

Tape two, side one:

NP: ...an interview with Ellen Tarlow, on 11-19-93. We can begin.

ET: O.K. Back in the Consul's office, he informed us that, although he detected a heart murmur, I seemed to be otherwise in good health and that we could indeed get a visa. The relief was incredible. We finally had this tiny little stamp on our passport, and it said, "This visa is good until September 22nd, 1941." And so there we were. We had what we wanted. We didn't even, I didn't even think of my grandmother at that point. I was just so happy. I could not believe I had this. So, back we went to "The Jew House." And there was always that little envy there. I could sense it. "You have a visa. We have nothing." Both Jew Houses were full of people who had nothing, who had no quota number, who had no way of getting out. Did we suspect more at the time? I think within us we probably did. We had been reduced to nothing, and how much worse it could get? I don't know that we knew, that we saw it, that we envisioned. I think my mother always envisioned something horrible. Anyway, now the task was to get passage. At that time the only harbor still open, one was Lisbon, and one was Yokohama. And Germany was already, no, Germany was going to be at war with Russia in 1940, I believe? If I get my facts straight. I think it was.² Anyway, those were the two exit harbors. So then again HIAS, which is the only organization that could ever work for us, tried to obtain passage. And we tried to get money from our relatives to pay for this enormous amount of money to make up for that. It was just highway robbery. All these countries were, [sighs] oh, using us and extorting money to get us, you know, passage. It took forever and ever and ever, because it was very hard to get passage. Now that we finally had the visa, we didn't know if we'd be able to use it. And I do remember going back to our little school in Bielefeld, and a man coming, a Jewish man coming up to me at recess and he said to me, "You'll never get out. You may have a visa. You're gonna be stuck here with the rest of us. You won't get passage." And I remember a terror flooding right through me, because that was all I lived for, that we had the visa. Well, somehow somewhere, we were told that we could get out through Portugal, and that my father's cousin in New York was paying, and HIAS, and everyone combined and so on. It was I think \$1,000 a person then. And so October, no, excuse me, August the 5th or 6th we embarked on the greatest journey of our lives. We were told we had to assemble in Berlin, and we would go in a sealed train to Lisbon. I will explain the sealing later. We had to provide food for the train for ourselves for five days. There would be no refrigeration. So my...parents prepared boiled eggs and bread and some pickled meat and odd things in a thermos. And early on an August day, at five or six in the morning, my grandmother walked us to the train. It was the longest walk I ever took and I ever will take. She was 77, I think, or 78. She took us to the train. She always wore black. She had a little hat on with a little veil. She was my father's mother. She stood on the platform, and the

²Actually, Germany attacked the USSR in 1941.

train approached. We had a bag each to carry. We could only take out that which we were able to carry, and I was very skinny, and very undernourished. I weighed 78 pounds. I was 13-and-three-quarter, and my father carried my bag with the clothing. It's all we could take, we couldn't, we could take nothing of value. We had nothing nor could we have taken it. And she stood, my grandmother. I called her *Oma*, which is German for Nanny. And, she did not cry. I don't know how the woman did it. I've talked about this, choking with tears. I've talked about as if I were a commentator and Connie Chung³ herself perhaps, and right now I feel like Connie Chung. I'm looking on. She stood there, and she put her arms around me and she said one final thing. She said, "Do well." I think it was as if she pronounced me for life, that I should do well. Because it echoed in my soul forever. She hugged us. She did not cry. If she did I didn't see it. I looked out the window until she was a little black dot. It was the most horrible thing in my life. She stayed. We went on to Berlin. We [unclear] I'd never seen Berlin. My father took me around. There were constant air raids. And, we did get out at night to the railway station in Berlin. It was a subterranean kind of a through-walk. And the sirens were sounding, because 1941, the British were heavily, heavily bombing Germany. And that was our farewell, a last air raid. And we were put on a two-compartment sealed train, with Gestapo escorts, because we were going through France. France was occupied by Germany. We could have been spies. And, the train was sealed. I don't know how it was sealed, but it was sealed. We had two toilets for 64 people. We sat straight up and they were not the upholstered first or second class compartments; they were wood. And we stayed on that for five days. Well, actually we were let out in Spain, so I shouldn't say that, but all the way through France we sat. In Paris they were, we stopped and HIAS again came with hot tea and hot coffee and the Gestapo came. We had two Gestapo men on each of the train compartments. Not compartments, I mean the whole train section. And he opened the windows with a key and the hot liquids were brought in to us. This is the only liquid we had since Germany. And then the two toilets, systems were made—children first, women, and so on. And I was so skinny that my father laid me in the baggage net on top, where the baggage goes. We didn't have much baggage anyway, and we were all in the same boat. So I kind of twisted and turned in there and I laid there. Everyone else sat. And then we got into Spain. The border of France, a little town spelled H-E-N-, I'll say it again. H-E-N-D-A-Y-E. The Germans called it Hendaye ["hen-dai"]. My father said, "They don't know their French. It's Anday [chuckles]. That was our last examination, by Gestapo and border German police, because France, you know, was theirs and a woman was body stripped and body searched...a Jewish lady. And she was in a hysterical state. My mother quietly explained to me what they did to her. I could not believe what they did to her. They were looking for jewelry, and some people did smuggle things out. And, we were questioned one more time, and then we went into Spain. And Spain in 1941 was at the tail end of a civil war. It was terrible. It was burnt, the fields were burnt to

³Connie Chung - a popular American TV commentator.

a crisp. They were stubbles of black. And the children were jumping on our train. The Gestapo escort had left. We were, Spain was neutral, for what it was then Spain. Six-year-olds were jumping in our train window yelling in there. But they wanted to smoke. Someone spoke Spanish, and they asked, "Why do you want to smoke?" And they said, "It kills the hunger." So we saw there another form of terror. And then we were let off at a little town called Irun, I-R-U-N, and it was the loveliest experience...

NP: This is in Spain.

ET: This was in Spain. We stayed a night and a day in a little inn. I had bed bugs in my room.

NP: Oh dear.

ET: They were falling on my head. I didn't know what they were. [laughs] And I called my father and I said, "Daddy, something's falling on my head!" And he came in and said, "Oh my," he said, "they're bedbugs. Put the sheet over your head." The next morning I thought I was in a scene of Carmen. It was Sunday, and the bells were pealing, and church was, Mass was beginning. Little donkeys with women riding on it. It was incredible. We had a wonderful time. My father knew Latin well, and Spanish, and Greek, so he got along really well everywhere. And we mingled. And we had some awful bread we'd gotten out of Germany. But it was bread, and they had no bread. Very little of it. They had lots of fruit, so we got fruit. So we bartered a little bit. And then back on the train and we rode all through Sierra Madre, which was burnt out at that time of year. It was kind of...I don't know whether it was burnt out. It looked yellow; I remember it. Everything was yellow ochre and mulberry trees and there was nothing there. And we just went through and through and through. And all these little kids kept jumping on our train asking for cigarettes. And then we arrived in Portugal. Not in Lisbon, but at the other end of this long, narrow strip of Portugal, I guess. It sort of ensconces that part of the world there. It's at the left end of Spain, it is a long strip and that's Portugal. And we were let out in a little town at night called Pampelhosia.

NP: Yes, would you know how to spell that?

ET: I think so. P-A-M-P-E-L-H-O-S-I-A. I located that.

NP: It's in Portugal.

ET: Portugal. And, we were told that we were going to get a real meal. And out, and under the stars at night, a little old lady came. And she had no teeth. She was dressed in black. And some other ladies came and put a table up outside, outside the railroad tracks. And there was a meal. And someone came and played music, and we were dancing. I couldn't believe it. It was very beautiful. And back on the train and the next morning we arrived in Lisbon. So it was a five- or six-day trip. And, Lisbon was breathtaking. It's a beautiful climate. It's a magnificent city. And my father being so aware of the arts immediately said, "Look at the architecture! Look at the sculptures! Look at the ma-, look at this, and look at that. Look at the fountains! Look at the streets! Look at the sky!" He was always educating me wherever he was. And it was magnificent. We were put up in a

huge old brownstone house. Communal living again. I had so much communal living that [chuckles] I've said to my husband very often that, "I don't mind being poor, but I always want to have my own bathroom [laughs] and my own bedroom." So there we were, communal living, in a big, big three-story house. We ate in one room. We had food provided. And we lived in Lisbon for two weeks, waiting for the boat to be ready. It was a lovely, lovely time. We had four dollars each, twelve dollars total, and we got Portuguese money, and my mother got coffee, which she hadn't had in years, and she inhaled it. And I got milk, which I hadn't had. So we kind of like floundered around and then again HIAS was there. And they said, "Would you like to go on a trip?" And they took us to some of those marvelous islands off the coast of Lisbon. And it was extraordinary. And while we were there we saw, I think half of Europe, its spies and its espionage system running around. Ex-Nazis and ex-thises and that. Just like the Humphrey Bogart movie. That's what life was in a neutral city. And then finally we were told that we could board the ship. It was the 22nd of Sep-, of August. And, I made a mistake before. The visa was good from April to August, not September. The visa ran out the night we boarded the ship. If we were not in international waters, I think it's three miles, I'm not sure, something like that, we could have been taken off that ship. We took off at 9:00 at night, and by 12:00 my father said, "We're finally safe." Our visa ran out.

NP: Do you remember the name of the ship?

ET: Oh, I certainly do. The Germans called it *Musinio*, but it's really *Mouzinho*. It was spelled M-O-U-Z-I-N-H-O. But there is some kind of an accent circumflex somewhere. And, it could be over the H or the N or, I'm not, I don't know Portuguese, but that was the name of the boat. It was an ancient boat. It had been an Italian boat built in the early part of the century, given to some other country as war settlement from World War I. It had been around. It was meant to house 350 people. It took on 750. Because, the company which owned the boat—I still remember that name too—the *Compania Colonia Navagacio*, which means the Colonial Navigation Company—owned that ship, and made *lots* of money on us, lots of it. And we slept tween deck. If you don't know what that is, that's how the Irish potato diggers came over. It's in the hold of the ship, in the bottom. And there are no windows, and there are no [unclear].

NP: How do you spell that? Tween deck?

ET: We called it tween deck.

NP: In between.

ET: In between. But it was the hold of the ship. And, we were taken down and there were 150 bunks. Two high, two across, men, women and children together. Six sinks. And air hoses to get air down there. There was no air. So you had to undress, and you had to do your, your everything. We had a...Russian lady—and we were all Jews, we were all in the same boat—she put up an umbrella and put a sheet over it. She was so comical. She would go under that sheet with the umbrella, ensconced under it, and she'd come out beautiful. She did the whole thing under that. And I remember lying next to a man who

was constantly seasick and throwing up, and sometimes on my side. And with six sinks, O.K., we had a system. Due to the fact that [laughing] we were the intelligentsias of Europe we had a system within sixty minutes. The climate was lovely. The men went atop on deck, and the women washed first. Since there wasn't enough water or time, you could wash down to the waist. And, then we would go upstairs as women and children, and the men would come down. But no shaving allowed, because there wasn't enough water. And then the women complained that they had to do a little more personal hygiene once in a while, so we were given once a week extra time for that. And we voted that the only luxury cabin available, since everyone had not paid personally but HIAS had paid the same amount of money, was awarded to a young French couple who had a year old and a two-year-old. And we gave it to them. They were both in diapers. I don't know how they managed. The food was obnoxious. We had everything done in putrid olive oil, and to this day I can't eat olive oil. I cannot tolerate it. I go to an Italian place and I say, "Leave it out." Unless they disguise it really well. We lived on oranges and bread, because the food was not edible. But the Portuguese who ran the ship were delightful. They were very friendly, very sweet. And every night we had entertainment. We had famous violinists, sopranos. My father loved running fun shows and things. He was a very entertaining, bright man. So he was the emcee. We had fantastic entertainment. We were free! It was a freedom boat. It took two weeks. Two weeks, and we went across the Amazons⁴ and then we...had a British convoy, which seemed to follow us for a long time. We were told later that the Germans often knew that they were refugee boats, and thought nothing of shelling them. And we felt very secure with this long British convoy line running along. The weather was magnificent. So the whole trip took a month. And we arrived on Labor Day.

NP: Where did you arrive?

ET: [chuckles] Well, we arrived at Staten Island. At the time I was told that Ellis Island was closed because it was Labor Day. And I believed that, but I have since found out that it may not all have been that, because I think the Coast Guard took it over. So whatever it was, it was Staten Island. But the setup was exactly the way Ellis Island went, disembarking. And there was the examiner at the table. And when I, I took a picture of Ellis Island, which we visited. And I made a little girl's face with the table that they had standing there, pretending I was checking in. And they spoke German. Of course they had to be so multi-lingual. And one of the first things he asked me, he said, "Have you ever had your lungs removed?" [chuckling] And my father said, "Do you think he might not know the word for tonsils?" Then he said, "I think I made a mistake." They were very sweet. So they did the whole thing. It took a whole day, and we couldn't get off the ship, because of Labor Day, so we sat on top with our little suitcases. And it was very, very hot. We didn't know that kind of heat. We didn't know it existed. Because Europe isn't humid, it isn't that hot. It was in the 90's and it was very humid. And we had our fall clothing on because we

⁴Azores? -ed.

were told, "September is September everywhere." And we were sitting, we had long stockings and hats, dying. And the Portuguese decided since it was a legal holiday here they were not responsible to feed us. So, we didn't have food. And so somebody hitched up some hot dogs to us. And finally at night we got off the boat.

NP: Wait a minute. Excuse me, were there Jewish relief agencies there?

ET: Oh yeah! They were everywhere.

NP: They were there in Staten Island.

ET: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yes. And relatives.

NP: And relatives.

ET: And HIAS. HIAS is a wonderful work.

NP: And ORT? Was anyone from ORT? Anywhere?

ET: Never heard of it. I only knew of HIAS. That was all I ever knew. If there was something else, I'm sure there was, but that was brought to my attention.

NP: So there were relatives to meet you.

ET: Oh there were relatives just standing down there and there were lights and, I will have to backtrack soon, and talk about my last three years in Germany. They were spent in air raids. I forgot about that before.

NP: That's all right.

ET: And, so here there were lights. There was no blackout. And it was heavenly. And we were taken to the loveliest section of New York, right off Central Park, another brownstone house. Communal living, and I...don't think I could ever go to camp after [chuckles] all that communal living! It was beautiful. It was a brownstone house, donated by someone, right off Central Park. And all the women stayed in one part, and all the men in another. And then you had to work in the kitchen. And we had food and I became very, very ill. I had a strep throat, which in 1941 wasn't treated with anything but rest. If they had sulphur it was only for the army. I didn't get any. And I also developed an infectious disease of the mouth because of what had happened on the boat—bad food and so on. And they said I'd have to be hospitalized and be isolated. And I said, "Don't do that to me. I can't even talk English." So they said, "O.K., you can take a little room upstairs and stay there for two weeks."

NP: You were quarantined?

ET: I was quarantined. And, I was really sick. I had fever, I don't know how long. But, as I came out of the fever I still had to stay in bed, and my father—who was eternally thinking of my education—said, "I found some books in the library in German! And you're going to read the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*!" So I did. And we had a German Jewish doctor who came to visit me, because who could understand English? Everyone had learned French over there, and some had learned English, but French was the language one learned there. So, the doctor came up and he looked at me and said, "Wow," he said, "You're thin." He said, "When you get up you tell me what you like to eat and we'll do it for you." So the first time I stood up he looked at me and he said, "I knew that you were

skinny. I didn't know you were that tall with it too!" He said, "What do you like?" I said, "Candy bars and whipped cream." He said, "It's yours!" So I lived off that. And we lived in New York for about six weeks. And it was very nice. We were able to see a lot of relatives. My father took me to museums. And, I got well despite not having antibiotics. He did it.

NP: He took care of you.

ET: Yeah. I got well. I was skinny and malnourished, all that stuff. And then we had relatives in Philadelphia—my mother's cousins—and they insisted we come here. And they got a room for us. It was communal living again. It was a boarding room, boarding house with a room. It had a room to sleep in and I had an army cot. My parents had a bed. And then there was another room that was a kitchen, but it didn't have running water. It only had a two burner stove. The running water we got from the bathroom next to our little two rooms, and there were boarders who bathed and also got water from there. And I remember being repulsed and just the whole thing was disgusting, because people were running in and out of bathrooms. This was in Strawberry Mansion on Columbia Avenue. Do you know it?

NP: My grandmother used to live in Strawberry Mansion.

ET: Everybody did.

NP: Yeah, yeah.

ET: But it was nice once.

NP: Oh yeah.

ET: It was lovely. It was beautiful.

NP: Everything convenient.

ET: It was wonderful.

NP: We walked to everything.

ET: Wonderful. Oh yeah, it was great. But this, you know, a little room. So we lived there for a month. My parents went to work in a factory making \$16 a week. My mother sewed on a machine, because she had learned to sew in finishing school, you see, so that equipped her really well [laughs]. She learned to work a power machine. My father became, swept floors in the same factory and became a shipper. And I started school. And that was a lovely experience. I knew a couple of words of English, "hello, how are you." But that didn't mean anything. And I was put into eighth grade, and I should have been almost in ninth, but they felt it was easier for me, because I didn't know English. What they didn't know is that I knew more than they did, even without my education. And I did extremely well. I started school in October in eighth grade. I graduated eighth grade in 1942, in June, within what about ten months? And I got into honors classes. I couldn't believe it. I lost my accent. I had a very lovely Jewish teacher helped me. She made me round out my words, *the* and *why* and *are*. [chuckles] And, I did very well. And we got a bigger apartment, and I worked summers. And I worked weekends. We all had to. And we did not know what had happened to anybody there, in Germany. I got one letter from my

grandmother, the last letter before Pearl Harbor. When I came here it was September. Pearl Harbor happened in December. And I might interject here that our boat, other than a boat leaving 4 A.M. that night, was the very last boat out of Europe. So I share this great fortune with all the people on the boat—the last out of Europe. There was no more. The Consulate which gave us our visa in April was closed down in June. Had we had a higher number we wouldn't have gotten the, a visa. One of the last visas. It was the last train out of Berlin, too. And, literally the last boat. The *Navemar* was the second boat out that night at four. So, about nine hours later than when we left was literally the last. I was the last to leave, and I have done nothing but question this since then. Why me? And I don't know why. I don't think there's an answer. But there is a survivor's guilt there. It is always there. Because, the children with whom I played, the children who I left, the people in the Jew House, they all went. And I have a book which was sent to me concerning the people in my hometown, as to their ultimate fate. It was made up by someone who had emigrated to Israel, and he had gone back to my hometown and searched everything. And I have the book and my children have it. It's in German. I've translated the salient parts for them. And it tells what happened to everyone. And we had left that August day, and by December they were already taking people. They took the couple that came from the Baltic Sea, in December, and sent them to Riga, Poland [Latvia -ed.], to a sure death. My grandmother was taken in '42. She went to Theresienstadt, which is the least of the offensive camps. It was for indigent and elderly and children. It's from that place that those famous drawings came of children, *The Butterflies*.

ET: Yes.

NP: She didn't last long. She died of starvation. She was near 78. There she was united with a sister and her brother-in-law, from the same region where we came from. They all died together. And when I think of her, lying on the ground and dying of starvation, I...can't reconcile that with anything ever again in life. Because she was the woman who gave, she gave everything. She gave every indigent person the same treatment. Every poor person, every "*shnorrer*", as we say, who came to our house. He could stay as long as he wanted. He was given food. She always had clothing. She always had something else in an attic room. She always had an open home, an empty...chair, table filled with food. She was the one who washed the dead bodies when other women said they couldn't. And I think of her.

Tape two, side two:

NP: O.K.

ET: Yes, he was lucky. My grandfather had died—I forgot to mention that—the year we left, in January, 1941. He was 84. He died, which was good. At least one less to go that way. I mourn all the others. My father's sister went and her daughter. Her husband, too, had died young, so that was one less to go. My father's sister fought in the battle of Warsaw. She was killed in it. Her daughter, who was, I think 12, was taken away from her to Auschwitz and was gassed—my first cousin who I spent my summers with at my home. I mourn for them. But I mourn really only collectively for my grandmother. And every film I've ever seen about the Holocaust, about the camps, I see only her face. She is the primary face. And when I see children in camps, I think of my playmates. And I also see me. I see myself. I always see myself in the camps, because with the proximity in time that there but for you go I, I would have been shipped out within four or five months from my town. And I don't think I would have survived very long. And I often envision what would have been. My mother was a tall, statuesque woman, and I don't look anything like her. She would have outlasted me, outlived me. And the terror of that lives within me, too, the might-have-been. I live in the might-have-been, because I was the last to go, last out of the town, last out of the land, last out of Portugal. And I have always envisioned myself in a camp. And I've had to do a lot of soul searching why God would have saved me. I never did lose my faith in God. My cousin has. The aunt who died in the Warsaw Uprising also had a son exactly my age. He came on the children's transport, alone. She was able to get him out alone. So she sacrificed that. He was raised very stringently Orthodox. He is a Baptist now. He said that his religion had caused him nothing but misery. His mother died. His sister was killed in Auschwitz, and why should he hold on to it? My father chastised him relentlessly. He said, "All the more reason that you should cling to it, because of what happened." But he did not.

NP: Is he alive today?

ET: Yes. He's exactly my age.

NP: Where is he?

ET: Chicago. A very bright man, in research chemistry. He remained childless—he is married—I...have the feeling on purpose. So, he was saved and what was, he was saved, but what was saved? Was his soul saved? His body was saved. I too, I forgot to mention was going to be in a children's transport. When we lived in the Jew House we were approached again by HIAS whether my parents wanted to get me out. It was easier to get a child out, and we called it children's, *Kindertransport*. You know that word.

NP: I know that. There is this wonderful woman that works with the Archive named Eva Abraham. She lives in Greenhill. And she has organized reunions of *Kinder*, and we have many testimonies and taped interviews of *Kinder*.

ET: Mmm hmm. Well my cousin then was *Kindertransport* what we called it. and I was considered for it in 1939 while we lived in the Jew House. My mother had a brother who lived in Nice, France and he wanted me to live with him. Little did we realize that, heh, France was going to go, too. And everything was instituted to get me there. It took time. I didn't tell my parents that I did not want to go. I was crying inside at the thought of leaving them. I was tortured. And I loved my uncle. I wanted to be there. It sounded wonderful, but I couldn't understand how I could ever leave my parents or be able to accomplish that. So, in 1940 in May Hitler conquered France. So all that went up in a puff of smoke. I was the happiest person alive, that I didn't have to go. When France fell to Germany, I was in Bielefeld, at the end of a school day, and I heard the loudspeakers. And people were screaming in the streets. Paris had fallen. And I went into an alleyway and I quietly cried, because that was the last stronghold of liberty, when Paris fell. And I couldn't cry publicly, because that would have been a dead giveaway. And because I was so "un-Jewish looking", incidentally, every time I took this train to go to the Rabbi's class in Bielefeld, I was accosted, why I was not in uniform, why I was not on an outing, why I wasn't here or there where I should have been, where all German children were. And I made all kinds of excuses. I, my hair then was sort of honey-colored. And I had the typical little German girl hairdo with a little pin on the side, with straight little short hair. And I was always taken for one. The other thing I— in retrospect—I think about is the years we spent in the Jew House. Air raids were constant, because the British were bombing us forever and ever. And we had this ambivalent feeling of, hey, we don't want to get hit, but we want them to hit something wonderful, to destroy this country. And the air raids were nightly. And then during the day for a while too, but it deprived me of sleep. We had by law to go down into an air raid shelter. And one night we had five air raids. Up and down, and up and down and up and down. And we were bombed pretty severely at one point. I remember falling off the seat as I was sleeping in the air raid shelter. A bomb hit very closely and I was rolling on the ground. They did quite a bit of damage. But we were bombed for two years, and the feeling of wanting them to really hit a fantastic target and yet not wanting to be part of that, it's a strange feeling.

NP: So this was constant.

ET: Yeah. And then, you know, as I said, the last years in, from Crystal Night on until 1941, I call them the gray years in my life. They have no color. There was no intimacy. There was nothing in my town at all. We had long, long, long years since been able to go to a movie or to a park or to anything. We were not allowed radios. So, reading was the only source of information, and education. And my father made very sure that I did that. And I did read voraciously and avidly. But they were very gray years. I went, I turned into my inner self a lot. I fantasized a lot. And when I read Anne Frank, which of course that fate doesn't even touch upon mine, but I...sensed her loneliness. Because I manufactured people in that lonely little room in the Jew House. And I dressed up. And I put perfume on and I read strange books. Because I wanted to be somewhere else than

where I was. The only escape I had was by going to the Rabbi's class in Bielefeld. There were some Jewish children there. But I always had to return home in the evening to my town where I, there again, I was alone. And it was like a...cold, iron grip upon me when I would return home, that I would be isolated again.

NP: It was a difficult time of life, being a teenager.

ET: Very difficult. It was a very tough period. The other sadness was that in the other Jew House was an elderly couple who had a daughter, a married daughter, and a little grandson in Berlin, who would intermittently visit. And this little boy was about two-and-a-half or three. He was a darling child. And I would go over and play with him. That was the only thing I could literally do. This little child and his parents died in Auschwitz. And I look at my grandchildren now. And I behold their life as very, very precious. And I think of that little boy. And it's hard to reconcile a world upon a world where this could happen. So needless to say that my four grandchildren to me are the essence of life. And, I think maybe that I was saved that I could go on and talk about it, that I could have two children, and that I could have grandchildren, that life has gone on for me.

NP: It is a reaffirmation emotionally.

ET: Isn't it. It is.

NP: Even when you carry this [unclear].

ET: Yes.

NP: It is a reaffirmation.

ET: It is. Now, I have been back to Germany.

NP: What year did you go back?

ET: '85, per invitation.

NP: Per invitation.

ET: Yes.

NP: Was this by the mayor of the town or...

ET: Yes. Each town, are we recording?

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: Oh, O.K. Each town had this little pang of guilt, *I think we did something wrong*. [chuckles] Putting it very mildly. And, they all came up with money and plans to have people come back. And a letter came inviting my mother and me. My mother was failing. She's in the Geriatric Center in her ninth year there now. And at that time she wasn't that bad, but she didn't grasp it, and I also think, if my mother had gone back into that town...

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: She would have killed. She would not have been able to tolerate this. She would have taken everyone and slashed them. So, I wrote to Germany and I asked, "Could I bring my husband in her stead?" And they said, "That's O.K." So we were both free. And my son and my daughter-in-law had been backpacking in Europe many years before and had been there. And my daughter had not been, and she said, "I'm coming." So she, the

three musketeers—my husband and I and my daughter! [laughs] All of us went. It was a question of, how would I feel about going back? Lots of people go back. But they have some semblance of a place that has some reality to them that they can look at. I had nothing. I mean that house was gone. That house, incidentally, burnt to the very ground, down to nothing. I think it was looted. I think they had to have been fools not to have looted it. We had this strong feeling. To go back in space a little bit, the day after Crystal Night, my mother and I did walk down momentarily and looked at the smoldering ashes and the glows of fire. And there was nothing there, except the stables at the very end of the property and the orchard, and the gazebo and the gardens. But the house was totally gone. And to go back to nothing, I don't know whether it's harder to go back to nothing or to go back where there was something that's not yours anyway. I think either way it's difficult. So my husband said, "I think it's good for you to go. And you'll see it in the light of today." And that, I...had nightmares about going back into that burning house. Two of them; one I wanted my little box of jewelry. I ran up, and I knew the house was burning and that I was, I knew that I was in this country but I was still running back into that house. And the other dream was that I couldn't get out of Germany, that my visa was not good, that I already had been to this country, had knowledge of it, but I was in Germany, and that I could not get out. So, we decided it probably would be fine for me to see what it was like today. So we went. And a German couple had contacted my parents, oh, at least ten years before. We did not know them. They were about my age. And the man wrote to my father and said that he, my father started a legal process, and he sued the town. He did a wonderful number on them. He won a little bit, too. He had three people put in jail for setting the house on fire. He sued the town for not protecting his property with the fire engines. My father loved to write. He was very articulate, and...

NP: These people were still alive?

ET: Oh yes, none of which I ever got to see. No one came out, except my darling old maids and a couple of old neighbors. Not one friend. So, anyway, we...did go back. And this particular couple had been in contact with my father and then with me. They had read about my father's collective writings to the town, and suits. And they wanted to write to him. The man was a very, I can only say "God fearing" man, who felt on his shoulders the guilt of Germany. And he wrote to my father for a long time, came here right before my father's death, which was in '77, and was able to meet my father. And he cried when he hugged him. He felt the German guilt so extremely, so deep within him. And so when we came to the town, he took total charge of us. He wouldn't let us take a train from Düsseldorf to my hometown. He came by car and he picked us up and he brought me a rose to welcome me. They were wonderful. My daughter stayed with them. My daughter did not go free, we had to pay for her transport. But she was given hospitality at this couple's house. And we were put up in a lovely hotel in my hometown. And when I touched German soil for the first time, I had a very strange feeling. And my husband and my daughter looked around, and I really laughed. And he said, "You know we're not in Kansas anymore." [chuckles]

And we were taken by this lovely man in a car. And as we approached the outskirts of my town I had a freezing feeling, a gripping cold feeling around my heart. It's the very essence of Germany where I lived. The oak trees, deep looks of Germany with forest, the isolated farm houses. That's on the outskirts of my town. And I saw that. I could only think of the oak cluster and the oak leaves. I could almost think of the tales of, *The Legends of Siegfried*. It was ominous, and it was beautiful. And I acknowledged it that it was so beautiful, as much as I had learned to hate it. And then we hit the town. And, my daughter and my husband just looked at me. I think they thought that one of two things would happen, that I would either scream, or I would just cry. I did neither. I just took it all in. And we were given spending money every day, other than everything having been paid for, \$35 a day just to run around. I looked around the town. My daughter went with me. She found little places all of her own that had been my haunts. I felt through her that I, she was the young woman who was expressing through her being there, who I had once been. She found a little place for a little clasp for her hair that I had found as a child. She found a shortcut through a church yard. And I said, "How did you know?" She said, "I just found it." I said, "That was my own short cut." And, being there gave me a measure of peace. I never dreamt again, about the house. I didn't. I went back to where the house was. That was very hard, I went alone with my husband. I don't know where my daughter was that day. She had been back with us, but that one visit was alone with my husband. And we had this triangle park in front of the house. I call it the little Rittenhouse Square of my hometown. And it's still there, changed a little only as far as architecture and horticulturally. But other than that, it's there. The property on which my house stood, I had always said, "I think it was two blocks long." And everyone said, "Oh, you were a kid. You know, you can't remember." My husband looked at it. He said, "This is two blocks! It's immense! I can't believe it!" The town took it and built upon it a cultural center, which made me very happy in the sense that my family had cultural evenings. We had musical evenings, and poetry. It's a center for the arts—dance, music, and stage. It's very beautiful. The pavement is exactly the way I left it. Little stones, the same pavement. I couldn't believe that. The pavement I had walked on, which I had thought somehow if I would walk on it, the door would be there and the house would be there. But there was the center. And we had lunch there. And, I said, "I swear this lunchroom, this dining room, is on top of my real dining room." It's sort of the same space. It's a feeling as if you had lived another time, another place, put the two together. So the one time I sat there and looked at this place I was with my husband and I really broke up. And that was the only time. And I said, "You know, this is mine. It's not theirs. This house is mine. They have no right to this." And I said, "I want it back. I want it the way it was." And I was angry. And I cried. And my husband looked at me and he said, "You're alive. You're with the living. You are not bones in Treblinka. You are here." And that was it. I was fine. But I had to say it.

NP: You had to set it right.

ET: Yeah. It's not theirs. It still isn't theirs.

NP: Was there any possibility of reparations for your family?

ET: Oh, we've gotten reparations. But it's not enough. My mother still gets money at the Geriatric Center once a month. But that actually is money that she received from my father having had to sign his profession away. Deprivation of the right to work. And they've been getting this, they, she gets widow's rights since 195-, hmm, middle '50s, I guess. They did get a settlement also, for the house, to a point. But...it's nothing really. It's nothing. But you know, one has one's life. And that's the most important thing. People always say to me, "What'd you, what did you bring out?" I said, "Me." And, as often as I've talked to friends who've known me a long time, they'll see a little jewelry item on me, "Did you bring that with you?" I said, "No. Everything was burnt in the house. Everything. There is nothing that I have that is my own, ever." And that's the hurt of it, that the identity which was once yours, it's only a material identity to say, "I owned this bracelet, I owned this something, this was my mother's, this was my father's." There is a loss from not passing that on. Because someone has touched it and it has belonged to someone from a long time ago. Someone sent a teaspoon, no, tongs, silver tongs, to my father here, and said that his grandmother in the last century had given it to a maid who took very good care of her. And because she knew that we had nothing left, we should have this. That's all I have. We have old fashioned silver tongs for sugar cubes. I don't bemoan or bemoan the fact of what we had. I would like to have shared looking at it with my children. I liked the house a lot. I liked how we lived. We had dinner prepared every day for 12 people—dinner is the mid-day meal as you know—just in case someone would come, a relative, a business person or someone, and the maids opened the door and curtsied. There was a genteel style of life. And although Hitler came and the Nazi world took over, I do remember that. And I do like it, and I did like it. But it took a long time for me to be able to say, "I did love it." I was supposed to have hated it. But one can't deny how one was raised.

NP: So much a part of you.

ET: Yes.

NP: It's how you feel.

ET: Yes. I was also interviewed when I was back in Germany by a young student about the age of my children. At that time he was about 30, 31. He was doing a doctoral thesis on the Jews of the area. The reason he was doing it is because he was a history student at the University of Bielefeld, and something came up about Jews. And he said, "What's that?" Of course he hadn't known. And he and his friends said, "We've got to find out." And they researched, and they found out there had been some people from Mars called "Jews" who had once lived in this town. And he got caught up in it. And he

did his doctoral thesis on it. And all the people who came back to all the neighboring towns within, as you would say Montgomery County or Townships and so on, he used all the people who came back on tape, and by mail. And he wrote the book. And I have the book. And it is beautiful. And he interviewed me for three-and-a-half hours. And he said, "Don't give me facts. I have them. That's my research. Give me feelings." And, he specifically asked me about the day when I couldn't go swimming, because that was probably the most traumatic thing in my life. Because it...was the real cut off of any normal life of child there. He interviewed someone else, and it was the most poignant thing I have ever read anyone ever having said about having lived in Germany. This man he interviewed lived in Hamlin, where the Pied Piper came from? And the river was called the Weser, W-E-S-E-R. He talked to him about when he was a child how he swam in that river. And he also skated on it in the winter, and how he loved it. And he said, "You know, I loved it so much. It hurts I loved it that much." He said, "I wish I didn't. I wish I hadn't. But the feeling of love for what it was will never go away, and how I wish it would." So anyone who is not truthful or honest with oneself or themselves, you must have loved it the same as your life would be, Natalie, here...

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: You loved it, and if you would be expelled from paradise, you would still love that paradise. It took me a long, long time to be able to say that, and to let that out. For the first many decades that I lived here I was thoroughly, totally American in my mind. Whether I, I think I appeared that way because in our first neighborhood in which we lived when we were first married, oh, they knew by my parents' appearance for sure that I came from Germany. And I had told them I was but I never talked about it. And I have talked about it incessantly in the last ten, twelve years. And I think that Elie Wiesel is greatly responsible that we all talk about it. It wasn't fashionable, and also, it was done with. It was over. But I think now I know that it was never over, and had brewed inside of me. And, I would never have said 30, 40 years ago how I loved Germany. I negated everything German. I married an American—because I loved him, not because he was an American! [laughs] But he happened to be. And I stayed with American friends and acquaintances, in an American milieu. Probably the more so to negate it. But I don't know whether you've found out that people in the last ten, fifteen years have opened up more?

NP: Yes.

ET: Why?

NP: Because there have been various gatherings in Jerusalem, Philadelphia, Washington, and survivors began to feel more comfortable giving their testimonies but many times didn't because they didn't want to frighten their children, but not knowing their parent's wartime experiences was frightening to children as well!

ET: Mmm. My children always knew.

NP: And that helped you.

ET: Yeah. My father talked a great deal about it. Sometimes perhaps too much, too young for my children, I don't know that. But I, I didn't-