

Interviewee:	<u>HEISMAN</u> , Ursula M.	Date:	July, 1, 2003
Interviewer:	Marcia Goldberg		
Audio tapes:	2 English	Transcript:	1 vol. (unpaged) English
Restrictions:	None		

## SUMMARY

Ursula M. Heisman was born in Mewe, Germany (now Gniew, Poland). Ursula grew up in Berlin and was a teenager when Hitler came to power in 1933. Her father, Isidor Hirschfeld, was a physician who served as such in the German army in World War I. He received the Iron Cross. Ursula had two older brothers. Her parents were “free thinkers” and her upbringing was an assimilated upper middle class one, with little Jewish content.

While still in high school Ursula was employed as an actress and dancer in a theater company. Ursula describes the rise of Hitler and the consequences it had for her and her family. For example, she was fired from her job as a dancer and her father could no longer practice medicine. She tells how they were made to wear the yellow star and of how her father resisted wearing it. When Ursula witnessed *Kristallnacht* she decided that she must leave Germany. One of her brothers, a physician, had already gone to the United States. Ursula recounts the difficulties she encountered in leaving Germany. It was only to Cuba that she was able to emigrate, and she tells of arriving in Havana, with her other brother, in 1938. Ursula recounts how she got a job as a dance teacher and that she was invited to move in with her employers, who were not Jewish, who subsequently paid \$1000 to the Cuban government to obtain visas for her parents. They arrived in Cuba on the ship after the St. Louis. Ursula describes life in Havana which she enjoyed very much.

In 1945 Ursula and her parents moved to the United States, joining one brother and leaving one in Cuba, who did join them at the end of the war. She tells of resuming her career as a dancer and eventually marrying and moving to Philadelphia where she decided to open a dance school. Eventually she had three schools and a ballet company called *Ballet des Jeunes* which engaged the top 25 students at her schools. The company danced throughout the United States and in Europe. Ursula closes her testimony recounting a trip to Berlin she and her husband took in 1969 or 1970.