HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ELIZABETH GEGGEL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gerry Schneeberg
Date: July 15, 1987

EG - Elizabeth Geggel[1] [interviewee]
GS - Gerry Schneeberg [interviewer]
CG - Carl Geggel [husband of interviewee]
Date: July 15, 1987

Tape one, side one:

GS: This is Gerry Schneeberg interviewing Lisa Geggel on July 15, 1987 and I'm going to begin by asking you to tell me for the record, your date of birth, place, and a little about your family life, please?

EG: I was born August 2, 1921 in Nuremberg, Germany. I am the older of two daughters of Heinrich and Marie Gutmann. My father was a merchant, had his own business with two of his brothers in Nuremberg. My mother was a housewife and we had a very peaceful family life, and I remember a very happy childhood in Germany. My father's business had two branches, one in Switzerland and one in Italy and when things, the political situation, worsened in Germany, my father felt it was wise to make arrangements to leave Germany and see if he could expand the Swiss branch of the business so that in case the family, actually three families, had to leave, there would be the financial support for this, and this is why my family left Germany in 1931 and we moved to St. Gallen, Switzerland. My two uncles remained in Germany but then after 1933, when Hitler came to power, they also left and they moved to Italy.

GS: Excuse me: were these the brothers of?

EG: Yes, these were the brothers of my father.

GS: So these were the three families that you referred to?

EG: Yes. At the time in 1933, it was the family's good fortune that we already lived in Switzerland and initially they all came to our house, and it was at Passover time and I remember that *seder* very vividly. Because it was a real exodus. It happened very suddenly. The take-over of the Nazis in April of '33 and my family coming, they all came to St. Gallen and stayed with us but for several weeks and then they moved on.

GS: Tell me just a little about what life was like when you were living in Nuremberg? You were a child, and whatever you can recall from that period? Did your family belong to any Jewish organizations or synagogue or any other Jewish group?

EG: Yes, we belonged to a synagogue in Germany. It was called a liberal synagogue I think it would be like a conservation [Conservative] synagogue here and my father was active in the lodge. I'm not sure, was it the B'nai B'rith? It was called the Lodge, I don't know. I guess it was the equivalent of B'nai B'rith. But I don't think it was B'nai B'rith. Maybe it was a Mason Lodge, maybe. And he was very active in that. And we did have, we were not orthodox, but we had a Jewish home and we kept the

[1]nee Gutmann. The interviewee's release form is signed Elizabeth Geggel. She also uses Liesl and Lisa as alternate names.

holidays, I was 10 years old when we left and we left in '31, so I don't remember too much. I was a child, really.

GS: Of course. And your family was not affected by, directly by the Hitler era but do you recall hearing of any incidents of antisemitism? When you were a child in Germany?

EG: Not personally no. But the reason that we left Germany was because of antisemitism. And when people say now that, you know, so many people didn't get out because they didn't know what was happening to them. One could, I didn't say it, but my father could see what was happening and that's why we left. If you wanted to look and see the negative things happening, they were happening. Not many people had the opportunity to leave and my father took the opportunity that he had and we were lucky that he did.

GS: Did any men in your family ever serve in the German Army?

EG: Yes, my father did.

GS: Oh, he was a veteran of the First World War?

EG: Of the First World War. My uncles did too. His brothers.

GS: Some men, I understand, felt that this offered them some protection?

EG: Yes.

GS: But your father didn't have any illusions about that.

EG: No.

GS: When your uncles came and Hitler became Chancellor in '33, can you recall anything about that, the reaction of your family?

EG: Well at that time in April, one didn't know what would happen next and it was, it seemed to be a very dangerous time and we lived right across the border more or less, so the family decided everybody would come to us and wait and see what happens. And one of my uncles did go back to finish up some business of his in Germany for a short time. But essentially from that point on they left Germany and there was a manager conducting the business, who was not Jewish.

GS: Okay.

DG: One of my uncles was not in favor of leaving. He thought things were not that bad and they were well-established and why upset everything and I remember some discussions about that, but my father convinced them that, well if things get better in Germany, well then we can just all go back. Why stay there and wait until things get so that you can't leave any more? So they, it was a very difficult decision to pick up and leave, for them. We had already left. So but in the end they left. I have another uncle, my mother's brother who also lived in Nuremberg, who my father tried to convince that he should leave at that time but that uncle didn't have any means of support outside of Germany and my father offered to lend him some money so that he would have a way to make a living, but my uncle didn't want to accept it and he decided to stay in Germany. That was in 1933. But ultimately this uncle, after the *Kristallnacht* in 1938 was picked

up by the Nazis and entered in Dachau and it was through my father's intervention that he was released from Dachau. At that time you could buy your way out of the concentration camp and my father sent a lawyer out to Dachau to negotiate for my uncle's release. And I remember, I still was a child at that time, that lawyer seemed like God to me, that he would go out there and negotiate with the Nazis and get my uncle out. So at that point, of course, my uncle had no other choice but to leave.

GS: Was he married?

EG: Yeah, he was married, had a family and that's why he really wanted to stay where he was able to support them. But after this 1938 episode, he had no choice and he left and he went to England.

GS: The entire family?

EG: The entire family; and my father and a friend of my uncle's lent him some money and he started a business in England and he was very successful and he repaid my father later on. He just didn't want to take a chance, really, he could have done the same thing in 1933. So it was very difficult for many people to pick up from their secure situation and into the unknown and, but I guess it took a certain courage to do it. It took the means to do it but also the, even if you had the means…

GS: The willingness to face the unknown.

EG: The willingness to face the unknown, and a lot of people just couldn't do it and if you think what you would do here, it is a difficult decision. If the same thing would happen in America, who would just pick up and leave? It's hard to do.

GS: I'm sure. So you were in Switzerland then from 1931 until the end of the war.

EG: Until 19…

GS: No, until '41.

EG: 1941.

GS: During this period, all right.

EG: I want to say that we became Swiss citizens. The fact that in Switzerland at that time, when we went there in '31, it was, you needed permission to stay there and to work there, just like here in America, you need a green card to work here.

GS: Right.

EG: But Switzerland.

GS: You needed visa to enter at that point. I know there was an agreement between Switzerland and Germany up to a certain point.

EG: I really, I'm not…

GS: Germans could enter Switzerland without a visa, and then that was changed somewhere in the late '30s.

EG: I'm really, I'm not familiar with that.

GS: But you needed permission to remain in the country?

EG: To remain in the country or to work there, and because we had a branch of our German business which was in my father's name, he had the permission to work there. My uncles did not have that permission to work there, and later on when they came they couldn't stay in Switzerland to work there. That's why they went on to Italy. Well, we eventually became Swiss citizens and the first step to that is to have the permission to stay there and to work there and after living there I think for five years, one could become citizens, and we became Swiss citizens.

GS: Did you maintain contact with people, other than these uncles, in Germany or elsewhere during this period, when you were in Switzerland? Were you able to send letters or telephone calls?

EG: Oh yes, yes, there was no restriction.

GS: You continued then all your contacts with friends and family in Germany?

EG: Most of my parents' friends were in Germany and other relatives were in Germany. And many of them visited us in Switzerland. It was very close by. So, and we knew what was going on in Germany.

GS: Was there news in the Swiss press or on the radio of everything that was taking place?

EG: Yes.

GS: You were much better informed than the Jews in most of Europe?

EG: Yes. Yes. And all of Hitler's speeches were on the radio. I can still hear his voice in my ears.

GS: What was the attitude that you recall of your Swiss neighbors and the people you came in contact with? Towards Jews?

EG: Well I can only speak from my personal experience. We lived in a three-family house and the other two families were very friendly towards us, and I belonged to the Swiss Scout movement and later on we also formed a Jewish what we called *Bund*; it was a *Habonim*. And I was very active in that and I was instrumental in organizing it. I was always very much interested in Jewish affairs but I also participated in the Swiss youth movement and the scout movement. We lived in St. Gallen which is a small town and there were not many Jews living there, so I was usually the only one or maybe there were two or three other Jewish students in a class, but the Jews were a very small minority there.

GS: But had good relations with the town people?

EG: Had good relations, yes. Yes.

GS: Many of my questions have already been answered. You have been very thorough. Were any members of your family deported during the war years? From Germany?

EG: Not our immediate family but somewhat distant cousins. One, a very distant cousin was on the St. Louis I remember, on that infamous ship. That was turned

back and they eventually perished. But they were second or third cousins, but I remember that my father tried to do something for them but it wasn't possible.

GS: Tell me more about your experience now in Switzerland. You went to school, you had this contact with *Habonim.* Were you aware of any Jews that went on to Palestine? With the Zionist movement?

EG: Yes. Our youth group was a Zionist group and one person I know for sure went to Palestine. At that time, there were, in St. Gallen there was a boarding school where many German-Jewish parents sent, it was a boys' school, sent their sons to go at least so that they would be out, and they, some of them joined our group and one of them went to Palestine. I remember. I must say the rest of us went to America. Some stayed in Switzerland but whoever left went to America instead of Palestine.

GS: You finished school, high school, then in Switzerland?

EG: I didn't quite finish it. I left during the last year and went to England, because at that point we had already planned to come to America. I mean, things got worse and worse in Germany and it looked very much that the Germans would march into Switzerland too. And my parents had decided to emigrate to America and it was important for them to know English, and so I spent the last year of high school in England. I went to nurse's training school there and the object was to learn English, but I also wanted to learn something besides, a profession, so I went to this nurse's school but I couldn't finish that either, because the war broke out and I went back.

GS: This was in '41.

EG: In '39.

GS: Oh in '39.

EG: And I went back to Switzerland at that time my father had gotten ill and I really wanted to be home and unfortunately, he passed away in December, '39, so he never did get to America.

GS: You came then with your mother?

EG: It was my mother and my sister.

GS: So, was it during this period between '39 and '41 when you had returned to Switzerland that you met Sally or had some contact with Sally Mayer[2]?

EG: Well, I knew Sally Mayer because he was a very influential person in the Jewish community in St. Gallen. At one time, he…

GS: Did he live in …?

EG: He lived in St. Gallen; that's how I knew him.

GS: I didn't realize that.

[2]Mr. Sally Meyer was the Swiss representative of the Joint Distribution Committee from 1940 - 1945. A sometimes controversial figure, he was involved in a number of schemes to free Jews from German concentration camps.

EG: I knew him; I don't know if he knew me. Because I was a young person at that time and he was, I think at one point he was the president of the congregation but he was…

GS: You're speaking of your synagogue in those days?

EG: Yeah.

GS: Yes. He was also chairman of the Association of Jewish Communities in Switzerland.

EG: Yes.

GS: That larger following.

EG: Yes. He was.

GS: And then, of course, I am most familiar with him as the representative for the Joint Distribution Committee.

EG: Yes.

GS: So I am anxious to hear you tell whatever you recall of this man.

EG: Well, I know him as a very substantial and influential person in the Jewish community in St. Gallen, and when I read what was written about him, I felt that it wasn't quite fair, because having lived in Switzerland at the time, and experiencing the feeling that you were very close to Germany and that any minute the Germans decided they could march in, that it took a lot of courage to do what he did and I think he deserves credit for that because he was, he looked very Jewish. He was a rather small man with a very pronounced Jewish face and for him to negotiate with the Nazis, I think took a lot of personal courage because he didn't know what they would do with him. They could have just kept him too. So that in itself I think deserves recognition. How successful or unsuccessful he was wasn't entirely up to him. Because the Nazis definitely had the upper hand. And just to negotiate with them at the Jewish prison at that time took a lot of courage. And that's the point I wanted to make.

GS: At the time you were there in Switzerland and knew of him, were you familiar? Did you know about anyone who worked with him or any Jews who were helped through his office? In the Joint Distribution Committee work I'm talking about?

EG: I know that my mother had an old aunt whom she tried to get out of Germany. We left in '41 and these negotiations of Sally Mayer with the Germans was after that.

GS: Later, yes. '44.

EG: Yes.

GS: But previous that he had worked with the Joint Distribution Committee.

EG: Well, I only know my mother went to Sally Mayer about this aunt and he was instrumental in getting her a visa to come to Switzerland. And she was an old lady at the time and she wasn't even permitted to live in St. Gallen where we lived; she had to live in some little village outside, I remember. But she wasn't there for very long because she got a visa to come to America. But without having been able to come to

Switzerland in between she would have never gotten out. So Sally Mayer made that possible. But that's the only personal experience I had.

GS: There are many such instances of his being able to do that.

EG: Yeah.

GS: His reputation then, among the people?

EG: He was held in very high regard.

GS: He was. He had done everything he could to help.

EG: Well you know, I, we left when I was 20.

GS: Twenty?

EG: And I didn't know him intimately, you know. I knew him as a substantial person in the community and I also lived through the time where you didn't know when the Germans would march in, because that's after all why we left. And for him to negotiate with them, I thought was very brave. I think people who didn't live in Europe at that time never had that feeling, that the Germans could just walk, just take over, and do away with you.

GS: You are saying there was an atmosphere of fear there.

EG: Yes.

GS: There for everyone?

EG: For everyone. There were a lot of Swiss Jews left at that time who had never been in Germany; they had lived in Switzerland and left because of that.

GS: His personality, apparently, has been described in different ways. He has been described as being a secretive person, suspicious of others, this doesn't come to a, very withdrawn and quiet. This doesn't come through in your recollection?

EG: No. I remember him as a very kindly person to whom I looked up.

GS: It could be that the events of his life after the period when you knew him altered his personality. In dealing with, certainly with the Nazis, and with others?

EG: Well I can't say that I knew Sally Mayer very well. Only in reading what was written about him it struck me that there is more to portraying him than was written because as I said, just what he did deserves credit and it's hard to judge how somebody acts vis-à-vis the Germans who were in power.

GS: And the fact is that thousands, some thousands of Hungarian Jews were saved as a result of his negotiations during 1944. Certainly many cases that may not be documented yet, such as this case with your aunt.

EG: Yes. Well I just felt I wanted to tell Nora[3] that I felt there was more to Sally Mayer than was written about him. I don't know about what this Mr., Dr. Bauer wrote about him.

[3]Dr. Nora Levin, founder of the Holocaust Oral History Archive and Professor of History at Gratz College.

GS: Well, his thesis is that the negotiations that took place in 1944 originally set up by the Nazis for the proposition that goods, trucks could be exchanged for Jewish lives.

EG: Yes.

GS: Went through many phases, and Mayer was responsible for being able to postpone, stall and change the subject of the negotiations from goods for lives, ultimately to money, proposed money, and that seemed like a possibility except for the interference of the American and British authorities who wouldn't permit transfers of money. And then ultimately the goal, which was not entirely successful, of saving Jewish lives by putting Jews under the protection of the Red Cross.

EG: Yeah.

GS: Did we think, or Bauer thinks, contribute to some change, some softening in the policy of the Nazis and the military deterioration, of course, was a big factor, but this, too, is considered by him to have been a factor in ending the gassing and in saving some Hungarian, a large number of Hungarian Jews.

EG: I think also some German Jews. Another cousin of my mother's who was in Theresienstadt came to Switzerland from Theresienstadt while we still lived there, must have been in 1940. I don't know the details how he got out but it was from Theresienstadt into Switzerland. I'm not 100% clear how that came about but I know that he got out. He was an older gentleman too and he passed away in Switzerland.

GS: Well there certainly must have been some money made available…

EG: Yes.

GS: To help in this.

EG: Yeah.

GS: And the chief work over the years of Mayer had been to administer transfer of money for aid, through his office.

EG: Yeah. Sure, I am sure. I don't know all the ins and outs and details of what he did but whatever he did was difficult to do. More difficult that it reads and what I read about him.

GS: Yes, well I know there's been altered thinking on the part of historians as more is discovered, of course.

EG: Yeah.

GS: And more is revealed.

EG: Yeah.

GS: We get a different picture.

EG: Yeah. It depends really to a large extent to whom you ask. It's also been said that the Swiss per se could have done a lot more than they did for refugees and I want to tell you about my parents-in-law.

[Carl Geggel, CG, enters the interview at this point.]

CG: Maybe you will come to that later. Finish this first.

EG: Yes.

CG: I have two suggestions.

EG: Yeah.

CG: First of all, Nazis actually had their people stationed in Switzerland, border guards you know, who searched the trains and so on, not in Germany but in Switzerland.

EG: At the border.

CG: That was one point. We have another one.

EG: When we left…

Tape one, side two:

GS: …with Liesl Geggel. This is side B of the interview with Liesl Geggel.

EG: When we left Switzerland in 1941, we had to go through customs in Geneva. At that time the Germans had occupied the part of France that bordered on Switzerland and, in fact, Switzerland was surrounded by Germany on all sides except the most southern part which bordered on Italy; that came a little later, that Mussolini went with Hitler too. But when we left Switzerland, the Swiss custom officials went through our luggage and after they were through, the Germans did also, on the French side. So the luggage went from one table to the next, and one table were the Swiss and the other table were the German officials, and while I felt rather sad leaving Switzerland at that point when I saw the German officers going through our luggage, I didn't feel quite that bad anymore.

CG: Talk about the trains, you know.

EG: Yeah, well, Switzerland was, as I said, surrounded by Germany and the last year that we were living there, I worked in a Jewish children's home in Heyden which is near St. Gallen, and I talk a little more about that later. But I saw every morning long trainloads of food stuff going from Switzerland to Germany, butter and cheese and eggs and whatever was produced in Switzerland. While all these things were rationed in Switzerland, they were sent out to Germany. I don't know what the arrangement was, if the Germans paid for it or that I don't know. I only know that the materials went out of Switzerland, where they were rationed, into Germany.

GS: Did your family have difficulty getting some of this foodstuff?

EG: Well, everybody had food stamps, ration stamps, and you could only buy what you had stamps for.

GS: What was it like, do you recall? I mean how often could you have meat? Or eggs?

EG: Well we didn't starve it wasn't like in war-torn countries. But there was a limit of foodstuff available. I worked in this Jewish children's home and I remember we caught one or two chickens for 60 children to feed, and the director of the home was an absolute magician in cutting up these chickens so that everybody thought they had the chicken dinner.

GS: That takes a gift.

EG: Well, I remember that we didn't starve, but food was rationed and you had sort of to make do with what you could get. But it went to Germany.

GS: Can you tell more about your work in the Jewish children's home? How did you get the job? What did you do? What was the…

EG: Well, at that time, it was after I came back from England. I wanted to become a social worker in Switzerland already and the requirements to get into social work there was: you had to have a practical year in an institution such as the children's

home or hospital or anything that you would later on work in. You had to have the practical experience of having worked there as a menial laborer. And that was the requirement of admission to the school of social work in Zurich, along with a high school diploma. So this is why I was in the Jewish children's home. And that children's home was organized by the *Frauenvehrein*. What would the equivalent be? The Federation of Jewish Women in Switzerland. They owned this children's home, and it was for Swiss Jewish children, and at the time I was there, there were quite a lot of German Jewish refugee children whose parents had sent them to Switzerland and who were supported by the Swiss government and also by the Jewish community in Switzerland. It was a joint effort and these children's parents were still in Germany. And they had sent their children out to safety and many of them went to America from there, when their parents got their visas. Their children joined them and they all went to America. But some of them, I'm sure, did not get out of Germany, and I really don't know what happened to those children because we left in '41 and the children were still there.

GS: How old were the children?

EG: All ages from five or six to teenage.

GS: Do you know, do you remember anything about their education, what kind of schooling they had? Was there a school with the home?

EG: Yes, there was a school in the home and there was one caretaker was provided by the Swiss government and the other people were, I guess, on the payroll of the Jewish Women's organization. But there was a school there and the older children went to the public high school. The younger, the elementary school, was right in the home and the older children went to the public high school there in Heyden.

GS: Was there Jewish education?

EG: Yes. It was an Orthodox kosher home. And supervised very strictly by the rabbis. At Passover time, I remember how we cleaned the kitchen and made everything kosher for Passover. It was an Orthodox home. Because it had to be available to all Jewish children and some came from Orthodox homes and some from more liberal, but the home was kosher and Orthodox.

GS: You don't know whether in fact any of these children got to Palestine?

EG: It's possible, but…

GS: It would have been after you left?

EG: Yeah, yeah. It's possible, but I really don't know.

GS: Did you have any contact or know of anything about resistance activities? On the part of either Swiss or German people?

EG: Resistance against…?

GS: The Nazis.

EG: The Nazis. No, but our parents experienced the helpfulness of some Swiss to help German Jews to get into Switzerland.

GS: Yes, you referred to these experiences of your parents-in-law.

EG: Yeah.

GS: Can you tell us about that?

EG: Well, for some reason we really never asked our parents specifically how it came about. But do you want to talk about that?

CG: Yeah, I don't actually know more that you do there. I almost think it is rather strange that we never talked about it.

GS: Carl Geggel, husband of Liesl, is going to speak about his own parents and their departure from Germany.

CG: Yes.

GS: Go ahead.

CG: It is strange that we never discussed this with my parents. But they came, when they came over to America, they lived in New York and I was in Chicago and was classified 1A and we were struggling you know to make a living, and somehow we never talked about it. The only thing that I know that my father was in business together with his brother in Munich, Germany and one day he received a notification that some Nazi, how would you call it, inspector would come and inspect the business. By experience they knew that when they inspected a Jewish firm they found something, somehow, maybe fabricated, and they decided to leave. Now all I know is that they had gotten in touch with a socialist organization in Switzerland which helped the German, German Jewish people, to get out of Germany into Switzerland and there always is a quite a traffic between the border, to crossing the border, between these two countries. People go for a day to Germany and shop and the other way around, and you get what they call a *grentzenschein*, which would be a border permit, to do that. My parents were furnished with such a border permit one day, 1938, 1938. It probably was closed down later on and they were given such a border passes, little pieces of Swiss chocolate and Swiss paraphernalia, and the two men crossed together and the two women crossed together and they made it. I cannot tell you anything about the Swiss organization because, unfortunately, we didn't discuss it.

EG: As my husband says, my parents-in-law…

GS: Did you put it on?

EG: Yes. Unfortunately, we didn't know each other then, or they could have come to us. But my parents-in-law stayed in Switzerland from May '38 until they got their American visa, and they did not have a passport because they at that time, they had to hand in, all Jewish people had to hand in their passports in Germany, that was why they needed this border permit to come out. And then in order to get an American visa, you have to have a document to put it in and the Swiss furnished such a certificate, identification certificate, and I made a copy of it, if you are interested for your records. In every city, in Munich, I think was one of the worst. That's where Hitler's headquarters was.

GS: Did any other people, other than your uncles, come to you, to your family in Switzerland from Germany?

EG: Yeah, quite a few friends do you mean?

GS: Yes.

EG: I want to finish this with my parents-in-law. When they left, my father-in-law wrote a very moving letter, I think, to the Swiss police headquarters and I translated it for your records.

GS: Would you read it?

EG: To the Swiss Police Headquarters, Department for Foreigners in Berne.

GS: Oh anyway, go ahead.

EG: Okay. My wife and I experienced the acceptance and hospitality of your beautiful country from the end of May until today, November 29, 1938, when we are leaving for the United States. This was during the most trying and difficult time as German refugees. I feel very strongly, while still on Swiss soil, that I want to thank you, and all the government agencies to whom we had to report, for the generous treatment that we experienced everywhere. May it be possible for Switzerland to carry the banner of humane treatment in the future as well. My God protect your country and its people. In leaving your country, we want to assure you that should we ever come across a Swiss citizen who may need our help, we shall do our utmost to assist him.

CG: That was the end.

EG: Yeah that was the end. Sincerely yours, David Geggel.

GS: I sense that you identify with this feeling expressed here, and would you say that the Jews you knew, your family and others, had similar feelings about their experience?

EG: In Switzerland? Yes, definitely. I remember in 1938 after the German *Anschluss*, there were a great many Austrian refugees who just came over the border overnight and they were housed in refugee camps that were set up by the Swiss government. And I know that the Jewish people in St. Gallen where we lived worked there and supported these refugees in those camps. I'm not sure how the financial set-up was, who paid for what but I think it was their combined effort between the government and the Jewish organizations. All I know is that every weekend we went out to that camp and served meals, and we entertained the residents there and we invited them to our home. They were really refugees; they came across the line without anything except what they could carry or had on their backs. And most of them went on to America. The whole thing with Switzerland is that it is a very small country and could not afford to accept refugees to stay there, but they opened their doors for transit to accept refugees until they could go on to another country, mostly to America, but some of them to Australia or Israel or wherever they could get a visa. That was a thing at that time, you needed to have a visa in order to go anyplace and those visas were very hard to come by.

Now there were many such camps in different parts of Switzerland. I only know about the one that was near St. Gallen, but other people know about others.

GS: Can you describe in any way what it was like in this camp? In other words, how did it appear the people were living? With much discomfort or little discomfort? Do you remember anything about the living quarters?

EG: It was, I think it must have been an army camp that wasn't in use at that time. Because it was available like overnight and barracks and bunks, big dining hall, and it was in a beautiful part of the country. But I think the people at that point didn't really care much how beautiful the country was. They were just glad to be alive. And they were anxious to get on from there.

GS: You didn't hear of any suffering?

EG: No, once they were there they were taken care of. Yes. But probably not enough got out.

CG: You mean turned back?

EG: Not at that time. It was in '38. When Austria was…

CG: *Anschluss*.

EG: *Anschluss*. I think it was in the spring of '38. Spring or summer. I remember it was warm when we went.

GS: In St. Gallen, to your knowledge, or do you have no recollection of any German Jews or Austrian Jews who were turned away who wished to enter?

EG: No. None. I remember some who stayed until they got an American visa. If you had a friend who knew of somebody who lived in St. Gallen, you could stay with them instead of in this camp. The point was that you couldn't work in Switzerland. You couldn't get a work permit at this point. All you could do was stay there until your visa, American visa or any other visa, came through and you could leave. So it was a transit arrangement.

GS: On the basis of your total experience in Switzerland and England and then again in Switzerland, as a German-born person forced to become a refugee, would you say that you felt strengthened in any religious faith or ideology, or philosophy, such as either Zionism or I don't know, socialism, or was there perhaps a hope that a speedy Allied victory would be the salvation, do you remember any feelings you had about hope for the future?

EG: Well, I think I was always very attuned to Jewish, to being Jewish, and interested in what happens to Jews, even before Hitler. I remember one experience where we lived in Nuremberg. There was a pencil factory nearby that had a big fire at one time and because all the lacquer and wood that was in there caught fire very quickly, and people jumped out the window and we were watching this and I said to my mother, "Are there any Jews in there?" and she said, "What a thing to ask – there are people in there!" but I must have been about six or seven at the time and all that was on my mind was are there any Jews in there. So I think I was always very much aware of being

Jewish and mostly concerned of what happens to Jews. Now while living in Switzerland, as I said, during this Nazi time, I felt very much at risk. And later on at Gratz, I looked through some papers and on one I remember the Nazis had a list of all the European countries that they hoped to invade and do away with the Jews, and Switzerland was on their list, too. All of Europe was on their list. So you felt that you were very much at risk. And you hoped that they would not succeed. But there was sort of a sense of being powerless, because they sort of ran all over Europe without much opposition in the beginning.

GS: So the only hope, would you say your chief hope was you could survive and leave and come to the United States?

EG: Yes. And that at the same time help whoever we could to do the same thing. And my parents did that. I mean, aside from the family, many friends came via Switzerland or whoever was in Switzerland, left some money with us so they would have some money outside, you know that my father would safeguard for them. Not too much. I mean you got so much allowance, and I mean my parents tried to extend whatever facilities they had to all friends and family. Because we were relatively safe.

GS: I would think that this would help sustain hope in your survival if you were able to help another.

EG: Yeah. Yeah.

GS: I'm sure. You left in '41 and arrived here the same year?

EG: Well we came, yeah, we were in Cuba at the time of Pearl Harbor.

GS: And actually arrived in the beginning of '42.

EG: In the beginning of January. Yes.

GS: Were you able to continue, did you have any contact at all after that with your family in Italy or with anyone still in Europe?

EG: Well, my family in Italy had already come here before us because they couldn't stay in Italy either. After Mussolini allied himself with Hitler, all the Jews who came there after a certain date, my family was part of that group, couldn't stay there. So they were in America before we came.

GS: So there was no contact then with any family or friends still in Europe during the war years after you arrived? And what can you tell me anything about other than these uncles and their families who were able to come to the United States; can you tell me about any other relatives, any other members of the family who you were able to contact after the war?

EG: Well, part of my family went to Israel. I had one aunt and uncle there and everybody else came to America. Now and your family, too, except for one aunt.

CG: Yes.

EG: One of my father-in-law's sisters who was an old lady at the time was deported to Theresienstadt. She passed away [unclear].

CG: Several, several relatives.

EG: Oh yeah, right.

CG: So there were a few relatives that perished. Naturally, friends.

GS: Is there anything else that you would want to add that we haven't talked about?

EG: Well I think that in going through all this difficult time, living here in America now one really appreciates the freedom that exists here and American Jews are aware of the privileges they have in living in a country like America, and there are organizations that safeguard our rights here like B'nai B'rith, who are very mindful of making sure that Jewish rights and all minority rights are protected and that's very important because the same forces that made this Holocaust possible operate here too if one doesn't watch out that they don't take hold. If one doesn't protect one's freedom, it's a very, it's something one has to watch out for at all times. And just living in a free country gives one responsibility to do that. 'Cause here one has the opportunity to do it. So we were very lucky that we were able to come here.

GS: And of course, the Swiss experience was what made it possible…

EG: Yes.

GS: …for you.

EG: Yes.

GS: …to do that.

EG: Yes. And we're still in touch with some of the people that we knew in Switzerland, so they...

GS: These are non-Jews?

EG: Yeah, so they at the time that we left there, they offered my mother that they would help us if they didn't have to leave and they…

GS: When you say help, in what way?

LG: They said, if the Germans come we will take you, we will take care of you. You don't have to leave and…

GS: You think they would have been willing to hide you.

EG: I think they would have been willing but my mother said to them, "If the Germans do come, there isn't very much you can do for us. Or you will get in trouble, too. And actually…

[Note: Interview stopped in mid-sentence when tape ran out.]