

Interviewee:	<u>GEGGEL</u> , Elizabeth	Date:	July 15, 1987
Interviewer:	Gerry Schneeberg		
Audio tapes:	1 English	Transcript:	1 vol. (unpaged) English
Restrictions:	None		

SUMMARY

Elizabeth Geggel¹, nee Gutmann, was born on August 2, 1921 in Nuremberg, Germany. She was the older of two daughters born to Heinrich and Marie Guttman. She recalls a happy childhood. The family belonged to a liberal synagogue and observed Jewish holidays. Elizabeth's father a successful merchant, uneasy about the rise of antisemitism expanded the Swiss branch of his business. In 1931 the family left Germany and moved to St. Gallen, Switzerland. Elizabeth details her extended families' experiences when Hitler came to power in 1933 (some of her uncles and their families moved to Italy and another uncle was sent to Dachau after *Kristallnacht*, but her father was able to secure his release.)

Elizabeth's family became Swiss citizens. She relates that there were few Jews in St. Gallen, but she was active in Swiss and Jewish youth groups: scouts and *Habonim*. In 1939, when her parents decided to immigrate to the United States, they sent her to England to learn English and nursing. Her father took ill and she returned to Switzerland where she worked in a Jewish children's home. He died in December 1939 but she, her mother and sister did come to the United States.

Mrs. Geggel discusses Mr. Sally Mayer, a Swiss businessman who lived in St. Gallen. Somewhat controversial, he was the head of the Jewish community in Switzerland and represented the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee from 1940 to 1945. Mayer was involved in a number of schemes to free Jews from concentration camps. Elizabeth looked on him very favorably and thought him very brave to negotiate face to face with Nazis as he did. She relates her mother's request to Mayer to get an aunt out of Germany (which was successful) and reads a letter from her father-in-law, David Geggel, sent to the Swiss government thanking them for the hospitality extended to him in 1938 when he stayed in Switzerland for a short time until he could go to the United States. She describes the Swiss refugee camps which housed Austrian refugees until they could get visas to go elsewhere. Elizabeth remembers that the Swiss Jewish community, herself included, helped them with meals and other services. She believes that the Swiss government was also involved in the effort.

Even though they were in Switzerland, Mrs. Geggel recalls that they still felt at risk, especially with the early successes Germany achieved at the start of the war. Her family left Switzerland in 1941, went to Cuba for a short time and finally emigrated to the United States in January 1942.

¹Nickname: Lisa.