

RG-50.462.0386

Summary

Note that the recording is silent from timestamp 00:31:10 to 00:33:45 in Part 1 and Part 2.

Nelly Lewandowsky (née Priester) was born on December 28, 1900 in Gradendorf, Austria. Her father was a physician; she considered her family affluent. She had a younger brother by 1.5 years. Before starting formal schooling, she attended a nearby school (now in the Czech Republic) to learn Hebrew. The closest synagogue was 2-3 hours away by horse and buggy. The family moved to Poysdorf, Austria to access better schools when Nelly was eleven. In neither town does she remember local antisemitism. During WWI, she attended a boarding school that had students of mixed religions.

In 1924, Nelly married Dr. Fredrich Hahn, a lawyer from Vienna. When Hitler came to power in 1933, they were living in Vienna, experiencing virtually no discrimination. She remembers clearly the concerns of many about Hitler's policies but had little personal problems until the Anschluss. At that time, now divorced with one son, Walter, born in 1927, she saw women forced to scrub the streets. She refused, but was not punished. However, shortly after Kristallnacht, Nelly along with her brother, mother and son were confined to a hotel. She was periodically assigned to manual labor while her brother was sent to Dachau. She helped gain his release before she left Europe. He later tried to escape through Hungary and Yugoslavia but he disappeared.

Her shop was confiscated. Nelly describes how she entered into an unusual correspondence with a woman in the U.S. while inquiring about emigrating to Woodbine, NJ and the difficulties of applying for a visa through the American consulate in Vienna. She left her son in a French chateau set up for children by Baron Rothschild, after waiting in Belgium, and departed for Woodbine from France on Aug. 2, 1939. She worked as a nurse with Drs. Morrison and Friedman. She was able to arrange for Walter to arrive in May, 1940.

Nelly's mother was sent to Theresienstadt, but survived the war and joined Nelly in the U.S. in 1947, living together until her mother died in 1963.

Nelly describes her encounter on the ship from France with Baron von Sternhagen (?), a former government minister for Germany's colonies before WWI. Through him, she met people who helped her buy into a retail uniform shop in Philadelphia after her son arrived from France. She also relates a story about a Nazi named Graf who helped her mother recover from stolen items.

Her ex-husband, shortly after the Anschluss, escaped to Switzerland where they were interned, ultimately going to France where he died of blood poisoning. Her second husband, Manfred

Lewandowsky, was a cantor related to a famous German musical figure, Louis Lewandowsky. They met in Philadelphia. All Manfred's family were killed in the war.

She concludes with a statement of satisfaction with her life and experiences.