HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ELSA KISSEL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Gloria Schwartz
Date: February 16, 2001

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EK - Elsa Kissel[1] [interviewee]
GS - Gloria Schwartz [interviewer]
Date: February 16, 2001

Tape one, side one:

GS: …with Elsa Kissel for the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive. I'm Gloria Schwartz. Elsa thank you so much for letting us do this interview today.

EK: You're welcome.

GS: Could you please tell me where you were born and when, and a little bit about your family?

EK: Well I was born in Mainz, Germany on December 5, 1919, and we lived in Mainz until I left Germany. We lived in the old town there, my father was a businessman and we had a rather large business that was spreading through two houses in the old town. It was--we had a workshop attached to it because my father was -- it was electrician and plumbing -- and it was **-- ,** had licenses for that and my father was an electrical engineer and we had oh about 10, 15 men working doing all sorts of things on buildings and, even roofing and things like that. And in the business we had electrical items: lamps, porcelain. There were different departments, stoves, gas stoves, all sorts of things, and I sort of grew up in the business. So while I went to school I already helped in the business, so that in the mornings I would give out material to the workers when they went to work, write it in and then in the evening I would take it back. What wasn't used and you know record it and I was hardly looking over the counter I was already busy in it. We had people working in the business of course, salesgirls and stuff. But I learned a lot of that stuff so that, like for instance, when little you know this-- today we have a throw out society but in those days everything was repaired. So people would bring in their toasters and their irons to be repaired and I would put the label on it but when they left I would do the repair. I had learned it. So I grew up in the business and did all this and of course -- I went to the first four years of my schooling I went to a yeshiva, the *Bunde Schule* and we learned Hebrew and -- you know, the first, whatever the public schools taught in the first four years plus Hebrew, *Chumash* [Bible] and *Tefilla* [prayer] and later on, when I was 10 I was transferred to the *Lyzeum,* the *Höhere Töchter Schule* where the first foreign language was French and then the second one was English and I used to take the -- my free time I used to go back to the *Bunde Schule* because we was all attached there, that we would go on learning like *Pirke Avos* [Ethics of the Fathers] and things like that. What else can I tell you there? I didn't--I wasn't a very good scholar because I thought school was there for me to have fun. And I did have fun, I enjoyed school. As a matter of fact, I think I was the only one in my class that started crying when, when I knew I was finished with school. I felt it was my best time and -- but, you see when the Hitler times started it became increasingly difficult.

[1]nee Blatt.

I was in a class of about 30 children at the *Höhere Töchter Schule* and maybe seven, I think seven of them were Jewish, and we sort of used to band a little bit together. There wasn't too much interaction really between the gentile children and us and as it became increasingly more uncomfortable they used to look to me usually, what I would do, because you know the time came when every five minutes it was *"Heil Hitler"* and of course we didn't raise our hand. And everybody looked into our direction and what we'd be doing. And other children were a little afraid, but I knew quite sure this is not what I'm doing, and then they followed suit. Like when they had assembly and they would look what I would do. You know, we would stand up of course, when they were doing all their stuff but it was always very uncomfortable. It also came to the point where--you see when my parents were Polish--came from Poland so I was, I was born in Germany but I was not German until my parents at the time got German passports, but of course they were taken away and we became stateless. But you came into, for instance, an assembly where in a speech they would say, "Well if a, if a cow is born in a horse stable, it's still a cow." Like if you came from Poland and you were born here, you're just no good. Even if you're born here and you know of course other children would look at you because they would know it is you that it is meant. So it was a very uncomfortable feeling. Also you know, there wasn't the separation of church and state the same way as you have it here. So like, for instance Advent time, about a month before Christmas, you know, they would light the candles and sing the songs. Well if you were invited somewhere to watch this it would be quite pleasant. But if you are there and you are not taking part because you don't belong it is very you know, it's a pointed--you become a point outsider, and it is very uncomfortable. So well, we were in a--we used to belong to the youth movement. We had a Zionistic youth movement and we were very active in it and we used to go away on trips. This was early on. You see, I was 13 when Hitler came in in '33. We took a while--the only thing that happened that was very pointed in '33 is when the SR[2] came into our business one day, and just said, "We close -- we have to close up," and we -- there was nothing you could do, they just went around and they closed doors and put on "Jewish Business" on the windows and stood outside and told customers not to come in. And I remember my father who was a little of a *Hitzkopf* [Ger: hothead] -- I don't know how to translate it, you know he was hotheaded -- and he threw--he didn't say anything when they were there, they were the SR, the brownshirts and he threw the keys down and he said to my mother, "I'm not going to open anymore. That's it!" And my mother looked at him and she said, "You crazy, we built up a big business and you're just going to walk away from it, what…?" And she said, "Whose going to believe this nonsense, whos's gonna--this is not going to last." And so, unfortunately he listened to her and he opened the business again the next day. But you know while you had all these uncomfortable things it was slow as it developed. It wasn't immediate. Our customers were mostly--we lived in the middle of the old town which was between the railroad station and the market place. So when the

[2]Probably means SA - Sturmableilung (Brown Shirts).

farmers used to come in, they used to come through our streets and they were our customers and the city employees were our customers, most of them. So the city employees slowly had to stop coming. They were afraid to come and I don't know about the farmers. They also dropped off, so the business sort of slowed down and as far as we were concerned as children we used to--we didn't feel it that much yet. You know we used to go on tours -- we were usually in the Jewish groups anyway -- and we used to go out on Sundays and we used to, I used to belong to a swim -- what do you call it, a swimming pool. They had swimming pools on the Rhine. They were houses that were built on barrels I think and then there were openings in the middle of it for a steep swimming pool and there was an opening where there was a floor in it but it was the Rhine water that would flow through it. And it was attached to the bank and there was a part of it that was a restaurant where the parents could come and have coffee and watch you, and there was a sundeck on top and I used to go swimming there every day. We had a repertory, a very good repertory theater in the town and my parents had season tickets. My sister was going almost every--she was very much into theater and so she used to go very much. But for me I was too young so I didn't go yet that much except when there was a children play on or something. When we went away we would stay either in tents or we would stay in youth hostiles but after a while you couldn't go to the youth hostiles anymore. You couldn't stay in tents anymore because you were afraid to be accosted. Sometimes we used to also stay with farmers, you know. We used to ask could we use the barn and we would in some way rec--compensate them and so we used to go on tours that way. But we had to stop doing that, you know, slowly these things were cut down. Some of it we still did like getting in touch with communities, with Jewish communities in other towns so that like, for instance we would say, write to the community in Cologne, we are coming through on this date, could they put us up and we in turn would put up youth groups from other towns if we could.

GS: What was the…?

EK: So…

GS: What was the name of your youth group?

EK: It started off as *Jüdishe Pfadfinder* that's the Jewish Boy Scouts, girls and boys were mixed and then it became the *Habonim*. We were in the *Habonim* but there was also the *Bechar*. We were different groups but we usually were friendly with one another and we would meet. We'd sing a lot of -- learn a lot of Hebrew songs and as a matter of fact, I have somewhere still one of the books the *Pfadfinder* book, I should show it to you, that I did when I was that age--that young [unclear].

GS: Now did you have any Christian friends, close friends?

EK: Well, not really. I knew the children at school. As a matter of fact, when I went back to visit about -- you know, I had been invited by the town…

GS: What year was that?

EK: Oh, I have to look it up, about 10 years ago I think.

GS: Okay.

EK: Someone came up to me and said, "You don't remember me" and I didn't, and she must of -- she was a classmate of mine and it wasn't until much later that I remembered who she was. I didn't know too much about her but I could recognize her on one of the old pictures. But I didn't recognize her when she came up to me and I knew very little about her. I had very little contact with them.

GS: How about the neighbors and the customers in your father's store? Was there any antisemitism that they showed or just that they stopped coming into the shop?

EK: Well, it was very odd. A lot of it just stopped. You have to -- there were people that, that were -- some people -- let me tell you an explan, explanat -- it comes different, you know, like for instance we had a worker working for us. Oh he was there since all the children were born. He knew every one of us from birth on. In 1938 on *Kristallnacht* he -- it was dangerous to go into the business, we lived above the business by the way, in one part of the house -- he came, he wants his papers, which meant I had to go into--somebody had to go into the business and I said "*Wiener,* wait until tomorrow, I…". No, he has to have them today, and he insisted that I go down and I get the papers on that day and give it to him. And that was the last we knew about him. This was a man who had worked with my father all his all these years, who had been paid high above union rates because he was a very good worker, and we knew that Ober [phonetic; probably a competitor] wanted him and we paid him high, and he was like a member of the house but complete turnover. We had a woman who came into our house--we had a maid in the house, that's a sleep-in maid. We had a woman that helped her as well and she came in once or twice a week. We had a big home and we had lots of guests over, and she--she was kind of, she was friends and around Christmas she would invite me to see her Christmas tree and stay and see that. So I used to go there [unclear] and her daughter worked in our house, in our business too. But she told us that she has to be careful with her son, who was a young boy who was in the Hitler Youth and she daren't say anything at home because she was afraid of repercussions when he would pick it up and talk about it or tell on them without realizing what he was doing. So they were afraid. I also remember like on *Kristallnacht,* I mean this is a longer story that doesn't need to be told but we weren't at home, I was in hospital and I had to go home because somebody had called in that the bird hasn't been fed. So it was dangerous for me but I had to go there. On the way back to the hospital someone stopped me, I don't know who it was, it must have been a customer or a friend of my father. I probably knew him, I don't know, and he says to me, "Fräulein Blatt how are you and how's your brother?" because they -- the town knew that my brother had been injured. And I was so angry that I couldn't even respond to him. My, my -- to this day I remember I just looked at him and I said, "What do you care?" and I thought to myself my -- now in retrospect I realize the man was in danger to stop and talk to me, but I, you know, I just couldn't accept that at the time. So the reactions were different…

GS: Yes.

EK: …and I know -- pardon, go ahead.

GS: I wanted to ask you, when you said you went to the hospital, were you ill or was this a job?

EK: No, on *Kristallnacht,* on that day they came very early in the morning and asked for my father. My father was ill, had a cold. They said, "No he has to come." So I remember he had -- should he take anything? "No just his coat," so he took his coat. My mother went after him with the medicine and a spoon, he should take this bottle along because we didn't know how long he would be away. And what we didn't know at the time and didn't understand is that he was taken to Buchenwald right that day, but we didn't know or they wouldn't tell us anything. There were two men that took him. And my brother was not taken. He was there, and in retrospect we realized that he was one of the people that they wanted to beat up but we didn't know. And when there was a call --you see, we handled -- my brother was the one who used to make the blueprints for work that was being done for the city. And he was in constant contact with them and he got a call like it's the city, they wanted to ask him about something. In retrospect we realized that they were checking whether he was there, and then -- you see, they used to beat in all the businesses. They smashed in all the businesses but our business was built through two houses. One of the houses belonged to my father. The other house, the corner house, belonged to a printing firm called Farbendruck that was around the corner somewhere. And we had built through these two houses and we had both the upper and lower floors of these houses. And the moment this occurred, all of the sudden Farbendruck arrived, somebody from Farbendruck arrived and they needed the key. And normally you don't give the key of your business to anybody but you know this was not a normal situation and we didn't know what was going on, so we gave him the key. And he had put papers, printed flyers over the windows of, there were about six or seven windows, over every window. It said "Aryan Business" because apparently he wanted to protect his house. He did not take the house. This is a way really but we didn't know that. But he actually wanted to protect his house. So he had put this over the windows, so they didn't storm the business.

GS: So he knew that this was going to happen?

EK: Oh apparently they all knew -- I mean we heard what was going on, you heard the hordes running through the streets and then you heard them and you see my father had been taken early in the morning. My sister wasn't there because you see, we all were in the business. We all helped in the business. My sister had married about a month or two before but she, she -- in Germany the Jewish and the state marriage is not the same thing. So she had the state marriage, she was already actually his wife, but she had -- wasn't under the *chuppah* [Heb: wedding canopy] yet. She hadn't married from the Jewish point of view, so she was still with us and he was in Cologne. On the 28th of October, that was just a little before the *Kristallnacht* that--we didn't know what was happening but they were rounding up people -- I don't know whether you are familiar with that. Are you aware of that?

GS: To take to Poland?

EK: Yes.

GS: Yes.

EK: And he was one of the people that was rounded up.

GS: Oh.

EK: And she went to Cologne that day to see whether she can help him, and since she was already married to him, state-like, we were afraid that she would be taken too. And so she couldn't do it, I had gone with her and had -- we managed to pack something and we saw him. We were on one side of the street and they were in a, behind a gate on the other side. But we saw him and we wait and I got finally permission to go across and give him a suitcase so that he had some stuff. But anyway my sister stayed in Cologne and he wasn't there to see whether she could wind up some of his business or do something for him. So she wasn't there and we knew all of this was going on in the streets on *Kristallnacht*, so we -- we packed suitcases because we didn't know what was happening so we packed a suitcase for my sister and we packed one for my brother and one for me and one for my father and mother together. And we hid them behind the piano figuring if anything happens something is packed to go. And then we heard them storming the house so my brother said "Let's run to the back." Our apartment went through a whole, the whole house and back of the house was attached to a flat roof so that my window, my bedroom window went out to a flat roof that you could go out on. On the other side of the roof was an empty house that belonged -- it wasn't really empty, it was-- Farbendruck also had a -- there was a restaurant and a wine -- I don't know, I was a child, I didn't know that much about it, but they had meeting rooms there and whatever--it was the *Goldene Pflug* and that house was empty at that time. It was used at times but it was empty at that time. And we ran across that roof and then we turned around. My mother wouldn't come and we said "Come." No, she wouldn't come. "Go," she wouldn't come. So we went into that room and it was a large meeting room and we couldn't find a way out and my brother saw a window and I see him going through the window but I knew this is on the second floor. I don't know where he's going through that window. I found a door and I yelled to him but he was already gone and I went through this door and I went through the house and I found one room had sort of like little corner in it and I stood in that corner. I just stood there because I didn't know where to go or what to do and I was all but seventeen and I stood in that corner. And I stood quite a while and then I heard someone walking in the house and with keys and I realized I had just best come out. It was one person and I came out and he said "You have to go out." He wanted me to go out into the street. Now that would have been the exit on, I think it was *Welchnonnengasse*, I would of come out there, and I said, "No, I have to go back the way I came", because I wanted to know where my brother had gone, and I wanted to know what happened to my mother. So I went back and I looked out that window and it was -- there was a crucifix underneath -- see that was, this was a yard that belonged to a church in Ratskirche and apparently there was a crucifix

under that window, and I realized that he must have jumped onto this crucifix and climbed down or something. I didn't see him and then I went back and I found my mother all disturbed. They had been in the apartment. They had smashed everything they could smash. They had ripped open--you know we had feather beds and stuff like this--they had ripped those open, the feathers were all over. They had smashed -- you know we had all these jams and stuff like that that we used to make ourselves -- they were smashed on the feathers, on the oriental carpets, everything was, it was just one big mess. We had a, we had a dining room that was, I've never seen anything like it. It was like flanged Flemish, you know these big turned legs and it was high polished and you could, you could see there was a mark on it but you couldn't destroy it, you know, but you could see everything that they could smash was smashed. And when they had left they hadn't done anything to her, they just frightened her. And she wanted to know where is Herman, where's my brother? And she said go up -- we had tenants in the house -- and, so I went up, there was a [unclear], also people that know us since we were born. "Oh [unclear], please go and look what's happened to my brother?" Because we couldn't go down and she says, "Don't you know they killed him." And that's all my mother had to hear. Now before this happened we had on one of the windows -- it was a narrow street, you know these are narrow cobblestone streets. Like when I came back now you weren't allowed to have any cars or anything in that area because the streets were too small. At that time you could still use a car, but you had a, what they call a spy on that window. It was sort of something with two mirrors and a triangle. When you looked out you could see the ends of the streets and we saw that there was a crowd on the other end in that street. So when my mother heard they killed him, so there was no holding her. She ran down and of course, I went with her and there was a big crowd in that street and we tried to get through. And I don't remember but we both were black and blue later so they must have hit us. And we found Herman on the floor. And then, apparently they called the police and the ambulance and we thought we -- I didn't, we didn't know whether he was alive and then he squeezed my hand and I knew he was alright, and we got him to the Jewish Hospital. They wanted to take him to the other hospital but we wouldn't go there. What had happened was that he had come down and he had run across the street and there was the officer of Farbendruck that's the people that owned the other house and he ran in there, and the owner was there and he said "Blatt, get out, get out." He didn't want him in his store, and my brother was desperate and he picked up an iron lamp that was on his table and he said, "You don't call the police, I'll kill you" and my brother wouldn't have killed him but he was desperate. So he says "I'll call the police, go" so my brother went out and they apparently attacked him immediately and the children told us later -- we're standing -- "He's still moving his eyelids. He's still alive," the childr… So anyways, so we got to the hospital. Now what happened there was they had no more doctors. All the doctors had been taken to Buchenwald that morning except one. He had lost his arm in World War I for Germany and he was a psychiatrist. He was the only doctor left in the hospital. The hospital was crowded. People were sitting in the

corridors. Why? Because the people in the countryside had their houses burned over their heads and they came in their slippers and in their nightgowns, and they didn't know where to go. They went to the Jewish hospital. So they were all sitting there and nowhere to go. The hospital was desperate. And there was not enough help, there wasn't enough to take care of all of this. I offered to help to them. "Well," they said, "We can't pay you." I said, "I don't care about pay. If you want me to help, I'll help", and I was doing their floors, I was doing their toilets, I was cleaning anything, because you had to help what was going on there. My brother was in a small private room, and my mother and I-- I mean I was busy most of the time. But my mother and I was sort of taking care of him. What happened was they called apparently every day. They wanted to pick him up because apparently they did not want people with that education to leave anymore. They wanted to use them or get rid of them, but they didn't want the brain drain to go out anymore. What happened was there was one nurse who was--as I said there were no doctors, so whoever was in -- other people were in charge and there was one nurse who was in charge. She was a big heavy nurse and I'm trying to remember what her name was [unclear] so her, she was -- when my brother was 13 years old, when he was a young boy, he had pneumonia, and she took care of him at that time. And you know, in those days they didn't have -- they had [unclear] they didn't have… [Tape one, side one ended]

Tape One, Side Two:

GS: Tape one and interview with Elsa Kissel.

EK: Well anyway, she had taken care of him at the time and my mother always felt thankful to her and always all these years used to say, "You saved my child. If not for you he wouldn't be alive," and always used to treat her extremely well. So now she was in charge and she had saved this child when he was young so he was--she wasn't going to lose him now. So she kept protecting him, she kept saying that he's not well enough to be taken, that they'd have to wait. Now the question was how are you going to get him out?

GS: I have to…

EK: Now the biggest problem of course was okay, she's protecting him but how are we going to protect him because some day he'll be taken, and we didn't know how to get him out. My sister had come back since and so had my father. My fath -- I'm interrupting this now because I have to tell you what happened to my father. We didn't know where he was. But since our business was not smashed up and it was all there, they wanted to take it over. So they sent a lawyer and an accountant to take over and they kept talking to us about it but whenever they asked us something, Herman was too sick and Eva and I said, "We don't know." So he said, "But you're," -- my sister's writing was in the books, my brother's writings was in the books. "Papa dictated." He is the only one who knows is Papa. "Where is Papa?" "We don't know." So he gave us a letter for the Gestapo that he needs my father to finish up the business and Eva and I took turns to sit in front of the Gestapo. Then finally somebody says, "What do you want?" We gave them the letter and he says, "Okay, go home." And a day or two later my father came home. My father's head was shaven, he looked terrible. It was winter, it was December, had no coat or nothing. "Where's your coat? Where's your jacket?" He said, "I wasn't going to take that home. There were people who needed it. I left it there." "What happened to you?" "Can't tell you." "Why not?" "When we are in America I'll tell you, not before." Apparently he had been warned, "If you say one word of what you saw you'll be coming back and not only you but your whole family." And he never said a word until we got to America. He never told us anything about it. He told us later. So anyway my father was there and my sister. Now was the question, how are we going to get Herman out of Germany? What are we going to do? So people had heard all over that Herman had been injured. So somebody sent us a letter that came from the Dominican Republic from their consulate in Paris that if he comes there, he will get a visa to go to the Dominican Republic. Now that letter was worth nothing, but you tried everything. So my sister took the letter and went to the French Consul. The French Consul knew us because my father and my brother used to travel a lot to France. We had patents that were running in France and in England and in various places. So the last time Herman had received a visa to go to Paris he didn't take it, because he didn't want to leave my father alone here with the family. And what we didn't know is that when a visa is refused, a French visa is refused the prefecture keeps it open for about five years, at least in those days, but we didn't know that. I think when you go to America and you refuse a visa, you don't get one for five years. Over there it was different. She

walked in and the French Consul said, "Fräulein Blatt, how's your brother, what's happening with him? I have his visa lying on my desk. I was waiting for you to come." So we had a visa. Now there was one other thing, when the last time our passport had gone in for extension they put a stamp into our passports "Not valid in any other country but Germany." In other words you couldn't get a visa into that passport. Somebody whether they forgot it or did it intentionally, whether somebody wanted to help us, had not put that stamp in my brother's passport.

GS: How nice.

EK: It was just like a miracle. So he was able to get that stamp in. Now was the question, "When are we going to get him out that he's not going to be stopped?" So we decided we'd take Christmas Eve, December 24th, because in Germany everybody's home with the Christmas tree and then they go to church. Nobody would be in the streets. And we didn't want him to take any money with him or anything because we were afraid he would get stopped. So my father took his wedding ring off and said, "Herman, take it and sell it on the other side. I know I'm married. Sell it that you have a few pennies." And on December 24th I brought him to the train, the evening.

GS: What year was this?

EK: '38.

GS: 1938.

EK: It was right after *Kristallnacht.*

GS: Okay.

EK: And we brought him to the train and we waited all night long for a collect call from France that he's over there and he made it. So he was out. In the meantime I had written to the mother of a friend of mine in England and ask to do-- I knew that there were domestic visas available. Britain needed girls to do domestic work and you could get a visa to do that. So I wrote to her would she try and see whether she can't get a domestic visa for me. She wrote back and she said, "There is a possibility that I can get you a visa to become a nurse. Would you be willing to take it?" Sure, anything as long as I learn something. So I said, "Yes, sure, of course", and I got a nursing visa to go to Britain. This was the Society of Friends were the ones that arranged that. They were in Bloomsbury House; they had an office there. So I went, I think it was in April of the following year and of course you know you couldn't take anything with you. I had ten marks in my pocket which is, was at that time about two dollars, and as I said, I wasn't the best student so even though I told them I speak perfect English it wasn't that good, and I went off to Britain. I said goodbye to my family. Herman was already gone, and I had been told at -- they hadn't told me exactly where I would be so I, I thought it was in England somewhere. I, I was sent to Whitley Bay in Northumberland and then I was sent to Scotland into a hospital there in Edinburgh. But I had no idea that I would end up in Edinburgh there. And I knew there were some problems because I didn't have the money to go there or whatever. I don't recall exactly but I know I had to pay back later on for that transfer that I didn't know

about. My folks, just to finish that up, my folks, apparently my father and mother apparently smuggled themselves to Belgium. My brother-in-law had come -- before all of this, I was still home and my brother-in-law got permission to come back to wind up business. So he came back -- he was supposed to be shipped back to Poland, and they got married, they went under the *chuppah* and he smuggled himself to Belgium.

GS: Oh my.

EK: The same night. And then my parents smuggled themselves to Belgium. My sister stayed to make believe the house is still -- everybody's still there, the lights on and things like that and then she smuggled herself and she arrived with a broken ankle in Belgium. This was all like -- you know when you saw Casablanca and these things like, those little stories there. That's exactly how it was. It was 100% true that way. Well when I was in Scotland, I arrived in Scotland and the little bit of English that I knew faded when I heard Scottish talk -- I didn't know what they were talking about. I remember coming in the afternoon and the sister said, "Are you hungry?" Yes, I was, and she said "Would you like to have…?" I'll never forget this, sausages I love, sausages from Germany but I didn't know that sausages in England were different and tea, the tea is different too because it's stronger and then it's served without milk or whatever. And I couldn't eat this and I couldn't drink this and I didn't know what she was talking about and I was miserable. But anyway I was there, I was out. Well I didn't know what was happening to my folks, and then--they had a very nice nurse--nurses home and I had -- so she brought me into this very clean little cubicle they had, and there was laid out on the bed a uniform that I was supposed to wear the next morning but I had no idea. You see, we wore those big butterfly hats as students. I don't know whether you ever saw them. I can show you a picture of it. But when you got it, it was just a starched piece of linen and you had to make that.

GS: Oh.

EK: I didn't know and then they had these stiff collars and I didn't know, and you had to have studs to put them in but the studs were things that you had to bring. You didn't get that and I had no studs. I had no idea. Well, the next morning I put on this crazy uniform -- of course I didn't put the collar on. I didn't know how to put it on. I didn't put the hat on because I didn't know how to make it. I didn't even know that it was a hat, and of course, that was unheard of, a nurse without a cap. I arrived in the dining room-- I was told where to go-- and I arrived in the dining room and there was shock when I walked in, without a hat and without a collar, half dressed and the apron, I didn't know what to do. So the sister immediately got somebody to take me back and fix me up. Well that is sort of how the whole term went and then they put me on a floor and of course you have to realize these were-- I don't remember in Brit-- in Scotland, they weren't 60 beds. No, they were long floors, they were like 25 beds or 26 beds. It was an old fashioned hospital and you had, you had like so many, so much staff on a floor. You know like, you had a sister and a staff nurse and then you had the probationary nurses, and they came from the first-- you see the nurses in the first year would do cleaning up and bedpans and what have you,

and in the second and third year they would already do dressings and do a little bit more in treatments and medications, and you know, you worked your way up. But when they put me on the floor and I didn't speak English and I didn't understand what I was suppose to do, I wasn't much help. So, and I counted as one of the people, so the others weren't exactly happy when they saw me coming because I wasn't, I wasn't pulling my weight. I had these tiny little dictionaries, you know, those "Lilliput" dictionaries and I gave it to the patients, especially when they were men patients, they enjoyed giving me the words. Like I remember them saying "Wipe the locker tops." Well I didn't know what "wipe" meant and I didn't know what "locker tops" was and they would show me and I would do this and I should never forget it. There was a little old lady and she was sick, I don't know how old she was. She must have been, I don't know, she was maybe my age now, but to me she was a little old lady. And she's lying in the corner there and she was whimpering and I felt so sorry for her. So I went up to see whether I could do something, at least ask her what she wanted. And she apparently said "Just a wee drop of water," but I didn't understand this and I kept asking her and just kept asking her and she kept saying "a wee drop of ?" and finally she said, "Go away you're daft." So this sort of was the way I went through this nursing part there. And then I had to attend lectures and take notes in because I'm going to have to be tested on this and I didn't know what this poor lady is talking, you know, I didn't understand her, and it was fast you know. And I asked her whether I could copy the lectures because I cannot keep up with the writings and listening, and she was very unhappy about it. They didn't have any understanding for this, you know, they -- I was a nurse, I'm supposed to do what I'm supposed to do and they just put up with me. And she didn't, she didn't like that but she says, "Okay" and she allowed it and I still have that book. I can show it to you sometime and you can see I had no idea what I was writing because the words are all-- you know I wrote funny because I didn't understand what I was copying. But to this day when I think of the heart, I remember her doing it on the board. She was a good teacher by the way and I remember, I understood what she was telling because of the way she taught it. So I still, to this day when I think of the heart I think of the way she put it on. So I finally got on night duty there and I was petrified sometimes there, because I really, you know, I had gone into nursing not because I wanted to be a nurse but I wanted a visa to get out of Germany and but of course you know, when you do something you might just as well do it well. And I remember staying at the bedside. You see they didn't know what to do with me so they put me with a nurse, a senior nurse who was doing dressings and I would go around with her and I remember to this day she had a case, there was a case of osteomyelitis and the poor man had a terrible leg there. It was really a mess and she opened this up and I was standing there and I could feel that I'm gonna faint and I was holding on to the bed and he looked at me and said, "It's okay". And I thought to myself, "If I don't stand this, I'll never be a nurse, I better hold on," and I forced myself and this is how I became a nurse and-- but it worked out. I did it okay. But I remember like one night they left me in this, in this what they called the septic, septic maternity. That

means it was the Obstetric floor and being septic meant it was cases that shouldn't be on the ordinary maternity floor. Like there was an epileptic and I had never dealt with epilepsy and here she was pregnant yet on top of it. I was scared stiff. I didn't know what I was going to do if anything happened. And I remember the bell ringing, the back of the hospital had an entrance, a rear entrance, and I went to open it and there was a couple standing and they were frantic to see a doctor. I called the night nurse who was, who was not very friendly with me. She wasn't too happy with me anyways. She was a supervisor, and I called her and said, "There's a couple here that needs to see a doctor" and she asked, "What's wrong" and I said, "I don't know." Well she came, she took the couple away and about two hours later she says, "Nurse Blatt, you didn't know why they were here" but she spoke in a brogue on top of me understanding her and she said, "She just had her baby." That's how well informed I was. Well anyway…

GS: In the town, how were you accepted?

EK: Well I was very lonely there and one or two of the nurses were very nice to me. Some of the doctors were very nice to me but I was afraid of them because I had been warned by my mother, and she said, "Elsale, as long as you are home everyone who takes you out knows your home and your folks and your parents and they will all behave. When you're alone be careful, don't go out if you don't know who it is, or why." So I was very much afraid to make dates or go out. So I didn't, wouldn't have anything to do with anybody there. And one night I think the night supervisor--they used to sometimes open the door and look in-- found me crying, and she must have called the Rabbi and the Rabbi then invited me to dinner. But you see, I was never accepted like they had a daughter and a son but I was never accepted by them and I didn't feel comfortable coming to, you know, to be the refugee that comes to dinner. I didn't like that. So while they apparently were very nice to me, but I didn't pick that up. Well anyway, I came off night duty one morning and I was tired, ready to go to bed when the matron came with two men, "You have to leave with them." So here I was again back to Germany, apparently being picked up. "What can I take?" "Nothing." That was, somebody got panicky up there and even though I was classified as a friendly alien I was picked up to become-- I was brought to Soughton prison. When I got into Soughton prison-- by the way, Edinburgh was a beautiful town and I loved Edinburgh. I liked what I saw there. And I sort of liked the Scotch in a way but when I got there I thought, "Well all of these people here must be Nazis and I'm picked up by mistake." So you know that there's an international law that internees have to have a day room, so during the day they have to be in one room. So I came in and there were about 50 women there and, of course as far as I was concerned all 50 were Nazis. So I stood at the door, I couldn't settle. I didn't look at anybody and they were all sitting there watching me. And the reason they were watching me was because they all had gone through the same feeling when they went in. They were all Jewish refugees. They knew exactly why I wasn't joining anybody. Well the only one in that group that really wasn't a refugee was a German women that had been taken off a U-boat and of course she was

very German. But she helped us in a way because, you know it was a prison, and the only things that they had like-- we had to have crockery. Apparently internees are not allowed to have the mugs that they had in prison, the metal mugs. So we had crockery there and she was able, like for instance, when you wash something you had cold water, soap, or whatever, you had no amenities-- she knew how to fold this and when you sit on it, you iron it. So when somebody wanted something, "Oh I can't get up, I'm ironing." So we were ironing and what else did they do? Oh yeah, of course the food was very poor and while I didn't have anything-- you see I didn't have anything except the salary that I got, and that salary was just enough to buy my toothpaste. So here I had nothing. So I didn't have anything but once in a while somebody would have an egg and she would show them how to boil an egg without having a flame in the water, in the hot water. She knew all this stuff, so we used this --and apparently they interned that must have been Italian women. There were two or three Italian women that were in Soughton prison on a different floor and we would see them. They didn't have a room so they let them sit outside on the veranda during the day. But they weren't mixed with us, they were separate. Well anyway, after about four weeks, we heard that we're gonna be transferred to the Isle of Man and since I had by now made one or two friends, with Scottish girls and I knew the Rabbi and I, I didn't want to be sent away from Edinburgh, so I put a-- I think I'm the only one who made a petition to stay in prison in Edinburgh. Nobody apparently read my partition so anyway I got to the Isle of Man and I don't know whether you know much about the Isle of Man. The Isle of Man was bankrupt at the time. The Isle of Man is a-- did you know that there are palms growing on the Isle of Man because the jet--the Gulf Stream apparently hits the Isle of Man and causes warm weather up there sometimes, so it was a resort place. But what happened-- and the whole place is hotels and *pensionnants,* you know, private houses that rent rooms, but what happened was, with all these Jewish refugees coming from Germany they were selling their *Sperrmark*. We don't…

GS: [unclear]

EK: Well, when you had money in the bank, you weren't allowed to take it out, so they called it a *Sperrmark*. The account, the account was there but you couldn't take it out of Germany so it had to be staying there. But if you were British and you wanted to go on vacation, and I would say to you, I'm going to sell you a thousand dollars worth of German Marks for 500, you would have a very cheap vacation in Germany, so we would sell you the *Sperrmark* in order to get some money out, and they could use it up in Germany. So the British went to Germany for vacation and the Isle of Man went bankrupt. So His Majesty sent us to the Isle of Man and paid 21 shillings for each one, a guinea for each head per week to keep them going. So I was one of the people who kept the Isle of Man by being His Majesty's guest. Well there were four towns that they used. Saint Mary, Port Saint Mary and Port Erin where they kept the women and Douglas and Ramsey were the two towns where they kept the men. Now the Isle of Man was, the internment camp was handled by the Quakers because they were conscientious objectors and this was one

work that they could do for Britain. And they were very decent. I really never had any contact with them, but we were fortunate in one way. There was one woman on the Isle of Man, her name was Minna Specht and she was an educator that came from Germany. She used to have an open-air school, a social democratic open-air school in Germany, and she had to flee and she came to Britain and Britain promptly interned her and it was our luck that they interned her, because she was extremely active-- first of all, she was an unusual woman just to see her. She used to walk along, she had an aquiline nose, you know, she was very dark brown, burned and she had blue eyes, big blue eyes-- she had white hair cropped back and she always wore a loden cape almost to the floor with a hood and sandals. And when she walked along it was as if somebody out of the Bible walked. It was really amazing. Well the first thing she did, was she went to the Administration and said, "If you give me a house, I will see that our children have schools" and because all the children under I think seven or ten were with the women and then the boys were with the men, and she went around and she checked, "Who of you are teachers? What are you teaching?" and she got a whole roster of teachers together. She set up within a week or two, she set up a school, and every child on that Isle of Man was in school. Then she went around and she said, "If you give me a store front or something that we can use as a community center, I will get these people occupied" and they did, they gave it to her. She went around and she said, "What did you doing in regular life?" So there was somebody from the Salvation Army. "All right would you give next Saturday a speech on the women in the Salvation Army?" "Okay." "Oh you were a dancer, will you speak about your life as a dancer?" and she set up a weekly schedule where every Saturday was somebody speaking. Then she says, "Oh you taught French, okay, beginner French" and she would have-- you would go past the store front and there would be a label where you could see very minute of the day, when could you take French lessons, when could you take Spanish lessons, when could you take English lessons, when could you-- and she would set up teachers to give classes to the people. Then she would-- then you know the women used to-- their husbands were in Ramsey or Douglas or whatever and the women were in the women camp. When they wrote to one another that had to go to Liverpool and had to go through the censorship and then back. So it took six weeks for a letter to go from the Saint Mary to Douglas. So she talked to the administration and said, "Why don't you let us have a post office? It's not going out of the internment camp." So she set up a Post Office where-- people from the Post Office were allowed to walk to the other settlement and deliver letters and bring them back so that the letters between the paren--, between the couples would go within a day or two. She finally said "Okay, you knit and you do hair and you do the-- we need a token system," and she arranged for a token system that we could buy from one another things. Like if you needed a sweater and I did your hair, we would pay one another in tokens. She really made life livable for us. Now the only problem was that not everybody was a Jewish refugee. Some people were BDM girls who had been in Britain doing domestic work. So in every house and I was in a house, and of course, that wasn't very comfortable because

the owner of the house, the more she could pack into her house the less she could feed them that was her profit, right? So I was stuck with someone I didn't know at all into the same bed, and-- but you had to-- and then somebody says to me, "How were you treated?" "Well, if I were a prisoner of war, I was treated extremely well. If I am a Jewish refugee I was treated poorly." You see there's a difference of opinion, and also you found that, that the BDM girl would sit downstairs with the landlady and the butcher boy and the Jewish refugee would be upstairs, and we all had the feeling if Britain gets invaded they all have to point upstairs, "There they are." We felt caught, we felt it isn't going to be so long and you're back in the camp. So it was very frightening. And then of course, they had this business with-- I don't know whether you knew about the Andorra Star… [tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

GS: An interview with Elsa Kissel. You were talking about the Andorra Star.

EK: Yes. Well they had told the women if you--the men -- if you go on the ship to Canada, you will meet your wife and children there. Well they felt it was better to go and meet the-- why stay here in camp separated when they can be in Canada together? So they went on but they never put the women on and then though the men were on the ship and apparently there was something where again, the Jews were locked up downstairs and when the ship was torpedoed none of the Jews were saved. And next door from my house was a woman who had both her husband and two sons on the Andorra Star list, so it was pretty serious.

GS: And the Andorra Star left from the Isle of Man?

EK: Yes, to go to-- then they did the same with Australia. They told the men and women they'd meet if they'd go to Australia so the men went to Australia and they didn't send the women. The women stayed in Britain, and they didn't meet one another till after the war. It was really pretty bad. Well the day came when they told me that I, that I will go to the tribunal. Now, my name was, my maiden name was Blatt so I was one of the early ones in the alphabet. So the whole house was waiting, you know, what will happen with me because the same thing will happen to them and I had written out everything and had prepared everything, who I was, you know, and why I should be free, etc. Well when I got to the tribunal there was another girl that went from our house and she I knew was a BDM girl, you know *Bund Deutscher Mädchen.*

GS: Right.

EK: And when we got there she went ahead of me and they asked her whether she wants to go back to London to the family that she had worked with or does she want to go back to Germany? Does she want to be repatriated? And she said she wants to be repatriated. So she was going to be sent back to Germany and when I came I thought I would be able to present who I am, you know, to get free, and all they asked me, "Do you speak English", and I said, "Yes" and they read to me that I would be interned for the duration of the war which was a terrible thing for me to hear. I was 21 years old. How long is the war? I don't know. So I stayed there and I think I, I don't know exactly when it was, like six months later or so, finally all of the sudden I was told I'm going to be released. So brilliant me, I asked to be sent to London. I didn't want to go back to Edinburgh, which would have been smarter but no, I go to London. Of course London had the Blitz. Well so I went into a hospital in London and the interesting part was that when I got to London, I didn't get-- I needed an auxiliary war service permit in order to work. And I didn't get that so quickly, it takes time. So Bloomsbury House had rented a house in Woodbury Downs where they had all these would-be nurses that were waiting for this visa, for this auxiliary war service permit and we were allowed to stay there. We had our room, we had board and lodging and there was a woman that cleaned and cooked. It was,

you know, like a vacation. But you see, unfortunately I was brought up by a parent that told me that I'm only allowed to eat when I work. The right way in life is you work when you get things, you don't get anything for nothing. So I knew I can't do this, I have to work. So I took the last pennies I had and I went down to Bloomsbury House, to Miss Pulzer who was the women in charge of the nurses and I told her that I would like to come and do any work she has. "I'll lick the stamps for your envelopes but just pay me to come in but let me work because I can't stay there," and she says "Well take a book, read line this up, "No, I can't." So she said, "Now, wait a minute." So she brought in a man by the name of Reverend Simpson. Reverend Simpson was at Bloomsbury House and he was the liaison between Christian and Jews. And he had his wife in Hungerford, Hungerford Berkshire, and with two children and the children had whooping cough, and he said, "Now look Miss Pulzer says that you want-- you're anxious to do some work. If you want to go down, I can't pay you, but if you want to go and stay and live with my wife and help her a little bit that would be good." "Sure, I'll go." So I went and I went there and I found that I didn't like so much to work with the children, they weren't that sick, and I said "You know what," to her, "I'll do your house, I'll do your shopping, I'll do your cooking, I'll do your cleaning. You take the kids and go to the [unclear] and have a good time." And this is what I did. I cleaned her house, I did everything, I cooked and cleaned, everything, and the place was very nice except it had no bath because it was sort of a makeshift, you know people had makeshift places to be evacuated from London. And she was invited by people, by Margaret and Gwen Nichols-- this was a farming family that lived nearby-- for dinner and bath. And then finally Gwen and Margaret invited me for dinner and bath. So I went for dinner and bath with the Nichols family and Mr. Nichols was very sick. He had Multiple Sclerosis and always needed help. So the two daughters helped him and they had a man coming in in the mornings and the evenings to help him. And he didn't like people very much but he liked me. He liked me because he could tell me all about the bad doctors who hadn't cured him and he was very unhappy about it. And he liked hardware and I knew hardware business. He had a hardware business and I knew hardware because that was part of our business at home, so I understood hardware. So he could talk to me about this. And also he was a pigeon raiser and I was very interested --I enjoyed hearing this, so he liked me. So when the kids were better there, Margaret and Gwen approached me and said-- you see I still didn't have my permit. They said, "Look would you mind coming and staying with us six weeks and then Margaret can go on vacation the time and then if you stay another six weeks Gwen can go on vacation, and then we'll give you six weeks vacation in our house." So I said, "That sounds fine." So I came and I stayed with the Nichols and it was a lovely home and they were lovely people and they wanted me to stay on. They said, "Why don't you keep with-- stay with us instead of going back to London" and I felt, I said, "Look, friendship is friendship and business is business and I ought to go and learn. I'll go to London and become a nurse but I will, if you'll have me I'll come every summer when I have vacation,"- -we had long vacations -- "and I'll, we'll do the

same deal every summer and I'll give you your vacations and you give me mine", and that's what we did. So we were-- as a matter of fact I just had a letter about three weeks ago, Gwen died. That was the last one of the Nichols and we were pretty good friends. As a matter of fact…

GS: I'd like to ask you a question. Was there any discussion of the war, what the Nazis were doing in Europe with them?

EK: Yeah, well, not so much. They understood that I was a refugee girl. They didn't, they didn't know too much about it except what I told them. They, they were very involved with the war per se because at that time we were at war. They didn't like Churchill because he wasn't refined enough but then they realized they need Churchill. They were very involved. Like when, what was that, when they, when all these ships went down and the people had to go and rescue the soldiers from, from, from Dun…

GS: Oh Dunkirk?

EK: Yes. They went all night long. Gwen went to, to pick up soldiers and to bring them back. You know, they were very involved with war effort and war things.

GS: But no discussion of the Nazis murdering Jews or the Nazi plans?

EK: I don't know whether we even knew that much about it.

GS: Okay.

EK: Even I didn't. I mean I knew about Buchenwald and I knew that it was dreadful when people died, and how they were handled. But I didn't know about burning and gassing. I didn't know about that. And then and they were very kind like when I later on when I said that I'm going to go to America, I remember Mr. Nichol calling me in and he said, "I can't give you anything." You know he was very rough, "I can't give you anything but I'll lend you money because I know you'll need some now" and I thanked him and I said, "No, I'll be all right but I appreciate it." And then when I went out I told Margaret, "You know I want you to know that your father said that to me and I appreciate it. I don't need it but it's nice." So she says, "Elsa, maybe you were afraid to ask him. I can lend you some". And I, you know, I felt they were really good friends because while I didn't need it they were there when I needed them or when I could of needed them. So I was fortunate in that respect. So the fact that my father had taught me, I don't take nothing for nothing somehow paid off in a way because I made good friends. Then I stayed in London and I couldn't leave because I couldn't get an exit permit because as a nurse you can't leave the country and also because it was wartime so it was hard to get a shipping. How you gonna go on a ship? And finally it got all together and you know once I graduated I had, I had trouble because I had done work in Scotland, and I done it work in London and they're different nursing councils. So I lost time and I finally got some, six months back or something and they didn't like that. You see they weren't always very understanding, and I remember going to the matron after I had graduated. I had not much choice because you could-- because at war time you could either stay in your hospital or do fever nursing or do-- you know there were certain things that you were allowed to do. As a nurse you

were sort of held in a position. And I went to her and I said that I was willing to stay but I would like her to understand that I'm waiting for an exit permit and a shipping and if this comes through I may have to leave overnight. She said, "That's fine" because they needed nurses here, "Stay". Well the day came when I got the exit permit and the-- all of this-- and I went to her and I said, "Matron, I can't go on tonight because I'm leaving" and I didn't even know which ship. All I knew was that I had to go to Liverpool and she got up to her full height and she said, "After all we did for you" because I have to go to work. And I looked at her. I was gonna answer her what she did for me but I, I felt it wasn't worth it. I just stood and I said, "I'm leaving." She didn't let me stay overnight. I had to leave the same day and I was lucky that I had-- knew somebody that could put me up that night. She didn't let me stay overnight. So that's how I left. Also I remember we had-- I nursed a lot of tuberculosis and we had a, a whole block of tuberculosis patients and you know in the Blitz you had the windows blocked up and there was no air circulation. And there was one room where I could go to and then they used the room for a leper. So the leper came in and then I had to-- my, you see you're supposed to do only three months on tuberculosis and then go to another rotation and I had done about five months. And the moment they put the leper in, they put me back onto this floor and you see you had to take-- he had both anesthetic and ulcerated leprosy and I had to open the wounds constantly because people came from all over London to see this. And I -- and he used the same bathroom. That was the only bathroom I could use and I finally decided uh-uh, "Don't do that to me." She did that to me, you know and I went to her and I said, "Matron, I have been six months on tuberculosis now" and she was very angry but she had to shift me off and I remember somebody saying to me, "But you're a nurse, you should be able, you know, you should stand this" and I said, "Well, I did my tour and that's it." But they had no feeling at all because I realized there's a 12 year incubation period. I'm going to go to America and I have no protection here at all. So anyway…

GS: So you-- how did you then meet up with your parents? Tell me what month was this and year that you went to America?

EK: Oh, I was D-Day I was here already. I had just came before.

GS: Okay.

EK: I could get a tissue?

GS: Oh certainly.

EK: Before we had left Germany we had all agreed that we have an aunt in New York. No matter where you are in the world, you let this aunt know where you are, so that we find one another. And in the meantime my folks had made their way from Belgium, through France, through Portugal. Herman was caught in Saint-Cyprien, in a concentration camp there and he escaped. And then my folks were in Oporto and either at that year Lisbon, Portugal gave no transit visas for anybody but Herman, who was in Marseilles, had to get a transit visa to go and get the ship in Portugal, in Lisbon. So my sister and her husband went to Lisbon to see the consul and of course you're afraid to go to the consul.

You're refugee in wartime, this is not exactly a pleasurable trip. And she sat there-- there was sort of like a courtyard in front of his office-- and she sat there for three days and didn't dare and he was walking in and out but she didn't dare. And finally my brother-in-law gave her a push and pushed her against him and the consul started laughing and he said, "I've seen you sitting there for three days. What is it you want?" And she said, "Look I have the shipping ticket, I have the ship tickets, I have the visa for America and everything for my brother. He's in Marseilles. We need to get a transit visa to get him to Portugal, so that he can meet us on the ship and I need that visa." So he said, "Okay I'll give it to you." So he gave her the visa. She cabled to my brother in Marseilles, "Go to the consulate for the visa." He cabled back, "No visa." The consul in Marseilles sold that visa to someone else. My sister had to go back to the consul and say, "There's no visa," and the consul got angry and he called through, "I want that man to have the visa," and that's how my brother got the visa and met them on the ship. But there were lots of things happening on that trip. They went-- and this is all hearsay because they told me then what was happening. See they always, refugees when they are traveling like this, they always would get like a little room where they would meet to *daven*, to pray and this was how they would really exchange information, because the information that you got on radio and paper wasn't always that reliable. So they used to go from town to town and at one point my father-- my father and my mother and my sister and her husband were together-- and my father said, "You know this fellow Fishele Weiden and he is very bright-- I think I mentioned this once to you-- we ought to, we ought to watch what Fishele does and we should go always where he goes." And then one morning Fishele told them, "It's time to leave. We'd better go." So they packed up and they met them at the station, and Fishele had his parents with him, his wife who was pregnant with a carriage with two kids in it and two holding on and a sister and a brother and I don't know, a *gontze mishpocha* [whole family]. And my sister felt ashamed because there was such a commotion there, but they went to this train station there, and of course, following my father and my mother and sister, and the last train had left. There was only one train there, and that was the diplomatic train and **no that she can't go** on it.

GS: And what city is this in now?

EK: I don't -- it was in France.

GS: In France, okay.

EK: France, I don't know which city it was, and so there were two guards and Fishele said to his wife, "When you see those guards busy, you get on that train, don't look back, don't look where I am, just go." He went over to one guard and started yelling, "Baggage, baggage," because he didn't speak English but his luggage is on the train. And he wants to go through, his luggage is there, whatever, and he carried on so that the other guard came over to help this guard. And his wife went through, his mother, his father, his uncle, his aunt, and my parents, my sister and my brother, everybody ran on to the train. The train started to go and Fishele Weiden gave both of them a push and got on the train.

My sister later on said to her, "Weren't you afraid when you went on that your husband would stay back?" And she said, "I knew Fishele would come out if he had to fly over the roofs of Paris, he will come." Years later when I was in New York, he was in the diamond trade, my sister said, "Come along there's a ball," or something that is going on. I didn't want to go and she said, "Fishele Weiden is there." I went; I had to meet him. Well anyway this is one story. I remember them telling me they were in Portugal in Oporto in a game. They had rented a room and it was coming to *Pesach* and it was-- you know a lot of the people that were there were Belgian Jews that were *diamanteurs* and had fled. And they were, they were very Orthodox and they were all in despair because how are you going to have *Pesach* in Portugal? So my Papa who was able to do almost anything said, "If you get me an old bakery and you get," you know, "If we put together and we get a bakery and you get me volunteers you'll have *matza*." So they did that, they got an old bakery. "But how we going to do about dishes?" because they only had just a few dishes, you know, everybody just had make believe. He says, "Whatever you can *kasher* bring to me I'll *kasher* it." So he set up in the courtyard something that he could *kasher* so the whole *Chevra* there had *Pesach* because my Papa baked *matza* and he *kashered* it for them. And years later my father was walking through New York, and he was-- this was I think near 47th Street somewhere -- and he ran into one of the Belgian volunteers, "Hi Blatt how are you doing? What are you doing? He says, "What am I doing? I'm starving." "What do you mean you're starving? Come, I'll teach you how to cut diamonds," so the whole family learned how to cut diamonds because my Papa was a *matza* baker in Portugal he became a diamond cutter in New York.

GS: Wow.

EK: So with all of this you had always something to make it a little -- people live and make life go, keep going as long as they can, no matter under what circumstances, so what else can I tell you?

GS: Okay, so where did you come in the United States?

EK: Where did I come in? The ship that they put me on was a Canadian troop ship and it was at the time of the San Francisco conference. That's why they took women on, and there were 50 women on that ship. And the ship came in, in, what's the town in, in Halifax. And then we had to travel down to New York and they had us in terrible quarters. They had no air conditioning. It was a train, it was open, and everybody was filthy from that dust that flew in. I don't know how but I somehow persuaded one guy to give me a sleeper, to make-- I got it, I got a sleeping thing and there was a girl that had twisted her ankle and I said, "It's going to be a squeeze but come, you can come with me," so the two of us squeezed into that one berth there. Well we got into New York there and when I-- I think I came in on 34th Street-- and I remember we came in downstairs, something-- and I, I don't know there was no way to get up there, there was-- you know, it was an odd way but anyway I got a freight elevator to take me up and I got upstairs and I saw my sister from far because we all had white hair and I saw my sister, I saw the white

hair and I yelled, Eda, and she came and we embraced and I said, "Where's Mama?" She had to get a freight elevator to get downstairs to get me. So anyways that's how I got to New York, and so and I'm here.

GS: Yes you are, yes you are. I want to just ask you one question back on the Isle of Man. Was there anything set up for religious services or?

EK: Oh yes, yes, that's very interesting. There was nothing really set up but the women demonstrated because Rosh Hashanah came and we didn't have anything. And I think I have it somewhere, I can show it to you that-- because they took everything away from me. When I left the Isle of Man, every piece of paper that had to do with the Isle of Man they took away from me.

GS: Oh.

EK: I had nothing left. I wanted to keep this, but they, I had nothing left, but this they didn't know I had. They took a movie house, the Quakers took a movie house, they imported a Rabbi and a *Hazan* [cantor] and the 4,000 women that were on the Isle of Man, I don't know if there were 4,000, whether it was the total population or just the woman, I don't know-- well, all the women went to that movie house for Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur and we had a service there, and I have the ticket to that movie house, for the service. So that was the only thing I remember as far as religion is concerned, nothing else. And I certainly wasn't kosher [unclear].

GS: Now what about the German girls? What you were asked when you left…

EK: She disappeared, she must have been sent, been repatriated, I don't know but they, how they would have done this in wartime, I don't know.

GS: So they didn't keep them.

EK: No, no they were sent back. But that was the hurtful thing. I mean she has a right to go back to London but I am the one that has to be kept isolated. And I remember one woman came back and she had been told that they're too intellectual. Apparently they were afraid of Communism or something. They-- I think that was part of why they kept some people, I don't know. It was, it was something that not, not something pleasant about Britain to remember. I made friends there, I had people that were very good to me, but there was a lot that was wrong. There was a lot wrong.

GS: Is there anything else you would like to say before we conclude?

EK: Well, I'm glad I came to this country and I feel it's been good to me. I was able to study, I was-- see the fact that I was not able to-- as much as I wasn't a good student when I was in high school, etc-- I was grateful to be able to go back to school when I came here, and I was able to study and get my education and advance. My husband is American and-- but has a great deal of understanding. In fact, he's felt, feels stronger about some of the things than I do. Funny thing is, he understood my family well, but he never understood me when I spoke German, because when I-- I hadn't spoken German from the moment I left Germany and I was always in an English speaking society and what happened was when I then tried to speak German I spoke only, I didn't speak high German, I spoke

dialect, and the Mainzer dialect is a horrible dialect, it's, it's miserable. But that was the only way I could speak it. It just came out that way and --by the way, the Mainzers, they're very proud of their dialect. It came out only that way and he always said, "I don't understand. I understand your family, but I can't understand you." That was how it came back but my children grew up here and it's hard to see, they have such different reactions to it. Like when I, when they invited me to come back to Germany, one son wanted to come and felt very strong about, "Ma," he said, "they feel worse than you do," and made friends amongst a lot of Germans, because he felt they're worse off in a way, in thinking back. While my other son came along because he wanted to see it, and all he could say is, "I can't stand them," and the third one wouldn't come. So each one reacts very different. I never spoke to the children much about it. Not-- I don't know why. You see, when my father-- when I finally met my father here, he couldn't stop telling me about Buchenwald and things like that, and it was so painful to hear it and I used to say, "Papa I can't listen to it." And he said, "Elsele, people had to live through it. You have to hear it," and I just couldn't, I couldn't do this to my kids. So I never told them much and yet, you know, they absorbed it in some way I guess. I noticed that my grandchild wants to hear about it. He wants to know about it. So some things I tell him, not too much, but he wants to know. But, what else can I tell you? That's, that's a life. You live through a lot, we learned a lot, could've done with a little less, but it's amazing how one adjusts, no matter what it is, one adjusts. But it's lately that I very often think of people that got lost, which, you know for a while I was able to put it away but… [tape two, side one ended]

Tape two, side two:

GS: …with Elsa Kissel.

EK: I spoke to some other five months ago but knew me since I was about four years old. She lived on the same street and she had been sent to Poland. She was in the camps, she married there, and I remember saying, "You know I often think about Leah and about Sophie," you know children we knew at the same time and she says, "Oh did you, oh you didn't know this one was on the train with me." And then she was telling me one fellow that I know which she used to like and she says too--you know we were brought up very strict, you know, it wasn't like we are here--and she says, "And I remember I said goodbye to him and we shook hands," and you could hear where she was almost saying, "I wish I could've given him a hug," you know, because she doesn't know of course where he had ended up or how he ended up. But once in a while this comes back and it's, it's painful still, you know. Or like I, I picked up a book recently, they're reading it in the book club: Stones from a River. It was by Ursual Hegi

GS: Yes.

EK: And I'm reading it, and it's written very well because I, that was the area I used to live in and it was just about that time, and it brings back a lot of things that, that just writing about it I had forgotten, or things that just ring a bell. Like, for instance, she speaks about one street, *Barbarossa Strasse* and I remember we had *Barbarossa Strasse* in our town, you know, and it brings back little things and-- oh but then it comes to a point where I feel, "Oh maybe I better not read more because it's too close, it comes too close." So there are certain things I sort of don't want to, I don't want to relive it. I know maybe I should but I feel, why plague myself, you know? It's unfortunate that people have to go through things like that and unfortunately we are still going through it in other places. And these human beings aren't very kind always to one another. I think that's about all that I have to tell you.

GS: Elsa, thank you very, very much.

EK: You're very welcome, anytime.

Addendum to Interview:

GS: Elsa is explaining, is going to continue this interview and explain what happened when the Jews were taken, the Polish Jews, German Jews were taken back to Poland.

EK: Well what actually happened is-- we didn't know about this but apparently the Polish government brought out an edict that anyone that hadn't visited Poland within the last five years would lose Polish citizenship. This was really one way of, for them to

say we're not responsible for the Poles anymore or for the Jews anymore because they knew most Jews hadn't really visited very much. And when the Germans heard that their response was, "Oh you're going to give us your Jews, we'll give them back to you." So, but this had all happened without us knowing anything about it, and then we realized something was happening but we didn't know what, and then one of the boys who had worked in our shop came one morning back on the 28th of October '38 and he seemed all shook up, and he said he didn't know what's going on but he saw people being taken off the trains and he was afraid. So we asked him whether he wants to stay here or-- because we had no idea who they were fetching and why. What would you like to do? He would like to go back home to his folks. So my father drives him-- got out of his clothes and put on the working clothes because maybe he would be safer when he looks like a worker rather than dressed up and he left and of course we never saw him again. Then we realized that apparently they're not coming to us, to our house, but something's going on. So they felt it was safest for me because I was a young child, I wasn't that young, I was about 17. So I went to go to see what happened to some of my friends who were Polish- Jewish. When I got to their doors, like Sophia Gutta's door, was locked and sealed, officially sealed. The [unclear] was officially sealed. Fina's door was officially sealed. On the way home I ran into Fina, this little girl I was friendly with and she was crying, and I said, "What happened, what's happening with you." And she told me that they took her and her parents out of their beds last night at ten o'clock and told them to come to the police station, and they were there all night and in the morning they put them on buses. And in the police station there were a lot of other people, and they put them on buses but she was taken off the bus because her passport was in Frankfurt for extension. And apparently they needed their passport, you know, to get them over the, to get them over to Poland. And she cried because she wanted to stay with her parents and they wouldn't let her. But that was the last time she saw her parents, and of course, I asked her to come home with me and she stayed with us then. I don't know how long she stayed with us and when an aunt came back from Poland. She stayed with her until she went to England but she stayed with us for about six to eight weeks, I don't know. She had nowhere to go and -- but at that time they-- my brother-in-law had also been taken, my sister was still living with us, and we saw him before he left, and as a matter of fact, his sister who was very smart, realized, I don't know how she knew, you have to have a passport to be taken. And she had a passport in the house and she hid it. And they came to fetch her and they searched the whole apartment but they couldn't find it and they left her. So she wasn't taken. She had opened-- on the, on the stove, she had opened the inside of the stove door and put it between the stove door and closed it again and that's the one place that they hadn't searched. She was very smart, she didn't-- and of course these people were sent to the border and after a while Poland closed the border and then the Germans sent them over to no-mans land and the Poles started shooting to send them back, and then the Germans started shooting and they went in [unclear] some of them got injured and hurt and killed and-- but somehow when you

ask, when you talk to people about the Holocaust, they never heard of all of this. And there were people lives finished on that day, so…

GS: Thank you.

EK: You're welcome.

[Conclusion of Addendum to Interview]

EK: …passport that they had visited Poland in order to not be shipped. So they stormed the Polish consulate for a stamp that they were there and we belonged to an Orthodox congregation and the Rabbi announced, "You may travel to the consulate to get your stamp into your passport on…"

GS: On Shabbat.

EK: "…on Shabbat, in order to save yourself." So people who were Orthodox traveled to wherever the consulates were, to get stamps into their passports so they should be left alone. But…

GS: The Jews that were taken by the Nazis were Jews who had not visited Poland in five years?

EK: Yes, yes. Well most hadn't, most hadn't. But then they got-- they used to call it a red stamp, they got the stamp into their passport, but of course you know, very soon afterwards, the 10th or 11th of November, 10th of November *Kristallnacht*[3] came so it didn't save them for very long but it saved this for a little while so…

[Tape two, side two ended, interview ended]

[3]*Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass took place on November 9 and 10, 1938.