HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ERICA VAN ADELSBERG

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Lucille Fisher
Date: December 8, 1981

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EV - Erica Van Adelsberg[1] [interviewee]
LF - Lucille Fisher [interviewer]
Date: December 8, 1981

Tape one, side one:

LF: An interview with Erica Van Adelsberg on December 8, 1981, interviewed by Lucille Fisher. Perhaps at the beginning you can tell me a little bit about where you were born and when and a little bit about your family.

EV: I was born in Munich in 1928; I am 53. My parents had lived in Munich and their parents had lived in Munich. My grandmother actually came, my maternal grandmother came from France and my maternal grandfather came from Augsburg, and we were quite well off. My maternal grandfather had a factory where they made silverware cutlery and my father's parents, his father, rather, was in the textile business. They were manufacturers and then in '32, was the Depression, my father's family lost everything, and with Hitler coming, my father and mother decided to leave Germany.

LF: What made them decide to leave Germany?

EV: I think it ...

LF: This was ...

EV: 1932. I think it was probably a combination of things. It was Hitler, it was the loss of the business, and I guess they had a fear of what was going to happen. However, they also felt that going to Holland would eliminate any kind of danger, and there they, you know they didn't look forward enough. They were willing to leave, to make a move, and, to this day, I really don't know why they didn't immediately move to the United States. I've asked and they said they don't know, they don't know, they can't, my father died but ...

LF: You were a little bit of a girl then.

EV: I was four years old when we moved. My brother was nine months old.

LF: Did your parents ever discuss with you what life was like before they left? Tell me about it.

EV: Yes. I think you would consider them to be part of a sort of an upper middle class. Everything was terribly proper. Life was, had a lot of expectations. My mother was expected to get married at an early age. She was expected to marry into a family with money. My father was expected to do well. I was expected to be nice. You know, that sort of thing. We had a lot of expectations but it was also a life that was, we were surrounded by beautiful objects. We had a beautiful apartment in Munich. I remember that though I was only four when we left. There was always classical music. There was always art. It was sort of a genteel surrounding and even in Holland when things were not that great

[1]née Herz.

financially, I remember that. You know, we always, my parents had art books, my parents had classical music. This was just part of our life style.

LF: Of your life style.

EV: Yes. And they traveled, even then. I know my parents, my mother was 21 when she got married and they went to Italy on their honeymoon. You know, they traveled. She was in Portugal.

LF: How about their feeling of any antisemitism?

EV: They must have felt it because they left Germany. Right? But I don't think they, in Germany, they themselves had no incidents; nothing happened to them. They were accepted in school. My mother was at the conservatory of music. They themselves didn't feel it until the '30's when Hitler started. They were afraid they might be involved.

LF: Did they ever tell you what they were afraid of? What incidents made them fearful?

EV: No, they, no, no. They were not religious people.

LF: How about their parents?

EV: Not a bit. Not a bit.

LF: No identification with the synagogue?

EV: No, no, they were members of a Reform, it was called a liberal synagogue in Germany, but there was really no great emphasis. There was emphasis on being German much more than being Jewish. It was an emancipation, you know, the Emancipation, and you didn't do this because it might be too Jewish or you didn't do that because it might be too Jewish.

LF: That was the feeling, and there were no Jewish organizations?

EV: Yes, there were Jewish organizations. I'm sure that...

LF: But they didn't belong to them?

EV: You mean in Germany?

LF: Yes, I mean did your family belong to any Jewish organizations?

EV: That I don't know.

LF: But they did belong to a liberal synagogue. It would be interesting to speculate what they felt that caused them to pick up and go to Holland.

EV: I think they knew that in Holland there was a much greater, a much more liberal attitude towards religious freedom, and they just felt that once they were out of Germany, you know, once they crossed the border, Hitler's influence would disappear.

LF: For them.

EV: For them.

LF: But did they feel that it was a real menace for Germany...

EV: They must have felt that it was a menace for Jews because, I'm sure they must have felt very strongly that, combined with the fact that my father's business failed and it was probably a *schande*, you see, and so in order to start somewhere they didn't feel

they wanted to invest money in a country where Hitler was running it. You know, it was [not clear].

LF: So, they left family and...

EV: They left family and very shortly after that the rest of the family also left.

LF: Where did they go?

EV: My mother's parents to Holland. My mother's brother to Portugal. My father had three brothers. One went to South Africa where he became director of the opera company in Johannesburg. The second brother went to London and was very big in textile business. The third brother went to Rhodesia—a tobacco farm. My father's mother went to London.

LF: And this was the early '30's.

EV: In the early '30's and they all stopped in Holland. That's why, you know, I remember, all of them stopped in Holland.

LF: En route?

EV: En route, and visited with us from between one week to three months and then went on their merry way.

LF: How farsighted they were! Have you ever discussed this with family, how they were so farsighted to be able to...?

EV: Yes, but of all the farsighted ones, my parents were the least farsighted, because they just made a...

LF: A small leap. So tell me, did any of the family ever serve in the national army in Germany? Do you recall?

EV: Not that I know of.

LF: Not that you know of. Did you say that, when you got to Holland, what happened, where did you go? To what town? To what city?

EV: We went to a suburb of Haarlem [Aerdenhoudt], which was like twenty minutes by train from Amsterdam. It was a nice little suburban area and we moved there next to a family who had moved in from Cologne, Germany, and the husband and my father started a new business in Amsterdam.

LF: What kind of business was it?

EV: Again, representation of textile manufacturers, rather than manufacturing themselves.

LF: Now before 1940, say the spring of 1940, did you experience any antisemitism in Holland?

EV: No.

LF: None at all.

EV: I really, I knew I wasn't Dutch. I knew that, and I wanted desperately to be one of them, one of the Dutch. I knew that I was stateless. Once we moved to Holland, we lost our German citizenship.

LF: So you were stateless.

EV: So, in 1940 I was like 11 in the spring, and I knew I wanted to be Dutch. I had not really experienced antisemitism. I experienced, you know kids say, "Oh, but you are not really Dutch," or something like that, but not often. Very seldom. It was a very pleasant lifestyle. Very pleasant.

LF: And that pleasantness lasted until about what? '40?

EV: 1940.

LF: That you felt secure and your family made a living.

EV: Yes, made a living, and it was nice. There was an awful lot of talk all through the years about what could happen, what could happen. It was not the greatest feeling of security, no. I mean I never truly thought about it in terms of security. But, I don't think I ever felt terribly secure as a child. I felt secure as in the family, that sort of thing. But I remember ever since I was a little girl there was always talk about Hitler, and this could happen, and that could happen. This uncle is leaving and that uncle is leaving. It was not, it wasn't a settled kind of life.

LF: So, the statelessness that you described, they kind of left you feeling that you didn't belong here or there.

EV: Yes.

LF: How did your family life change after the Nazi occupation?

EV: Well, drastically.

LF: They attacked quickly, didn't they?

EV: Holland was attacked on May 10th, 1940, and it was within five days Holland fell. Okay. By May 15th we were finished. Now there was a, we tried, my parents tried to go to England, and I think this attempt lasted at least two hours and you couldn't get out. So, we knew we were stuck. So, from the 15th of May on, we knew that things were going to be very, very different. And then, in September 1940 [EVA later specifies September 9, l940], my family being stateless, was taken by the Germans. We were told that within 24 hours we had to move from this little suburb, which was right on the North Sea, ten minutes from the North Sea by train, we had to move east, inland. So we moved, but we didn't have a place to stay right away and, you know, you asked about family life. So what happened is my parents stayed in a little *pension* with a Jewish lady and her husband by the name of Blumenthal.

LF: These were Dutch people?

EV: These were German Jews.

LF: German also.

EV: Yes, Resi Blumenthal and her husband Reinhardt. And my brother and I stayed with our former housekeeper. When we moved to Aerdenhoudt, a little suburb, a German housekeeper moved in with us and she took care of my brother and me for about five years. So that made it like to '37. Then she got married she moved east of Amsterdam, to Hilversum, and she was there with her husband, a German Jew [EVA later identifies hem as Erna and Rudi Asch]. And when we had to move to this particular town, she took

my brother and me, and my parents went ten minutes down the road to this little *pension* where they had a room. So, for half a year we lived like that. So, it was a big change. Once in a while we would eat with our parents. Like on a Sunday, we would have a meal, you know, something would happen and finally, my parents rented a house in this community and we had a...

LF: Was your father able to earn a living during this time?

EV: He was still able to go to Amsterdam because it was as close from that place to Amsterdam as it was from the other side.

LF: So that he could run his business?

EV: Yes.

LF: He could run his business.

EV: I went to school there. By then I was in 7th grade and it was the first time that I did have antisemitic experience. With my math teacher.

LF: A Dutch man?

EV: A Dutch math teacher and he failed me for being Jewish.

LF: How do you know that he failed you for being Jewish?

EV: Because I did all the work. I was no great mathematician, but he would always grade me lower than other people who did the same.

LF: Did you feel that there were many Dutch who were antisemitic?

EV: Very, very few.

LF: Very, very few.

EV: He was the only one, he and a French teacher. I don't even know that she was truly antisemitic. She was just very nasty, and I had a horrible time for a while. And then, you know, I got over that and I did all right in her class but the math teacher, he was very rough on me. And I was really no great math student, but I was not that terrible.

LF: But the other Dutch people were...

EV: Wonderful, absolutely wonderful.

LF: Did you have any experiences with Nazis or Nazi sympathizers?

EV: Not then, not at that time that I remember.

LF: Do you recall a Jewish Council being set up or any sort of...

EV: I know there was a big Jewish organization set up and the name escapes me [*Joodse Raad*, February 1941], but you know, I have books if you are interested in Dutch, of the destruction of the Dutch Jews and there are photos of that in there.

LF: I would love to see them sometime. Are they books that came from where?

EV: Holland.

LF: You brought them with you from Holland?

EV: I didn't. I found out when I was in Israel that I'm in the book three times.

LF: Oh my, I would love to see them and perhaps there's parts of them that we could photostat for our archives, if they have any meaning to Dr. Levin [Professor Nora Levin of Gratz College, founder of the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive.]

EV: You're welcome to it.

LF: Okay. I'll have to connect with you, I'll pick them up from you.

EV: I have them here.

LF: Oh, you have them here. Great. That's great. Are there any, now that we are talking about it, are there any mementos of the family that might bear xeroxing, that would have significance for us?

EV: I don't know whether my mother has anything. I don't think my brother has anything. I have a book of poetry that I brought that I wrote.

LF: That you wrote?

EV: Yes.

LF: When did you write it, Erica?

EV: When I was in concentration camp.

LF: Oh, I'd love to. Did you bring that along too?

EV: Yes.

LF: You're wonderful. Will you leave it with me? Can we xerox what we want?

EV: You can xerox if you want, if you can understand it. It's in Dutch, or in German, I forget.

LF: That's all right.

EV: And I brought the star.

LF: You brought the star. When did you have to begin to wear the star?

EV: I don't know. '41, I think, but I truly, I forget. [Beginning May 3, 1942 every Jew aged six years or older had to wear the yellow badge.] I know it was before we went to the concentration camp. Because I know that I had to sew it on my coat to go, but I don't remember.

LF: Do you remember how you felt when you had to put that on?

EV: No. I know I didn't feel terrible because a lot of people wore them and a lot of Dutch people put them on. It was sort of a defiant thing. A lot of Dutch people would wear them. In the beginning, not later on.

LF: To come back to this Jewish Council or the community body, did Jews in your community look to that Council for leadership, guidance?

EV: Yes. I forget the name. I have to look that up. [*Joodes Raad*] Yes, they did look for leadership. They did look for leadership, yes.

LF: And did they trust it?

EV: Yes, because, you know, I think this is why all these horrible things happened to us is because people were much too trusting. People were sheep. In 24 hours you had to move, in 24 hours people moved. There was no resistance.

LF: But we're talking about the Jewish Council.

EV: The Jewish Council, well, people knew after a while that they were working with the Germans, in part. They had to work with the Germans, but they trusted it. Yes.

LF: There was no resentment?

EV: Yes, there was a lot of resentment.

LF: Tell me about it.

EV: I don't even know about individuals, but you know you got to hear that so and so is on the Council or he is a rich Jew, he has all the diamond business. But that was all along. It was the Jews who had connections. It was called "*protection*" and they picked that up in Israel after the war and called "*protektsia*." Those that had it, that have this connection, they were able to save their skin.

LF: Really?

EV: To certain degree. I know my father, when we were, running now ahead, you know, when we were in Westerbork which was a Dutch concentration camp, my father had to work on some job where he had to be in an office, a German, you know a *Kommandant*, was in charge of this whole operation, and because my father was very precise, which most German Jews probably were, you know, when we had to go in front of the *Kommandant* in June '42, June '44, June '42, excuse me, he said no, we could stay in Westerbork, and it was because my father had done a good job. Had he not done a good job, we would have been sent to Auschwitz in June 1942.

LF: This way you weren't. I better change this tape. [Side one ends before tape is fully used.]

Tape one, side two:

LF: This is tape one, side two of an interview with Erica Van Adelsberg on December 8, 1981, interviewed by Lucille Fisher. [Long interval before interview resumes, approximately 1/4 of the tape.] Do you mind?

EV: No, no.

LF: So, anyway, your family were feeling, did they feel then that they were going to try to emigrate and go someplace else? Was there that kind of feeling, then, when this was happening, or wasn't this in their mind?

EV: When?

LF: In Holland, when things were closing in.

EV: Yes, well, then, they would have liked to but it was too late. There was absolutely no way of getting out. Then they knew they were stuck.

LF: Well, now, tell me, did you know anything about the experience of the Jews in other parts of Europe? How did you get to meet them?

EV: I knew, for instance, that neighbors of ours in Aerdenhoudt left in '38 on a boat. I think it was called "Simon Bolivar" and I knew that the boat hit a mine in the English Channel and I knew that the wife survived and that the husband...

LF: Where were they going?

EV: They were going to England, or possibly from England to the United States but, whatever, they got out in '38. I knew others who got out.

LF: From Holland?

EV: Yeah, I mean these people died, all right. The wife survived and the children and husband died. We knew that. We knew that.

LF: But did you know about the experiences of Jews in Poland and...?

EV: No.

LF: Nothing at all.

EV: No, I didn't really. I knew about *Kristallnacht*. We did hear about that. That was '39 [1938]. November 9th, that we knew about.

LF: How did you get the news?

EV: By radio and by, you know, people telling this. But I truly can't say that I was aware of Polish Jews and Russian Jews and Hungarian Jews. I was not even a teenager at that time.

LF: Do you recall newspapers at that time?

EV: Yes, we used to read the newspapers.

LF: Was there anything in the newspapers about?

EV: I can't remember.

LF: Of course you were a little girl, a young girl but did you get any feeling from your family that they were really fully able to accept the reality that all over Europe, Jews were being murdered and gassed, and things like this were happening?

EV: I don't think people knew that there were gas chambers. Who knew about gas chambers? We didn't know that. We never knew about the gas chambers. We knew that we were being sent to Auschwitz, but we didn't know that Auschwitz had gas chambers.

LF: What did you think it was? What was your conception?

EV: You might get killed on the way. You might get starved. You might get beaten to death. You might be tortured, but you didn't know which way you were going to be tortured. I never knew that. Nobody knew that. How did you know it here? You didn't know there were gas chambers till after the war.

LF: Yes, you're right. Well, tell me about the deportation, for your family.

EV: We were in Hilversum, which was this...

LF: How do you spell it?

EV: H-I-L-V-E-R-S-U-M. It's a middle size, a nice size town. It had four radio stations, a very pretty town, and, again, it was the German Jews who were told, and it was again 24 hours, pack up, you are going to, I don't know what they called it, a detention center, or something. So we did. We packed up and it was extremely cold. So cold, that I remember that the toilet was frozen and I do remember that the rabbi from the Portuguese synagogue came to the station to say good-bye to me. This I remember. He was our neighbor and he had always been very fond of me. His name was Rodriguez-Pereira. He came, and that just stuck with me, okay, that the rabbi, and he was the Chief Rabbi in Holland, of the Sephardic. And we went on a train, and this was a regular coach.

LF: Coach? The Germans put you on a coach?

EV: Yes, there were maybe 60, 80, 100 others. I don't know how many there were from this little town, and we took this train ride.

LF: Did they tell you where you were going?

EV: And they said we were going to Westerbork, and they told us where it was. It was in the northeastern part of Holland, and it was in January, and it was very, very cold, and I wore a lot of clothes. And I remember my father introduced me, met somebody on the train as we walked through, and he introduced me to another young girl and she was the same age, but three weeks difference and her name was Jo and we became very good friends. Until this day we're very good friends. And this was my first friend in the concentration camp. And all people who had children kept the children except for two and it was me and she and we had to live in the barracks for women because we were just over thirteen.

LF: So you were separated from your parents when you got to the concentration camp.

EV: My brother was with my parents, but Jo and I were separated.

LF: When you got to the concentration camp, was there any procedure there that?

EV: Yes, when we got there we got food and we were told to register, you know, very orderly, and it was not a bit scary, I thought. I remember...

LF: Did your parents get scared?

EV: I didn't ask them.

LF: But you didn't get a sense of it?

EV: My parents were always worried. My mother was always worried. So, she was worried. It was a sort of *fait accompli*. I had accepted that. There's always worry. And my father, I don't know. They managed reasonably well and they did what they, you know, they were very, they were, sheep. You know, you had to register, so they registered; you had to drink coffee, so they drank coffee; they had to go to the left, they stood left. They did everything they were told to do, so they were conformists. You know, they did what they were supposed to. But I remember that a young man came, and he was much older than me, he was 20 or 22 years old, so he was really...

LF: An older man.

EV: An older man, and he told me that there was a youth group in the camp, and I immediately took a liking to him and his name was Leo Blumensohn and he did have a youth group. And I thought it was going to be great fun and it was. It was great fun! Can you believe?

LF: No, I can't believe.

EV: This was before the transports started. The people who were in this camp so far were illegal immigrants from Germany who had crossed the border in '37, '38, '39, '40, '41. They were there for years and years. Maybe 500, 600, a thousand, all German...

LF: Not Jewish?

EV: All Jewish. But they had been stuck in this camp first by the Dutch—they had been put there by the Dutch—and the Germans left them there. So they were referred to as "*Alte Camp Insassen*," "old campers," and when we came we were the first contingent of new ones and they were delighted to see us, you know. And they made such a welcome for us and there was no talk about Auschwitz. Nothing. The whole idea was we were being detained in Westerbork.

LF: What did you take with you to the camp?

EV: One suitcase a piece. Winter clothes, some summer clothes, some toilet articles, a couple of books, maybe some writing material. Maybe my mother took some medicines and, I really don't know.

LF: But all of your family possessions you left behind, your furniture and all.

EV: Oh, yeah.

LF: And what happened to that, you have no idea.

EV: It was stored by gentile friends and we got it back after the war. Not all of it, but most of it.

LF: So, was there, tell me about the conditions of life in Westerbork.

EV: The first half year was, it was really not bad. I lived in this barracks with the women, but I ate at my parents'. They had a room in a two-room apartment, which was a long barracks divided into two-room apartments. And then finally we moved into another barracks where we had a bigger room and we had all four of us in this one room. So then I moved out...

LF: Did they do their own cooking or...?

EV: We could do our own cooking and, also, we got from the camp, we got fed. Like, when I was in the barracks, we always got our coffee in the morning, and the bread, they brought it over.

LF: This was what year?

EV: 1942. January to June, July. It's all before July 1942.

LF: And what cooking you did, they were allowed to go out and buy food?

EV: You got food rations, and from that you could make things.

LF: But money, you didn't have?

EV: No, you didn't get paid money, but you could still go to Amsterdam once in a while. I got permission to go for a weekend to Amsterdam. And I remember, I went to Amsterdam and then I went back to concentration camp.

LF: How amazing. And your parents could go off if they wanted to?

EV: I don't know whether they were able to go more than once, but I did. I went once.

LF: Did you work in the camps?

EV: Not in the first half year.

LF: Your parents either?

EV: Yes, my father did office work. That's what he did, and my mother, she must have done something. I do not remember what she did. [Telephone interruption]

LF: So, you went to school? What kind of schooling did you have?

EV: It was in German, because the kids who had lived there for several years they all came from Germany, and they didn't know much Dutch. And it was in a little school house and the teacher's name was Mr. Gabel...

LF: A little school house in the camp?

EV: Yes, a little room. Really, like a little schoolhouse and we had lessons in German, we had lessons in, and then because there were some Dutch speaking one of them taught us about cosmetology, I remember we had lessons in cosmetology and textiles. I was thirteen. We had lessons in English, we had some English lessons.

LF: How about Hebrew or Jewish content?

EV: No, not in school. That was the youth group.

LF: There was a youth group that taught this?

EV: Yes, the youth group met on Saturday afternoons and there are pictures in the books on that. We used to do a lot of hora dancing and we used to have a lot of intellectual discussions on Saturday afternoon.

LF: Do you feel that this was Israeli-inspired or Zionist-inspired groups?

EV: Yes.

LF: You do?

EV: Yes. But also there was a much more traditional Judaism than I had ever experienced.

LF: What do you mean?

EV: I was not brought up with any kind of religious background. I mean, I went to Sunday school to learn a little bit and I went to the synagogue once in a while, but, it was much more Orthodox-oriented than I'd ever been exposed to.

LF: The Jewish spirit?

EV: Yes, and we studied the holidays and we observed the holidays and we prayed and it was really, you know, it was the works.

LF: Did you enjoy that?

EV: I loved it. My parents thought it was terrible.

LF: But you felt strengthened from that?

EV: I felt tremendous. I mean this really gave me a lot of strength. I had my prayer book in Belsen and I used to say the prayers and I used to remember all of the people that I was with who by then most of them had been killed in Auschwitz. But I didn't know that. I knew they were sent to Auschwitz, but I didn't know whether they would have made it.

LF: Did you get a feeling for Zionism, then? Did you hear about it?

EV: Yes, oh yes.

LF: And, your parents kind of pooh-poohed it, or...?

EV: I was called a *rebbitsin* [rabbi's wife] and they pooh-poohed it. And they thought it was pretty hairy...

LF: Pretty tacky, huh? So, what about an underground? At that point you didn't know that there was an underground?

EV: No, I was never involved in an underground. There was no such thing as far as I know in Westerbork, an underground.

LF: But did you have an underground in Holland at that time?

EV: I know that...later on I learned that my, Martin (who I was married to) had been in the underground, but I hadn't.

LF: Uh huh! So, here you are in Westerbork and you are going to school and learning to be Jewish and your family are working and then what happened?

EV: And then in July, things changed drastically. Suddenly the men were called from whatever they were doing to build barracks, because we were told more people were coming, and they did come in droves. And, then, the old campers were called in, as I told you, and some were sent up right away but most were not. Most were able to stay. A group that was sent was a group that...

LF: Sent to...

EV: Sent to Auschwitz. Okay, I was for a while in the women's barracks. I was with a group of orphans from Utrecht, German-born orphans, and it was a very nice group and, again, they were all brought up very Orthodox and I learned [unclear] when I associated with them, and I was considered part of the group because I wasn't living at home. This group, as a unit, was all sent to Auschwitz, with the first transfer. And that was my first realization that...

LF: Did you know they were being sent to something...

EV: We knew they were being sent to something horrible, but we didn't know what it was.

LF: How did you escape it if you were with this group?

EV: Because I wasn't an orphan. I was registered as a child of Margo and Walter. My living quarters were for awhile with them.

LF: Did your health, was your family's health good, was it considered good in the camps. Did you ever get medical treatment there?

EV: Yes, once.

LF: Tell me about it.

EV: In Westerbork.

LF: Yes.

EV: Medical. Yes I had, I don't know what I had, like a sleeping sickness. I think I must have had mononucleosis because I couldn't stay up and awake. I kept falling asleep and they put me in the hospital. And I do remember Leo Blumensohn was my first visitor, and I was sure he was in love with me!

LF: How about the medical treatment at the hospital?

EV: It was, what did I know? It was fine. It was Jewish doctors.

LF: Jewish doctors?

EV: Oh yes. We had our own hospital. We had our own orchestra. We had everything, before July.

LF: Then tell me about in July.

EV: So then they started with the transports and that meant that every week, Tuesday and Friday, people were sent to Auschwitz, and every week people would come in, and masses and masses and masses and the next Tuesday half of them would be shipped out or three-quarters of them would be shipped out.

LF: You didn't know how they made the selection?

EV: The selection was made simply if they had no papers to show that they were sponsored, that they had the passport of Paraguay, which many of them did.

LF: What is that, Erica?

EV: You could buy a passport from South American countries. Some people, many Jews did that. So, how can you ship away Paraguay nationals? You can ship away stateless but not Paraguayans.

LF: I see, but your family were not able to do that.

EV: We weren't Paraguayans, but we had our own little papers, which a lot of people did, too. We had an affidavit to go to Israel which an aunt in Israel sent, from Israel. That saved us, too.

LF: So, then, how long did you go on...?

EV: In Westerbork?

LF: Yes.

EV: From, we got there in January '42 and we left in February '43.

LF: Where did you leave for?

EV: Bergen-Belsen.

LF: And, tell me about how you were selected to go there and what happened.

EV: It got so that anybody whom they could send, they sent to Auschwitz, okay? They just kept sending people to Auschwitz more and more and more; because we had the special papers, they couldn't send us to Auschwitz. Since they started decreasing the numbers in Westerbork, we were then picked to go to Bergen-Belsen. I must tell you that when these people came in masses, my mother had to start working as a *Baracken Leiterin*, you know, to be in charge of barracks. She was in charge of the women's side and a guy was in charge of the men's side. So, she came home one day and she told me she was going to be *Baracken Leiterin*, and a man is coming over to meet her. He just came from Amsterdam, and he is Hungarian. So, he came in, very attractive, very charming, and after he left, I said to my mother, "You better watch out." Thirteen! I'm pretty mature. "I think he likes you." Well, this is my stepfather now.

LF: Oh, for pity's sake, this was the man she eventually married after...

EV: What happened was that she fell in love with him and he fell in love with her. He was married, she was married, and after the war, when they met...He was shipped to Buchenwald, she was sent to Bergen-Belsen, so they were separated. After the war, when we all got back to Hol...

Tape two, side one:

LF: This is tape two, side one of an interview with Erica Van Adelsberg on December 8, 1981, interviewed by Lucille Fisher. I think that we didn't watch the timing on that other tape too well, so, you were talking about your mother eventually divorcing your father and how did that go?

EV: I think what I was saying on the other tape was that after the war, when we all returned—his wife had died; she died about four days before the end of the war. She was on her way to Denmark, and the bus, or the car, or whatever mode of transportation she was in, was bombed and she was killed. His name is Eugene Por. In Hungarian, Jeno Por. He and my mother finally did get married. She came to the United States; he did, too. She divorced my father and married him, but she stayed very friendly with my father, who subsequently also married but who died very young. He was 58 when he died in 1958.

LF: Tell me, as a Hungarian, how did your stepfather get to Westerbork?

EV: He got to Westerbork because he had lived in Hungary, then in Vienna, and then moved to Amsterdam. He was picked up as a Hungarian Jew. As a matter of fact, he had tried to escape this by being baptized and it didn't work. A lot of Hungarian Jews did that. They got baptized, thinking they were automatically Catholic, and Judaism was wiped out, but it didn't work that way. I must tell you that after the transports started the school sessions stopped, especially for those of us who were thirteen or older, and we were required to do some work. And I had a friend who was a lab technician. She was in charge of a lab. Her name was Gisa Wall [born Gisa Wolf]. She was from Vienna and she was very charming. As a matter of fact, she got married in Westerbork. I was at the wedding and one of the poems in the little book[2] is about them getting married.

LF: When there was a wedding in Westerbork, how did that happen? Did you need permission?

EV: I don't know about that. I know they got married and...

LF: By a rabbi?

EV: I don't remember whether it was a rabbi or a civil ceremony, but they did get married and her husband's name is Harold Wall. [In Europe, Horst Cohen married Gisa Wolf. Names changed in U.S. to Harold and Gisa Wall.] I think it was something else in German. And they moved to California after the war. At any rate, because she was a lab technician, I was able to get a job in the lab that she was heading, and I was trained at age not even 14 to be a lab technician. I learned to do urine analysis, and I learned to do blood testing, and after a while I was sent around the hospital taking blood from patients' fingers and to think that I was able to do that at fourteen seems, quite amazing. I enjoyed that work. It was with doctors and with other lab people and it was a good job. It was considered a very good job. And I stayed with that til we went to Belsen.

[2] A reference to the album-journal Erica Van Adelsberg kept, a copy of which is in The Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive.

LF: Your parents kept on with their...

EV: My parents kept on with their work and my brother did go to some sort of a school program at times. It wasn't very regular.

LF: But there was no cruelty, no beatings, no anything that identifies a concentration camp going on to the Jews at that time?

EV: I can only speak for our family. There was nothing as far as we were concerned. I know that in the barracks where my parents worked, it was very crowded. Where my mother and Jeno worked it was very crowded, and there were some altercations between people, between Jews themselves. I don't know whether the Germans actually came in and did anything. Not as far as I know. I'm sure when the transports left on Tuesday and Thursday there was pushing and shoving, at least. I mean, there may have been more, but I did not go to those. I did, at one point, go, get up on a Tuesday morning very, very early, like at 4:00 in the morning, because a friend was to be shipped to Auschwitz, and he was alone and his name, I think, was Abie or Abbie Abram, and I was very, very fond of him and I brought him food to take on this trip and I did see him and this was one of the very few times that I actually went to the train early in the morning to see people.

LF: And that train came right into the camp?

EV: Yes, there was a railroad track that ran right into...

LF: Were they frightened when they were going?

EV: Yes, they were petrified. You would be, too.

LF: Of course. So, you think they had some idea that they were going to something pretty horrible.

EV: Yes, because most of the time the trains were not regular trains with window seats and windows. These were cattle cars.

LF: Did the people who knew they were going in the transport ever think at any time about escaping? Was there any of that?

EV: I'm sure they all thought about it but, you see the camp was surrounded with very high barbed wire fences, and there were outposts all over with Germans and machine guns, so there wasn't that much. There was probably an escape attempt here and there, but I don't remember. I don't remember. I remember one in Belsen, but I don't remember one in Westerbork. I also think that I have blocked out so much that I don't remember because of that.

LF: I can understand that. It was such a frightening, horrible experience, because you talk about it living in such an unnatural situation, so, naturally, that I can well believe that you must have blocked out a good bit of it. So now, these transports are going. The people who had hunks of papers that permitted them to stay felt relatively safe?

EV: They felt that time was on their side, because the longer you were in Westerbork the better off you were. But as time went on, and they cleaned out the cities in Holland, and the Jews were moved east to Auschwitz, there were fewer and fewer left, and that is what happened. Finally they got to the people with all the papers and, instead of

sending them to Auschwitz, they sent them to places like Theresienstadt and to Bergen-Belsen and other places. My friend Jo she went to Theresienstadt, after which she went to Auschwitz, after which I saw her again in Bergen-Belsen.

LF: What made a person be selected for Theresienstadt and then moved and then moved again?

EV: I don't know.

LF: No rhyme or reason that you know?

EV: No. Theresienstadt was supposed to be less threatening, less horrendous than Auschwitz. Everything was better than Auschwitz, and so maybe what they did...I don't know, but I suppose that they may not have had enough room for everybody at once to Theresienstadt, so they gave the impression that you were going to something that was a little better, and then when they had room in Auschwitz when they...you know, they would ship them to Auschwitz. This is conjecture. I do not know. I know that people going to Theresienstadt felt that they were better off than going to Auschwitz.

LF: Your parents in their particular job at the camp, did that make them feel any more secure?

EV: Up to a point.

LF: And then?

EV: And then we were selected to go to Belsen because we had the papers, the affidavits for Israel, so...

LF: How did that tie up with going to Belsen?

EV: Belsen was a camp where they had people with all different kinds of papers as I told you, the Paraguay passports, the Israel affidavits, and, I don't know what else. All sorts of exceptions.

LF: So that's what qualified you for that?

EV: Yes.

LF: And how long did you know in advance you were going, or did they just come and say tomorrow...?

EV: I don't know, maybe a day or two.

LF: Maybe a day or two. So, you got your things together and you went.

EV: Yes, we went, and that was February 15th, 1944. We went to Belsen.

LF: Tell me about that.

EV: Belsen is in North Germany. It is not too far from Hannover, which is not too far from Hamburg. It is in the northwestern part of Germany. It is flat, very flat country, as was Westerbork. It was not a very long ride. I don't remember—six hours, seven hours. I have no idea. And this was not in cattle trains. This was in a regular coach. And we went there and when we got there we were greeted by the people in charge at the section of Belsen where we were going to be. Belsen was gigantic and different sections were surrounded by barbed wire so one section of the camp couldn't go to the other section. We were...

LF: When you say gigantic, how gigantic?

EV: Maybe, I don't know. More than 50,000. I'm guessing, but I would imagine that at one point that was possible. Maybe a little less, but it went on. But it was enormous. Okay. But it was not all Jewish. There were Polish criminals, there were Gypsies, there was a section of Hungarian Jews. We were in a Jewish section and top dogs in that section were Greek. They were Greek Jews from Salonica and they were in charge. They were the big *machers*. Why? Because they were there first. So you had to be very friendly with them, and I remember there was a woman that was the milk lady. She gave milk to children and teenagers and pregnant women, of whom there were very few, but you had to speak to her, and you had to do it in French. "*Madame, s'il vous plait, un peu de lait*." And she would say, "*Oui, oui*," or, "*Non*," or whatever and you would say, "*Un peu,* a little bit, a little bit," and she would say, "*Demain*, tomorrow come back," or she would say, "All right, today." But that is where I did a lot of speaking, you know, you had to speak French, in that part of the camp, because the Greeks were in charge and they spoke Ladino and they spoke Greek and many of them spoke French. Then, they had Jews coming into that section from Tripoli and Africa. Why, I don't know, because that was Italian and the Italians shipped them, and those people were pretty cold. Because they had never been in a cold climate. So they didn't have to do much for them to die. All they had to do was not give them enough warm clothing. So this was a very international section of Belsen. They did not have gas chambers. They had work *kommandos* and work groups. I worked every day.

LF: What did you do?

EV: Different kinds of work. At one point, I was in charge of children in a day care center as it were. People would have little children, and mothers would work and I would be babysitter. Ten, twenty, thirty, whatever number. At another point in time, I was in a factory. We made some sort of material for the war effort, for the Germans. It was plastic piping that had to be woven in a certain way. It was like braided in five different ways, and I truly don't know what it was for, but it went on for hours and hours we had to sit and do the braiding. Those were my main jobs. You worked all day. And at that time I was 15, and the barracks were lousy. They were cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. It was triple deckers. And they got so crowded that you had to have two in a bed. At that point, there was a lot of disease because of lice, and a lot of people had typhoid. I had it twice. I had one case that was called para-typhoid and at the end of the war, after we were freed by the Russians, I had typhoid fever. I also had jaundice. I had that twice. So that was life in Belsen which was much less...

LF: You were not with your parents then...?

EV: I was living with my mother and my brother, and my father was in a barracks for me. They separated men and women. There wasn't much family life. I mean, you did get together for meals once in a while, and they would bring in the big containers, and the main staple was turnips. Every day we would have turnips, once a day. We did get some

soup the second meal, and in the morning, some sort of coffee substitute, *Ersatz*, and that was it.

LF: Was it sanitary?

EV: Sanitary to a certain degree. We went to bathhouses and they would turn on the water and you would take showers, hot water, and this was maybe once every so often. I don't even remember.

LF: And what about the bathroom?

EV: There were long lines with sinks and toilets. No, toilets were outhouses. But they had bathrooms with sinks and you could wash there. But I remember very often in the coldest winter months that we would use the coffee instead of to drink it to wash ourselves because it was hot.

LF: And your mother and father did what kind of work?

EV: My mother was in charge of a barracks there, too, and my father—he had all sorts of jobs and I do not remember exactly what he did. But I know it was a hard physical labor at one point.

LF: Was there any thread of Jewish life existing there at any...

EV: Yes, there was. We would have our little meetings which were, you know, outgrowth of this youth group in Westerbork. We would have that once in a while but it wasn't as often. It wasn't as nice. I know one group would make little matzos for Passover. They got some milk, I mean not milk, but some flour and water, and they would make little matzos over the fire, but it was really a nothing. There were no services, there were no meetings, not that I know of.

LF: And family and friends, did any of them ever turn up?

EV: Well, my father was in the same camp. He was just in the men's barracks.

LF: No, people from the other camp, people that you had known in Holland, did you...?

EV: Yes. Once in a while, say, when another transport came—actually from Westerbork I only remember that there were two or three after us, and that was it. And so yes, people would turn up and you would see each other. And a lot of them would die, you would be aware, you know. They died because of starvation and because of lack of medical facilities and because of lack of will to live, I think.

LF: Well, when you came down with the para-typhoid and the jaundice, were you given medical treatment?

EV: No.

LF: No.

EV: No, not in Belsen. I was sick with the para-typhoid for weeks and weeks and weeks. Maybe 7, 8 weeks. As a matter of fact, after that was done, very close to the end of my illness, we were at the end of the war practically and we were told to move out of the camp and go on another train, which was supposed to go to Auschwitz, and I had to walk,

and I remember that, 7 kilometers, after I had lost a lot of weight and I was extremely sick, and I made it.

LF: Was the news seeping down into Belsen about what was happening?

EV: To a certain extent. We had a lot of bombardments around the area. Not in the camp, although at one point a British plane strayed and did hit the camp a little bit. It killed one woman and she was standing next to me. Next to me. As close as you stand to me. She was hit and I was not.

LF: You can well wonder why. Were you guarded by Germans in the camp?

EV: Yes, constantly. My grandparents were also in that camp.

LF: Oh, tell me about your grandparents. They had gone to...

EV: My grandparents had come to Holland and they stayed in Amsterdam much longer than my parents and my brother and I, but they finally were sent to Westerbork and they came with us to Belsen. I believe we all came together. My grandfather died of a heart attack in June '44. My grandmother held on pretty well. At one point did not have to go to the *Appel*, which was the morning call where you had to line up five in a row, and so she was exempt from that because she was over 65, or whatever the age was, and so she could stay in bed, and I remember very clearly that I, on a very cold morning, hid under her covers not to go outside and an S.S. came in and he pulled the covers from her and there I was, and he could have done all sorts of things, and I just gave him a little smile and said that I wouldn't do it any more and he let me go. But that was pretty risky. But, then, you did a lot of things that were pretty risky. But this was one of them. But grandmother did get very sick and towards the end was really bedridden and you could see that she did not have much longer to go and she also went on the train that we went on to go to Auschwitz. This was in April 1945 and she died three days before the end, before we were freed. She died the day after President Roosevelt died and we got the news that he died and she knew it and after he died, she died. It was just before the end of the war.

LF: Do you make any connection between his death and her death?

EV: Yes, to a certain degree, because he was her hero and she always...

LF: Why was he her hero?

EV: She felt that Roosevelt would win the war and we would all get out...but basically, Roosevelt didn't help the Jews very much, or the American government was either powerless or unable or unwilling—I don't know.

LF: Well, tell me, were there guards other than Germans?

EV: Yes, there were *Kapos*. These were the Polish convicted criminals who were acting on behalf of the Germans, and they were extremely cruel, and they would guard the camp, and you needed to be on good terms with them. A number of the women went to sleep with them to be able to save their skin, practically their lives, because they were tough. They were mean and they were tough, and they had nothing to lose.

LF: Were any of the guards, either Germans or *Kapos*, civil at any point to the prisoners, can you remember?

EV: I don't know particular times, but I would imagine that there must have been something because there wasn't total harassment at all times, to everybody, but I don't know. I really don't know. I mean I was lucky when I was discovered and he didn't beat me and he didn't kick me. So, I must say, at that point, you know, he was not cruel.

LF: Would you just briefly review the routine in the camp, the daily routine? You got up at what time and you did what at what time?

EV: I know we got up early and we did get some of this hot brew, and you got approximately a slice of bread to go with it. If you sliced the bread thin enough, you could manage it, and after that, very often there was the call, the *Appel*, and you had to go outside in cold and rain and snow and ice and heat and you had to line up five in a row. This was done evidently to get work crews together and also so they could see who was where. Now I don't even remember whether it was done every single morning, or most mornings, but I remember that it was often. There were days when it was done twice a day, morning and night, but, again I don't know how often. And, after that very many of the people would go to work, they would go to their work detail. Like I would go to the place where they made plastic, whatever, and my mother would take care of the barracks and my father would go to whatever job he had, and my brother would sort of wander around or be in a group where they took care of children.

LF: Were there many children in the camp?

EV: Well, there were quite a few. I don't know how many. Most of them did reasonably well; some died. Some died, little kids for the most part, they did reasonably well.

LF: Do you know of any religious services that were held or...?

EV: I don't know, but don't forget, probably there were more of them in the men's barracks, too, because a lot of the Orthodox men would have their prayers, but I don't know when and where. I don't know.

LF: I'm going to turn this tape on to the other side now because I think we are kind of getting to the end.

Tape two, side two:

LF: This is tape two, side two, of an interview with Erica Van Adelsberg on December 8, 1981, interviewed by Lucille Fisher. [Long gap before interview is resumed] Were there any, or was there any particular leader in the camp, any figure in the camp who helped the others to kind of hold on?

EV: Yes, the leader for the particular section that we were in was the man who had been our neighbor in the little suburb where we first lived. He was my father's business partner. His name was Joseph Weiss. And he was a very kind man. He was very highly respected by everybody and he was the leader for the German and the Dutch Jews. There was a leader of the Greek Jews. He was a big, handsome, tough sort of a guy and I don't remember his name, [not clear] or something of that sort. I don't remember. So there were various leaders, but they worked together.

LF: What did they offer you that helped to sustain you?

EV: They were able to make some contact with the Germans that evidently benefited us from the point of view that they would, from my understanding, assure them that we would cooperate but would they please, you know, let the sick people lie down and would they give some medical help? I don't know.

LF: Sort of intermediaries.

EV: Yes, it probably is described in that book which I didn't bring today, of the destruction of the Dutch Jews.

LF: And were there any spiritual leaders there, people who spiritually kind of lifted you out of despair?

EV: I don't remember.

LF: You don't remember that. Where were you when you were liberated?

EV: I was in a small German town called Tröbitz, which was near Leipzig.

LF: How did you get there?

EV: We were told in April '45 that we had to leave, and we knew that the war was close to an end. There were some reports that seeped in. So we were told to go on a train and the rumor had it that we were going to go to Auschwitz and, as I told you before, we had to walk seven kilometers. My friend Jo Seelman was in another section of the camp, but we were able to get together and I asked her to come with us and she was afraid too, and she told me recently—after I left she was so upset that she didn't go with us.

LF: Her family were not there?

EV: She lost everybody. And, anyway, we walked the seven kilometers and reached a station or platform with a train that was cattle cars.

LF: Now, the Germans were supervising this exit?

EV: Oh, they sure were, yes. There were several hundred of us: German Jews, Dutch Jews, French Jews—they also came, a lot of French Jews were in our section—Greek Jews...

LF: Belgians, I guess.

EV: I don't know about Belgians. I don't know, but it was a whole conglomeration of people, a lot of languages. We got on the trains and I remember sitting on the platform before going in and it was the only time in all these years that I broke down and cried and I sobbed and I thought I would never make it, but I got on the train.

LF: Because you were so tired?

EV: Because I was so tired and I thought that it was the end. I figured this was it.

LF: And, your parents were...?

EV: My parents were on the train, my grandmother was brought on the train, somehow with some kind of transportation, because she couldn't walk. We got on the train and it was a horrendous ride. It was from April 7th or 9th until April 23rd on the train. Okay? Every day we would be attacked by planes, or there would be alarms and we had to hide. We...

LF: Whose planes were they?

EV: British, French, American, whatever. They didn't know who we were. We crossed the River Elbe on the way to Berlin, and we were in the middle of the river and there was an alarm and we couldn't go back and we couldn't go forth, and we were told this is it, guys, and I remember saying the *Sh'ma Yisroel*. But, we made it, we weren't bombed. We were in Berlin two days before it fell. The train stopped in Berlin, we saw the destruction, and we moved on.

LF: You didn't leave the train?

EV: We left the train in certain places, not in Berlin.

LF: But as the trip went along you could get off?

EV: We got out because we had to find food. We ate raw potatoes, we ate whatever we could get.

LF: They were under no obligation to feed you. You fed yourself.

EV: They couldn't give us enough food because they didn't know where to get it from, evidently, and they weren't interested in getting it. We were in one town where, suddenly, there was an alarm again and everybody had to get out of the cars, and I lost my family and I ran and I hid under a locomotive, and then I thought, this is stupid and I ran and I ran away, and just as I was running away, maybe a hundred yards, the whole locomotive was hit and it blew up. And, that's the kind of trip it was. We did not have places to wash so we at one point stopped at a little lake or a pond and many, many people would bathe together in this little lake.

LF: How many people were on this train?

EV: I would say it was 600 to 800, but many of them died, and more of them died after the liberation.

LF: So, finally, this train ended where?

EV: The train ended...can you stop a minute...[pause]

LF: There were about 600-800 people you think on the train.

EV: Yes. However, after we were free at Tröbitz, many of them contracted typhoid and many of them died after the liberation.

LF: You don't know who was responsible for your liberation?

EV: Yes, I know exactly who was responsible. [laughter] The Russians. We were liberated by two young Russian soldiers on horses.

LF: Tell me about that.

EV: This was the 13th or 14th day and the train stopped, and it was early in the morning, and we could see the Germans, and we were not that many by then, and they had white flags, and two Russian soldiers appeared on horses, and that was the liberation. And we couldn't understand them and they couldn't understand us, but we knew we were free.

LF: And then what happened?

EV: Then, through some people who did know Russian, we were told that we should go to the nearest town, which was Tröbitz, and find ourselves apartments, which we did. We were told the Germans would leave or they would make room for us so we would have housing. I went and found an apartment for my family. They...

LF: Did you have to displace someone?

EV: Actually I didn't have to displace. They lived downstairs and they gave us the upstairs.

LF: These were Germans.

EV: Germans. So, they made room for us.

LF: Did they do this willingly or angrily?

EV: Yes, because they knew if they didn't they were going to be shot, so they did it, quickly. So we moved in and the next day, we went and looked like scavengers, looked for food. We found a German abandoned army train with enormous supplies of food, especially cheese, and we took it back. Also the man I was going with to find this, he and I killed rabbits, and we had rabbit stew, and we ate, and we all got sick promptly because it was too much. After that, a lot of us got typhoid, and even though we had been inoculated, evidently it wasn't strong enough at that point, and many, many people died right after being liberated.

LF: Where were you cared for?

EV: The Russians set up a hospital and they gave excellent care. As a matter of fact, they took my brother, because he was very sick, I was terribly sick, too, but they took him away and they cared for him, shaved his hair and he recuperated. My father was very sick and they took care of him. He had a heart attack in addition to having typhoid. My mother was very sick. I took care of everybody and then I got it. I got it worse than they did, I was really near death, but I made it, and then two Russian soldiers wanted to come and take me with them and I kept saying, "Typhoid, typhoid," and that sort of scared them off, but otherwise, I think, I am sure, they would have taken me, to rape me.

LF: The Russians.

EV: Yes, but they didn't. We stayed in this little town for about six weeks. One of the people who died there was the wife of Joseph Weiss. She died there along with many others, and after six weeks the Americans came in and said they would resettle us back in the west; first in the western part of Germany and then into Holland. This trip took many weeks because the roads were in poor condition. The bridges were blown up. But we did finally make it back to Holland.

LF: Did you get together with any of your family that you had.

EV: Not the family, no. When we got back to Holland, we stayed at the house of some friends who had been with us in Belsen. Their name was Perlberg and we roomed there for several months.

LF: Was there any contact with Jewish agencies, like the...?

EV: Oh, there were lots of contacts. Once we were on the way, repatriated, the American Jewish agencies, the American governmental agencies, everybody did whatever they could. Then we were taken care of.

LF: How long did you stay in Holland before coming here?

EV: I was in Holland, I got back in July of '45, and I left in July of '46, a year. I went to school.

LF: Who guaranteed your admission to the United States?

EV: The Quakers.

LF: The Quakers.

EV: I was the first European student to be admitted to a Quaker school after the war.

LF: And, your parents also came under their aegis?

EV: No, no. My mother came as a visitor, I came as a student, and my brother was sent to boarding school in Switzerland, and my father stayed in Holland, so that the family was completely split up, then.

LF: Did your father stay in Holland by choice?

EV: Yes, because he assumed my mother was coming back, because she went to the United States as a visitor, but then she wrote him that she would divorce him and marry Jeno Por.

LF: Who had gotten to the United States.

EV: Yes.

LF: Had they been in contact with him?

EV: Yes, after the war.

LF: And, then, he eventually came to the United States, your father?

EV: My father married a Dutch woman and they came to the United States and they lived in California and they were very good friends with Gisa and Harold Wall, the one who I worked with in the laboratory in Westerbork. So, yes, and I am in touch to this day with people that I was in Westerbork with. Or in Belsen.

LF: Then your brother and you eventually stayed and your mother stayed also?

EV: My brother arrived in 1947 as a student, and he was admitted to the same boarding school that I had been to. He also came as a student to go to Quaker school.

LF: Well, Erica, I think that kind of ends our soiree. I am so sorry that that second tape really was not good.

EV: In closing, I think I should say that you are a very good interviewer.

LF: Thank you.

EV: And, while it was painful, I think it had to be said. I personally am of the opinion that it's very important not to forget what happened during the Holocaust, and also of the very strong opinion that certain people or certain institutions are using the Holocaust to financial benefit that I do not agree or subscribe to.

LF: For instance?

EV: I don't like to name names.

LF: Okay.

EV: I think that...

LF: Are you talking about people who are writing books, who are...?

EV: I think there are certain people who have made the Holocaust their livelihood or their profession, and I just find it...I know I could not do this, at this point. I'm not saying never, because you can never say never, but I find this somewhat distasteful. I think it has a place in history, and I think that I have made my contribution. I would very strongly urge those who are putting this together to use my poems simply as a record. They are not to be published, they are not to be translated by anybody without my permission. I think, basically, I would give, I gave this interview to remember those that did not make it, and that's really what it is all about. We're here and we go on, and this interview is in the memory of those who didn't.

LF: Erica, just one more, because you are so clear in what you say in your convictions. Do you think it could happen again?

EV: I think anything is possible. I think that the same thing couldn't happen identically. I don't think it's an identical thing. I do believe that many similar events have already happened and the world has taken very little notice of them. I would point out Campuchea, for one, and Afghanistan, and these are two examples that certainly are tremendous tragedies and loss of human life. We don't know the number but it runs into many hundreds of thousands, and we're not taking any active role in that. Whether it can happen to Jews again, I would imagine things can happen. I don't think ever to the degree. I think the State of Israel is, in a way, our hope of something not happening, and I do think that cruelty will continue forever, and that's a terrible pessimistic thing to say, but I have seen nothing to indicate that people are less cruel in 1982 than they were in '42. Maybe some different methods. On the other hand, I also think that there is always hope and I am a great optimist by nature, and I feel that, even throughout this horrendous experience, had it not been for my strong hope, I would have never made it. And I do look for good things in any situation and I told you earlier that some of the things in Westerbork, as crazy as it

sounds, they were good for me, in a certain way, not that I was in Westerbork, but some of the connections I made, and some of the experience I had.

LF: And your alignment with Judaism?

EV: Yes, so that there were some things that weren't totally horrendous. They were...I had some good times, and I don't mean to say that the experience in general was good, no, but there were some snips of it that were definitely good, because I met some wonderful people, and did some very interesting things, and joyful things.

LF: Let me ask you. Your experiences were as a young girl.

EV: Yes.

LF: Would you venture what your mother might have said in conclusion? Would she have echoed your kind of feeling, or do you know if she subscribes to a different point of view?

EV: I think my mother has also blocked out a great deal. Maybe even more than I have, and I am quite sure she would subscribe to that, too. I don't even know that she would be willing to be interviewed. I don't know. My parents, my mother and stepfather, have tried to let the past be the past and they went forward. And they visited Austria and Switzerland and Germany, fully aware of antisemitic tendencies there even to this day, but also aware that they enjoyed certain aspects of it as vacationers and that's all they were. They were on vacation and they enjoyed certain amenities and certain parts of that. They do not wish to be awakened again and again over what happened. They know it happened. I'm sure there are certain guilt feelings. I'm sure there are certain scars. My stepfather had nightmares for years, but they have buried it to a large degree.

LF: What about their feeling of Jewishness, their feeling for the State of Israel?

EV: Their feeling for the State of Israel is very positive, philosophically, and they would make contributions, but they do not have a personal involvement. My brother also has buried much of it, and he was so young that his experience...again, different. My brother, Ernest Hilton, changed his name from Herz to Hilton, he was married twice.

LF: Why did he do that?

EV: Because he felt that it would be better for business and he changed it a long time ago. He was married to a woman from Australia for 15 years.

LF: A Jewish woman?

EV: No. And he divorced her and he is presently happily married to a woman from Thailand by the name of Saisampan and they have a son a year-and-a-half old and I think my brother is in a unique position. My brother was the first to be bar mitzvah in Holland after the war and I would...

LF: Whose idea was that?

EV: My parents, and I would imagine...

LF: Well, that was a switch for your parents, wasn't it?

EV: No, no that was not. That was part of it. Bar mitzvah was part of it.

LF: It was part of the ritual.

EV: Yes. He was the first to be bar mitzvah in Holland after the war and he probably is the last, or one of the last, to have a baby from the people who were in camps. His baby was born a year-and-a-half ago. And that was his first and only child. So that he has two records. The first bar mitzvah and the last to become a father.

LF: Well, that's on a positive rebirth. Okay, thanks Erica, a million.