think that the kid was going to be four years old and she had a Christening. She was going to have her baptized. They still hadn't found out who the father was. You had to have the name of the father to have her baptized. So she cleaned out the apartment for once. She put clothes on and there was a lot of food and a lot of booze and I helped with all the preparations, but I didn't want to go home (to the apartment) that night because I was so scared since I knew that they were going to have a lot of people there. I didn't know who was going to ask me what questions, so I came home late and she was just furious with me. They made me drink a glass full of schnapps (brandy) which is unreal and I of course, wasn't used to that. Maybe I drank a little wine or a taste of beer. They made me drink that, and I became deathly ill as a matter of fact as ill as I ever was in all my life. She thought that that was great, that that was just cool, you know. You know, get drunk and being sick. They woke me up with aspirin and coffee. Then she did accept me. Now that I was a person like everybody else (who got drunk) that was great.

Then we had neighbors. He was a white Russian and she was a German. I guess that she used to be a call girl, at one time, but she was OK. His name was Ivan Rickhoffhausen von Alteis, but we called him Ivan, that was the Russian who came over during the revolution. They made vodka in the basement. Every night we drank vodka endlessly and ate zekuska as the Russians do. He thought that if you drink and eat with it, that is how you keep from getting drunk, you eat smoked fish, caviar, whatever, but drink that vodka is what Frau Winneman kept saying, also.

Then the bombing raids came, and we had to drag everything to the bunker. We took Karen's baby buggy and loaded that buggy, threw the kid on top. The kid was asleep and the cat jumped in and we all dragged everything to the bunker. The bunker was about three blocks away. Everyone who has never been through a bombing cannot imagine what it is like. You sit there and you hear a whistling and you hear the crash and then the entire business shakes. And that was a building which was built for a bunker, that means a massive building. Everyone sits around with these bright lights and the Volksturm, the old men who were not in the service directing everything. So everyone sat there waiting. They had as

many clothes on as they could possibly wear because they didn't know whether they would find anything when they came home after an air raid. Half of the women got hysterical. Some of them would just sit there, perfectly rigid. Kids usually slept through it. They were so conditioned. Then, when it was all over you walked out and then you looked and saw the fires and the ruins and you wonder; "Oh, my God, is there something to come home to?" Our neighbor used to get so drunk when he heard the siren that he went out in the street and yell "Come-on you little bombs, come on!" We had to drag him back into the house. He would pass out in the basement. My landlady would pass out on the sidewalk. We had to drag her also. It was wild! It was really wild.

My money was running out and I did not have any connections to sell the jewelry. It was getting worse to spend all that time on the street. In addition to that, my landlady had a neighbor who started asking a lot of questions. This was an older gentile German woman who would never normally associate with my landlady. She was much too high class (for my landlady), but the war was going on and she was a smoker (so she wanted something from my landlady). She started asking questions. My landlady told me that she was annoyed about it. She had no suspicion about me, but this woman evidently had suspicions. What gave my landlady suspicions is that I would not go out with the German soldiers, that annoyed her. She could not understand why I wouldn't date anybody. She said; "you are a young girl, why shouldn't you go out and date?" I told her that I had a dead fiancé and stuff like that. So anyway, it was getting tenuous and I didn't know how long I could hold out anymore. So I turned out to be very lucky again by fate. All my life it was never anything I did with my own brains.

Q: I was going to ask you about how long did you stay (at Frau Winneman's?)

A: I stayed with her about three fourths of a year.

Q: Through the winter and the summer then. How were you able to do that?

A: Well, that is what I said, with movies through which I sat two or three times. I went to museums, you know, Berlin is full of museums. You can go into the big department stores, I spent a lot of time there. You get very resourceful if you have to. You know your feet hurt, but you just plain have to find a different place to go every day. You couldn't go to the same place, or they would recognize you.

Well, anyway, this girl I used to share the apartment with (before I went underground), she had a boy friend at the time. He used to come and spend the weekend. We all suspected that he definitely would go underground, and as a matter of fact, that he already lived underground because he never wore a star. He looked very average, you know, sandy hair, freckles and all around just average. He was thirty. I never knew too much about him. As I said, nobody asked anybody any questions, you just kind of kept your mouth shut. So I figured



that he had gone underground and that the girl had gone underground. I did figure that they still would be together.

Well, one day on the street, somebody called me by name and I thought, "Well that's it!" So I turned around and it was this guy. His name was Emil Messerstruck (or something close to this name). I don't think that I ever was so glad to see anyone in my life. You know, that was the only one. You have to realize that for all this time I had not be in contact with any other Jewish person. I had not listened to any BBC or anything. I had no idea of what was going on in the war. You know the papers were full of German victories all along. Of course, I knew that the air raids were taking place, but we didn't know. So anyway, he and I went into some coffee or restaurant and he told me that the girl -- his girlfriend -- had been caught also. She was ready to go underground but she wanted to pick up her last pay check from work in the factory. She picked up the pay check. At that time the Gestapo raided everybody and she got caught for that last pay check.

So he was living in hiding and he had gotten hold of some papers and he worked for a German grocer as an accountant. He had been working for him for years. He knew him. He was a very smart cookie. The gentile German grocer figured that it is a good idea to keep a Jew handy because, if the war goes wrong, they would go into business together. They had plans to set up a chain store such as the A & P, big plans you know. Emil worked for this grocer. He got food from him, which one can expect from a grocer. He got ration tickets from him. The guy took him in and gave him some. You know, you could pull deals that way. He had a room out in the suburbs of Berlin. He had some papers that he was draft deferred because of some kind of heart ailment. You could say that he was in pretty good shape.

So I told him what I was doing. He said, "Hey, you got to cut this out. This is an awfully dangerous game you are playing, that running around. Let me get you some papers to start with." He got me an identification card stating that I was working at such and such a place, with a photograph. That was an awfully good thing to have. He said that he was going to try to find another place for me. He had connections on the black market and stuff. He could help me sell all the jewelry. He started coming to the house. My landlady didn't like him. She thought that he was too old for me, that he wasn't good looking enough. She just didn't like him. He was kind of a standoffish person, you know, he didn't like to be bothered. He had had a very tough life. His parents were from Lithuania.

After a while, in a very poor section of Berlin, we found an apartment house, with a courtyard and an other apartment house behind it. There we found a room on the ground floor. It was a dark, back apartment building, really grungy and grimy with a toilet in the hall. We established that we were a couple and that I was not well, and therefore could not work, so now I could spend my days in the house in the house without having to run around in the streets while he went to work every

day, which was a good thing. He had a place to go and he did work and he brought the food and stuff. We sold the jewelry, as we needed to, little by little, because we had to get clothes and food and other things. These things, including the incidentals mostly came from the black market. I still kept in touch with the Chinese man from the restaurant, because you could not afford to lose contact with anybody. You might need them again.

Q: Did the landlady question you that you had a wedding or was she just satisfied that you had gone off to live together?

A: Oh no! Oh no! that would have been impossible. We said that we were married.

Q: But you didn't ask the landlady to the wedding and she was not insulted?

A: No, no, no! She thought that Emil and I had gotten married and that I was a fool. That was it.

Q: I was wondering why she did not want to throw a big wedding knowing how she was about parties.

A: She just didn't like him, like I said. However, I went to visit her by myself. However, the new landlady knew what was going on. I think that I might mention her boy friend because that was important that nut or whoever he was was out for the money. We paid an exorbitant price for that place, something like it these days we would pay \$300 for a place like that, or maybe even \$500 (depending on the value of the DM). So we lived there because they wanted the money.

In the meantime, the old scrub lady stayed with her son. You know it was her apartment (which she rented to us) but she stayed with her son. The apartment was a room with a hot plate and a toilet down the hall. So I played my records a lot and I visited the Chinese restaurant and I visited my former landlady. My friend Emil got very angry at me when I did that. He thought that I was taking chances. I just couldn't handle it. You go nuts if you don't go out and see somebody sometime.

One day I got sick on the street. I fainted and they had to get an ambulance. I thought that was going to be it, but for some reason they didn't question who I was. As it turned out, it was a pretty good thing, because the people in the apartment building truly believed (after that) that I was really sick. As it turned out, I only had the cramps, that I passed out, but it all kind of helped. So we lived there for a while and then the landlady's boy friend got greedy. He wanted more money. We kind of offered to meet him half way up to what he demanded.

That went on for a few weeks and then Frau Gieser came and talked to us one day. She said, "Hey, that man is going to turn you in, he wants more money, he

thinks that he can get someone else and then get more money. So either you pay him a lot or he is going to turn you in.” That was pretty decent of her. That was half way decent, but half way she was scared to death that someone would find out that she is involved. You know, if it was known that she was hiding Jews, that would be her neck just the same. When she told us that, we had to get out the same night.

Now Emil could go back to his old room where he used to live -- because they never knew that anything was wrong. He had told them that he was out of town and other stories. I had no place to go. I went to Frau Winneman for one night. I said that I had had a fight (with Emil) and “Can I stay here overnight?” She said “sure!” However I couldn’t stay there longer because that would have been really worse with that one lady asking. It was impossible. I had no idea what to do. This Frau Gieser who had rented us a place, her son was a janitor in another apartment building. His wife and kids had been sent to the country because of the bombing and they did decide that I could stay there for a while. So I went there. I stayed there one night when he started to get awfully friendly. I just freaked out and the next morning I got hold of Emil at work. I said that I was not going to stay there.

I wondered, “Who am I going to call and what will I do?” Then I remembered that my uncle, my favorite uncle, had been married to a gentile German woman. He had divorced her because she was very fond of men and very fond of drink. However, in spite of the divorce they had remained on good terms. The uncle had passed away and my father had given her all the furniture and everything and we had remained on good terms. She had really loved my uncle. She was crazy about him. It was just one of those things, she was just too fond of men and drink and that was it. So, I decided to call her. I found her in the phone book and I called her. She just about passed out when I told who I was. I said: “I have got to talk to you.” She said, “Come on!” She had an apartment way across town. It was a good thing that Berlin is a great big city. I went there and told her that I had to have a place to stay. She had had no idea that I was still around. She had figured that everyone of us was dead. She worked in some war office and had a boy friend who was a big shot general who was, thank God, out of town. She said, ‘Now, you can stay here, but you can’t go in and out. You have to be completely quiet because some of the people know that I used to be married to a Jew at one time, and it is too dangerous with the general and all that stuff. See what you can do and I will see what I can do and we’ll figure something out. In the meantime, you have to stay here.’”

Now this was on the fourth floor and there were a lot of bombing raids and, of course, I could not go to the basement which was kind of creepy because staying on the fourth floor is no fun when you see the crash! And everything (of an air raid). So I stayed there for about two weeks. Food was no problem. It was clean, it was nice, it was like a kind of vacation.

Then this so called aunt, well we have always called her aunt Friedl. She had an aunt who was an older lady who worked in a factory, an old maid "Tante Emma." Tante Emma (Tante is the German word for aunt) had a little cottage outside of Berlin, a weekend cottage you know, a little frame place where she used to go on weekends. She still worked in the factory. So, she decided that I could have that cottage. There were some neighbors around, but they were not the nosy type. They were pretty nice people. One was a school principal who had retired and was living there with his wife. A lot of people went out there because of the bombing of Berlin it was so bad, that it was not unusual to go there and stay there. So I went there and we established right there and then that I was married and my husband was working in town and that he would come out over the weekend. This way, a working set-up was determined. I stayed there all through the week and Emil came over the weekend and brought me food and whatever I needed.

Tante Emma came on her bicycle. She had learned how to ride a bicycle when she was 65 -- and she had a pet. You wouldn't believe it. It was a chicken without legs which she called Chicky. She had it on the back of her bicycle. When she got to the cottage she put the chicken in the lettuce. The poor thing couldn't walk. So we stayed there and I became acquainted with the neighbors. You couldn't help but get acquainted, especially with the school principal and his wife. They were older people and they were very nice. He went hunting. They took me in like a daughter, really, they were very nice people.

I stayed there for two months and then the bombings became too bad. The bombing shifted to the outskirts of Berlin, and we had absolutely no shelters. We had no basements. We had nothing. We were standing in the fields. You could see the bomb runs. When the planes came over, they dropped what we called Christmas trees. These were the markers where the bombs were going to fall. Then the German planes went up and tried to fight them. then came the flag (the Fliegerabwehr i.e. anti-aircraft guns) and they had the air fights. As it happened, it was always directly over us. When the allied bombers reached the point they were supposed to reach, of course they dropped the bombs. You know they wanted to get rid of them before they went home. So it came to a point that it was impossible, you know, no shelter, no nothing, these air fights going on, the bombing going on. It was getting to be something which was almost impossible to bear. It was also getting to be harder and harder to get back and forth, even when going with the train, thought it was only one hour from Berlin. It was hard to go there and I couldn't get my food. so I knew that I had to go back. There was just no way that we could stay there.

So I decided to go back to Frau Winneman my first landlady because by now it was pretty clear that the war was lost (for Germany). They had started drafting men fifty-five years old and kids like sixteen years old. We heard from the people coming back from Russia. It was pathetic, the way they looked. You knew it was just about hopeless. So I decided to go to my first landlady, Mrs. Winneman. I had not been in touch with Herr Kreutzig at all. I didn't know whether he was

traveling, whether he didn't have the time or what. So I went to her in spite of the fact that Emil was very much against it. I told him that I didn't care, that I had it up to here now, I am going back to her. I am going to tell her the truth and I am going to see whether she will keep me anyway. So I went to Berlin and I talked to her and I said "Hey, listen, this is the story. I am a Jew. I have been hiding all this time. I am not Mr. Kreutzig's niece. I am in your hands, whatever. So what you want." She said, "Look, you are one of the family, you come here, you stay here, that's it. Of course I guess she figured that it wouldn't be bad either if I would be there at the end of the war. Now she knew too that the war was ending. So I moved back! Now she was a little better prepared to deal with that gentile German neighbor woman (who had been making a nuisance of herself).

Emil came by and he looked in this little room there anyway. I stayed home and I forget what story we made up for the people. No, I remember now, we didn't make up any excuse; I stayed in the back room all day long. I didn't come out, I didn't go out into the store anymore like I used to and I still pretended as if I was working. I just used to show up at night. I thought that I almost had it made to lay low for the time, but this German neighbor woman put her two cents in again. I had known a man from the neighborhood who had tried to pick me up lots of time. I always kind of put him off. He had a big (Nazi) party sign on his door. This neighbor woman came in and she told my landlady that this man had been asking questions about me and that she thought that he was Gestapo. That was a big lie. However, I said to Frau Winneman, "I have got to get out of here because I am not going to endanger your life and Karen's life!" I was particularly fond of Karen and of her. They may have been low class people, but they were good hearted people and they were nice to me. I added, "I am going to get out of here. I kind of doubt that that fellow is Gestapo, but I am going to take the bull by the horn and I am going over to his apartment." I did. I asked him, "Have you been asking a lot of questions about me? Now what is the story?" he said, "Well, nothing". He just wanted to ask about me. He was "interested." So I said, "Well you got me in a lot of trouble because I can't afford to be asked about. This is why: I am Jewish. I am hiding out! This has spoiled it for me! I can't stay where I am and I haven't got another place yet." He says, "Well, you can stay here for awhile." "OK" "For a price." I still had some heavy gold watches. He seemed very willing to take them. this man turned out to be a complete pervert. People were going in and out. The weirdest people you have ever seen! It was just wild! Everybody coming in said "Heil Hitler!" I had never heard that, so I thought, "I can't stay here either."

So one night I went over to Frau Winneman and I said; "Hey, I don't know what to do. I can't stay there either." So, again, I was extremely lucky! A friend of hers showed up, an old school friend who was a widow who lived in the East part of Berlin. She lived by herself, a very nice person, a Social Democrat, real old fashioned, you know, union people. You know, like they are here, strong left leaning affiliation. We decided to tell her the story. What can we do? This can't

go on much longer! She said, "Pack your things, come with me!" We went out to her place and I stayed with her.

By this time the bombings were day and night, all the time. We stayed in the bunker. We met people. People started talking. We met some German soldiers who did turn out to be from Alsace-Lorraine (the French provinces on the left bank of the Rhine which Germany annexed in 1870 and, again in 1940), really French all the way, just biding their time, trying to pick the right moment to desert and get in with the French prisoners of war. So we were just waiting.

By now we knew that the Russians and the Americans were stopped on either side of Berlin. We were thinking that the Americans would come in. We were positive that the Americans would come in from the West, and the Russians from the East. Since we were living in the East, were we going to see the first Russians? That was a frightening sight. These Russians would scare the hell out of you. I mean they just looked scary, that's all. So they came and we knew that the battle would occur pretty soon. We heard shooting in the distance already. We saw the prisoners of war, everything was bad.

My old landlady, Frau Winneman, called me from the West. She said, "Hey, this is going to be the end, I wish you could come back here, because I don't want to be alone with Karen." Well, I couldn't blame her, alone with a little girl! I owed her so much, so I said "OK, I am going back there."

By this time nothing is running in Berlin. No trolleys, no nothing, but a lot of cars. All the big shots, army, SS, SA, party officials, in their cars taking off to the West, getting out of Berlin, getting the hell over into the American territory, hopefully, so I hitched a ride. It took me about five hours to get through the city and to Heiligensee. I went with a bunch of big shot Nazis.

By this time, I had nothing of value left, I don't remember if I took a suitcase. I believe I had a small bag and I had about three rings left, about three diamond rings which were worth something. But, while going from car to car I managed to lose them. So I had nothing. I got to Frau Winneman's with the clothes on my back, and that was all.

Then the bombing started in earnest. We heard artillery all day long and we moved after a couple of days the beds and all our belongings into the basement.. We couldn't go into the bunker anymore, because by now we had the Russian planes also. You see they had the Russian fighter planes. They came down really low and threw firebombs. By that time, the stores were mostly closed and you had to go and stand in line to get bread or milk, or whatever, that is, with your ration tickets. So the Russian planes came over and machine-gunned the people who were standing in the lines. People were laying all over the streets, you know dead, and nobody came to take them away. They just put paper over them. Here you would see an arm sticking out, there you'd see a leg sticking out. You know,

you have that constant artillery in the background and you don't know, in the basement. They were just trying to get through it. (the bombardment).

The funny part was that this guy showed up. The guy I spend a couple of nights with, that pervert, and he says, "Now look, I just want to remind you of the time I helped you. You know, when things go wrong my name is." I thought "OK." So we stayed in the basement and we would have been OK. but, just maybe two weeks before the whole thing was over, the house was finally bombed. We had to get out of the basement.

We got the little girl, of course, and we got most of her things. That was the main thing. We got as much food as we could and we wound up in the apartment house kiddy corner from the one we used to live in. That was the house where that nosy neighbor lady lived. We then stayed in that basement. We were living there. There was a young pharmacist and another young girl and several other people, we were all living there.

Then people started turning the SD (Schutz Dienst) i.e. protective service, i.e. a paramilitary unit set up by the Nazis) out. When the German soldiers came in, nobody wanted them in. Everybody said "Get out! find another place." "We don't want any soldiers here! No Nazis!" One crazy guy, one diehard Nazi decided to go on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the apartment building with a machine gun. He started shooting out of a window. In front of the house there already was a Russian tank. So he started shooting with a machine gun. Of course, they were going to blow us to kingdom come. So, finally some guys managed to get rid of him and get the gun away from him. We all sat in the basement while we were waiting for the shooting to stop.

Goebbels was still talking over the radio. "We are going to hold Berlin and our Volksturm (the peoples defense forces), you know the 75 year old men without teeth and shaking all over, are going to fight to the death. We are going to win!"

The food was getting so scarce that when a horse fell down in the street -- (now I had eaten enough horse meat during the war, we had it in the country because it was available without ration stamps), -- but his was not a horse which had been slaughtered. We ran between the bombings with a knife to cut a piece of meat and cook it, because you knew you are hungry and you had to eat. That was it. That was the end.

One day the shooting kind of stopped and that was it. Then we were afraid to come out of the basement, because we didn't know what was up there. So then we went up there, of course. I, stupid me, I am so glad that the war is over. I made it! Oh boy, the Russians are here. We didn't know if they are Americans, didn't know if they are Russians. We hoped that they are Americans! But anything is better than the Germans! My neighbor, the White Russian taught me the phrase: "I am not German, I am Jewish!" in Russian. I learned it! So, OK.

Fine. We go out in the street, we see the Russian soldiers with machine guns going around, you know. So we went back into the basement.

The Russians came in waves and waves. All the Germans, all the German women! That was the big word "Frau-Komm!" that meant come on, female. Rapings happened all over the place. Most of them were drunk when they came in. They were drunk like skunks. When they were in a good mood, they just raped the women and when they were in a bad mood, they shot the whole place to hell. They just shot around. You can't imagine. I saw apartments afterwards, nice apartments in which the Russian soldiers had been in. You wouldn't believe it, but everything was shot up, telephones were ripped out. They took things which they thought they could use. They were so far behind in their technology and everything. They used any place in the house as a bathroom. They probably didn't have any at home. They probably didn't know what a W.C. was. It was just perfectly disgusting.

First, when I was so ignorant and carefree and happy, you remember, and I tried to talk to them. First, I got my share of rapings, and afterwards I got wise to it. We had a great big wardrobe in the basement and all of the women we hid behind there. The men kind of positioned it in a way that it looked as if it was right along the wall. They just left a few of the older women up front. They took the old women too, of course, but they were not in as much danger as we were. So we hid behind there for about three days, because things happened which were so bad like a fourteen year old girl being raped by about twenty of them, and the father standing there. The only one nobody touched was my landlady Frau Winneman. She was dying for guys! She was always dying for guys and she sat right in front and so help me, nobody ever touched her. I never could get over that!

So that was the end of the war! That was when the Russians settled down. We were very disappointed with the allies that they didn't send us the Americans or the British or somebody else civilized. But they didn't. We had curfews. We lived with the Russians. We had to be off the streets at 8:00 P.M. I moved in with another German girl and we were very careful, because the Russians were still dragging every woman off the street. They stole every watch. They had a thing about a watch, that is what they wanted, watches and money! Anybody with a watch. "Uhr! Uhr! Uhr!" (The German for watch is Uhr). They didn't know how to tell time! One guy called me over on the street once and wanted me to show him how to read a watch, which he had stolen. They stayed about, I guess, one month until they set up the division of Berlin.

The second ones were the Canadians, who came in. The Canadians, of course, that was heaven. They stayed for a little longer. They went around and gave candies, and gave cigarettes and were nice. The German girl I lived with, of course couldn't speak a word of English, but she had a Canadian boyfriend right away. He left after two weeks and of course she had a little souvenir; she was



pregnant. I told her that she was going to have a terrible time because the kid is not going to understand German and how was she going to talk to it in English.

Q: Did you speak English?

A: Oh yes! I had learned in school. I had learned several languages. So that was it. Then that was it and the Canadians left, and we had the British come in. the British were quite another story. They were really very proper. Before they picked up the girls, they questioned them whether they went to church every time.

Q: It was all right then?

A: Yes, that made it OK. When, finally, they left, thank God, then the Americans came and finally, order came. Then everything became established.

Q: It was all so interesting that I would like you to continue about why you came to America.

A: OK. So I still lived with that German girl who was getting a little heavy around the stomach. She was kind of dumb, but she was a good girl. We used to go swimming. We had nothing to do. There was no work or anything like that. So we kind of helped each other out. We got some ration tickets. We got some food from the allies then. So we went swimming and we were swimming one afternoon on one lake out there in Gruenwaldt when a jeep came by and I saw my first Americans. Two guys jumped out and they wanted to find the way to somewhere. So we told them the way and later on we found that they knew that way well, since they picked up the mail every day there!

However, that was the very first American I had met. Bill McDaniel, is the one who brought me over to this country. He was a mail clerk in the First Army. We became acquainted and I told him about myself. He said: "Hey, do you want a job?" I said, "Sure!" So he said, "Well, OK. We can use somebody who speaks some English, and knows something about selling." So, since my father was in the retail business, he took me to his commanding officer and they requisitioned. Now the Americans "requisitioned", they didn't steal. The Russians "stole", the Americans "requisitioned". These two are the same thing, of course, but who is going to argue the point.

They had me set up a tailor shop for them. I hired three German women for them and we set up a little room with an ironing board and a sewing machine. I could interpret. The G.I.'s came and had their uniforms either pressed or if the pants needed to be taken up or the sleeves or the stripes sewn up, collar fixed or whatever -- they came in and they told me what they wanted done. I told the old ladies what they wanted done. I usually slept there since there was a big table here, so that was OK.

Q: Were the old ladies paid?

A: Yes, by the German government, not by the Americans. I don't know if it was the city government or the Reich government. The German government paid us, but I don't know from what pocket. Then the First Army left.

In the meantime, a cousin of my mother's came to Berlin from here -- from the States. He had been in the States for years, long before Hitler. He was one of the black sheeps in the family, whom they all chipped in and bought a one-way ticket and said; "Go to America!" So he came back as a War Department employee with an equivalent officer's rank and a fancy uniform. I guess that he was about fifty and he never had had too much money here. He was from Queens, N.Y. where he had a wife and three kids. He was living over there, in an elegant villa. He had a German girlfriend.

Anyway, he came to hunt for me at the request of my sister. My sister had written him a letter. In that letter she wanted to know what was left of the house and of me and my cousins and all that. This cousin of my mother's worked in a part where the Americans were hiring Germans to check the mail which was going out of the country or coming into the country so as to see just what was being said. Everything was still being censored. They hired a lot of Germans to do that and the German government paid for it. So when the group left where I had that tailor shop, my second cousin got me a job up there where he worked.

Since I could understand English very well, and I didn't have to sit there and do that lettering. They put me in the supply room with a G.I. I worked with a sergeant Eddy Homesen (or something close to that). He was a big fat guy from Chicago. Of course, I could understand English, but I was not very fluent in it and I didn't know that colloquialisms. He answered the phone: "Sergeant Homesen" and I thought that when he was gone that is what I was supposed to say. So I said "Sergeant Homesen" and they came back, "My, your voice has changed!" They were kidding, and they taught me to curse, to say things that were really fierce. I didn't know what I was saying. They were great to me, all the guys were great to me, but they really taught me to curse. When I came over here, I thought the M.P. would drop his teeth when I let loose. I had no idea what I was saying.

Anyway, this guy whom I had met, Bill McDaniel, and had set up this tailor shop, he had gone home when his turn came up, he wanted me to come over here. We were supposed to get married -- and he did get over here. You know, I worked for the Americans in Weimar. He wrote me.

Q: What happened to Emil?

A: You see I forget when I don't write things down. Emil got caught. He got killed. We met when I moved back to Frau Winneman's. We met every afternoon at a

certain spot. He would bring me food and everything. We would talk and we would cheer each other up. One day he didn't show up. I waited and the next day he didn't show up either. So I knew that something was wrong, and I went to his boss and he hadn't shown up. So I had his boss call his landlady and all his things were there. The only thing which really got me, he had a gun. He had bought himself a gun, a revolver, and he had said that whenever he gets caught he at least would take someone with him, that he would not go without a struggle. At the time he was caught, he did not have the revolver with him. So I did assume that he was killed instantly, because, after the war, they had places where you could check up on people to see what happened to them, on the ones who came back from the concentration camps. I had one year after the war to check on him. He was killed. He was killed.

Q: You were talking about working with the U.S. army.

A: Yes, I enjoyed working with the Americans. I worked in the supply room and I learned a lot of things. I particularly learned English, which helped me a lot. I also learned a lot about the behavior of Americans, which was a great help. I corresponded with Bill and he was trying to get me out of Germany and I was trying to leave. All the people I worked with also tried to help me get out!

The one officer who was in charge for a while, Captain Sargent, became the consul or something like that. I went to see him and I was considered a "Displaced Person", at least I called myself a Displaced Person. They said, "Where were you born?" I said, "In Berlin." They said, "Why are you displaced?" Well, anyway, between what they did for me -- the officers I worked for -- and Bill, from Iowa, they got me a visa to come over here. Bill paid the ticket for me. I was here barely after the war was over. I came over on the second boat, because they were all working to get me here, that is, all the guys I was working for.

Q: Where did you leave from?

A: From Bremerhaven. We had to be in a camp for two weeks.

Q: A Displaced Persons Camp?

A: No. It was a camp in preparation mostly I guess to check that you did not have any contagious diseases, or other illnesses. We were questioned. I was questioned by the CIC (the outfit which was later renamed the CIA). They questioned us very closely and one had to show proof who one was and what one was, because at that time they were very strict as to who came over here, especially right after the war. So I went through all of that questioning, but it was a big help that I had worked with the American army, and they (my former employers) could help me in a lot of ways.

We stayed in Bremerhaven and we embarked on a troop transport to come over. It was no luxury ship. The troop transport was called the S.S. Marine Flasher. I got to the U.S. on June 26, 1945. The boat was marvelous (according to my memory). Boy, that food! I hadn't seen any food (without rationing) since 1936. Everyone was seasick except this one girl I met on the boat and I, and we ate "like there was no tomorrow." Wow! That food! Oh that was the very best thing of the whole trip. We hadn't seen anything like that!

Q: Were there any G.I's on the ship?

A: No, no just Displaced Persons and such. There were mostly Jews, some Germans who had been political prisoners and people like that. That was all. I had a visa not from any organization. I had a private visa from Bill.

Q: Was Bill there to pick you up?

A: That was messed up. They did not notify him of my scheduled arrival. I spent about four days in New York with a Jewish organization which picked me up and tried to talk me out of going to Iowa. As it turned out, they were right. I shouldn't have gone, but I didn't know that then.

Q: How did you get to that Jewish organization?

A: They met all the boats and they took care of anybody who was not met by somebody. They took anybody who was left over and put them up in a hotel. We landed in New York on the night of a big fight. Some great boxers were fighting. So, New York was just jammed packed. We were taken from the boat to a hotel and on the way we were stopped by people who asked, "Do you know where we can get a hotel room!" It was just impossible to find a place in New York. Bill came after about four days with his sister and brother-in-law. I had met the brother-in-law overseas also. He was stationed in Berlin too. They took me to Iowa.

Q: Can you talk about Iowa?

A: No! Not in any detail.

Q: We are interested in your adaptation.

A: All right! When I told the guys in Berlin where I was going, especially Captain Sargent, they asked me "Where are you going?" I said "Newton, Iowa!" Captain Sargent and others had an absolutely hysterical fit! He said, 'I am going to show you a map.' He said, 'you were born here in Berlin and you lived here. You will never make it in Newton, Iowa!' I said, "Well, I am going. Bill is waiting! I love him! He is cute as a button! He is wonderful to me. He sent me clothes. He is a nice guy!"

We went, first of all, by car with his sister and brother-in-law. I couldn't get over the American customs. She had pin curls all over when I met her. So I thought "Oh, my God!" She wore jeans. So I thought "Oh Lord! What is that?" All the old ladies in New York with the red hats and the yellow hats and the flowers, and the bright red lipstick and the nail polish. You know that is how loose women looked in Germany! I know that in Germany they would have been Madams, or something like that. Especially with the blue hair. All the girls in jeans!

We went to Niagara Falls on our way to Newton, Iowa and there we had quite an experience. They wanted to see the falls from the Canadian side also. They had never been there. So we went. There is that long bridge (probably the Rainbow Bridge). The Americans let us out without any difficulties. The Canadians asked everybody "Where were you born?" (That is always what the question is at any crossing into Canada since all those who are not U.S. or British citizens need a visa to enter Canada. Those who are not native born U.S. citizens have to prove U's; citizenship upon request).

"Newton, Iowa, where were you born?" Washington, Iowa, were you born?" Berlin, Germany, come on out!" So in there (in the Canadian custom house) they questioned me. They saw my papers. "No way are you going to go into Canada!" They think that I am a German spy. (Actually what The Canadians were concerned about was illegal immigration). "No way are you going into Canada!" They scared me to death by telling the people who couldn't come in because of failure to prove U.S. citizenship to the satisfaction of the Canadians that the U.S. border guards would not let them back into the U.S. I was crying. I was hysterical. They kept me for one hour. Then they let me loose. They said, 'OK, you go on back and you will be lucky if the Americans will let you back in!' because supposedly I only had a visa not permanent residency.

I was ready to jump off the bridge! I just could see myself being on that bridge forever, you know, between the two border guards. So they gave me a note to hand to the Americans. I don't know what it said, probably "This is a German spy, don't let her in!" So, at the American station, I handed them the note. They said, "Come on in." So I sat there and he says, "How long have you been in the U.S.?" I said, "Ten days." So he said, "but I think that you have plenty of time to see Canada, why don't you see the U.S. first! Have a good time!" The U.S. border guard was just great, but I was just afraid. You know that that comes after so many years of being afraid of anyone wearing a uniform or even part of a uniform or even talking with any authority. It was terrible.

So we got to Newton, Iowa. I was waiting for Newton, Iowa, you can imagine. We passed a little town, that is a little town square and two pigs and one movie. So I said, "where is Newton, Iowa?" They said, "We just drove through it!" And so it was.

Then I met the family and found out that Bill had told nobody that I was Jewish. Besides that, Jews are not too well liked in Newton, Iowa. There are exactly eight Jewish families and nobody would socialize with them, I believe to this day. The Jewish families own stores and stuff and sent their kids away to school. So Bill hadn't told anybody that I was Jewish. He told them that I was a French girl. However, the problem was that there was a real French girl living in that place. I was scared to death that I would be running into her, because I couldn't talk French that well at all.

His mother and father were good people, nice people, but they were just as scared of me as I was of them. His mother told me later on that she thought that anyone from Europe had two heads or something. I mean she didn't know! I mean that she was the sweetest thing. We became finally acquainted and I liked her a lot. We kept in touch for a number of years. I told her that I was Jewish. They were Methodists. You know, the mother had more sense than all of the kids put together. The kids thought that she didn't know that they drank and smoked. I told her that I did. "You know, my religion has nothing against it." She said, 'I know that they do it. They just think that I don't know.' Anyway, I couldn't handle it. Being in Newton, Iowa! Such a small town! So I left.

Q: Were you married?

A: No, we didn't get married. No, I couldn't see it and he had been seeing another girl while I was still in Germany. I thought that our life styles were so different that it wouldn't have worked out. We,, we didn't break up completely. I took a job in a tailor shop in Newton, Iowa. This guy, I talked to him, he seemed an OK guy. I told him, "I can't live like this." So he told me: "Well, this one is a Jewish person. Go talk to him." So I did talk to this one man and he said, "You don't have a chance as a Jew, and you'll make this man miserable. Get out!" So they collected, I think \$38, for me to buy a ticket to return to New York, so I left.

Q: You went back to New York?

A: I went to New York.

Q: What kind of contacts did you make in New York? Just getting a job?

A: No, I didn't stay in New York. Thank God I met a girl I had been on the boat with and in Bremerhaven. She was on the same train (heading to New York) that I was. She was from Rochester, New York and I was coming from Iowa. We met on the train. She was very unhappy. She was living with an 86 year-old uncle. She was a nineteen-year old girl. He was coming to New York for an operation. He was a professor of Biblical Languages and a Methodist Minister. He had converted, you know. He had been born Jewish. Anyway, she said that if she wasn't going to stay with this uncle she wanted to stay with me.

I was supposed to stay with somebody whom I knew from the boat who was supposed to have plenty of furnished rooms. This man met me. It was a man in his fifties. I found out the first night that he didn't have a room, but that he thought that it would be a good arrangement if I would stay with him. So I spent one night in the chair and the next morning I called that girl and her uncle at their hotel. We told her uncle, and I moved in with them. I stayed with them in New York in the hotel while he had his operation, a cataract operation. She told her uncle that either Helga is coming with us or I am staying with her, when he was making plans to leave New York City. So I went with them to Florida where he had a place. We stayed there for a while.

Q: Did you get a job in Florida?

A: Oh yes. We got some jobs. At first we stayed with the uncle. One of the jobs we got was as chambermaids once. That was in a little boardinghouse where they had a lot of old ladies. People thought; 'Oh boy, these girls are from Germany! They will be really clean.' We didn't even know how to clean a house. We went without a broom, just with a dust rag. We had never cleaned anywhere before. Then we left and went up to Jacksonville and took regular jobs.

Q: So by this time you felt that you had gotten acclimated?

A: Oh, I didn't like the country at all at first.

Q: You had gotten the job and gotten along.

A: Yes, we were able to make a living then. Yes, we did. We worked in Jacksonville, both of us. I worked in a store, a very nice dress store and she worked in another store. We made out OK.

Q: Well, how did you come to Dayton?

A: This girl was going with a guy from Germany who had come from Germany to Cincinnati. She eventually went to Cincinnati. She wanted me to come to join her. I went to Cincinnati. She broke up with this guy. I took up with him. I married him and stayed in Cincinnati from then on most of my life. Then I filed for divorce. He went to Dayton, got another job here. He talked me into dropping the divorce. I came to Dayton with the kids and got stuck. I finally got a divorce after all and got stuck here in Dayton.

<http://collections.ushmm.org>  
Contact [reference@ushmm.org](mailto:reference@ushmm.org) for further information about this collection