

Interviewee:	<u>KISSEL</u> , Elsa	Date:	February 16, 2001
Interviewer:	Gloria Schwartz		
Audio tapes:	2 English	Transcript:	1 vol. (unpaged) English
Restrictions:	None		

SUMMARY

Elsa Kissel, nee Blatt, was born in Mainz, Germany on December 15, 1919. Her parents were born in Poland, her father was a businessman. She talks about her education in both *Yeshivot* and public schools. She describes in detail how school, her family's relationships with non-Jews as well as Jewish life in general changed after Hitler came to power. Their activities became more and more restricted. She graphically describes the destruction and brutality her family experienced during *Kristallnacht*, when her father was sent to Buchenwald.

Elsa explains how her brother, Herman Blatt escaped to France, her parents and her sister smuggled themselves into Belgium. She got a nursing visa for Great Britain, helped by the Society of Friends. In England, Elsa—along with other Jewish refugees—was brought to Soughton Prison in Edinburgh. Later she was interned on the Isle of Man in a camp run by British Quakers. Minna Specht, a German educator, organized a school for children and events for the adult internees in these camps. The Quakers arranged Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services for the women internees. Generally, the few non-Jewish prisoners were treated better than the Jewish ones.

Once Elsa's release was approved, her request to go to London was granted. She describes in great detail her life in England—working for two British families and later as a nurse in London during the Blitz—once she got her auxiliary war service permit. During this time, as a young refugee girl on her own, Elsa shows great resourcefulness and strength of character.

Elsa explains how various family members managed to get to the United States. While still in Portugal, her father enabled Orthodox Jewish refugees to celebrate a *seder*.

Elsa traveled to the United States on a Canadian troopship to Halifax, then to New York where she was reunited with her family. Unlike her father, Elsa never spoke to her children about her experiences. Each of her three adult sons reacted differently when Germany invited Elsa to visit with her family.

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SUBJECT HEADINGS

World War, 1939-1945 - Personal narratives, Jewish

World War, 1939-1945 - German Jew

Germany History, 1938 - *Kristallnacht*

Internment: Soughton Prison

Internment: Isle of Man

World War, 1939-1945 - London

Post Holocaust - Psychological aspects