HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

EMMI LOEWENSTERN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Fred Stamm
Date: February 10, 1981

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EL - Emmi Loewenstern [interviewee]
FS - Fred Stamm [interviewer]
Date: February 10, 1981

Tape one, side one:

FS: ...student at Gratz, recording German Jewry. This work is done under the auspices of Professor Nora Levin. The next voice you will hear is that of Mrs. Emma Loewenstern. Emmi Loewenstern, I apologize. Emmi, how old were you when, Hitler came, Hitler came to power on January 30, 1933. How old were you then?

EL: I was eight years old.

FS: Do you remember anything of that day?

EL: Not that particular day. I was a very guarded child. My parents didn't tell us too much. I went to a Jewish school at the time. We were all classes mixed in one room, and there were four children in my class that time. We knew there was a Hitler in power. My father told us not to worry about anything because he had been in the war and he was a soldier and he had his Iron Cross, and nobody would ever do anything to him, so we were not to worry about anything. And we continued to go to school until the Jewish school was liquidated.

FS: From which town in Germany do you come from?

EL: I was born in Emmerich on the Rhine.

FS: How big of a town was this, approximately?

EL: It's about 15,000 people.

FS: And how many Jewish families? Approximately.

EL: Oh, I would say maybe 20, 25.

FS: The Jewish schooling you had there, was it an intense Jewish education, or...

EL: No. No. It was a regular *Volkschule*, and of course we had Hebrew, we had Bible classes. We had Sunday School.

FS: And of course there was a synagogue there, too.

EL: There was a little synagogue.

FS: You don't remember the number of Jewish families?

EL: Not exactly.

FS: Approximately.

EL: No. I said about 20, 25.

FS: About 20, 25. Now, what is your earliest recollection of acts of antisemitism of children, were there, of children from Aryan families? Did you live next door to a, Germans, to *goyim*?

EL: Yes. Of course. I was very friendly with some of the children. We played together. It was just like one big family until November '38, or even before that. The children were not allowed to talk to me.

FS: When you say before that, I don't want to pressure you for dates, but could you recall the year, approximately when this estrangement.

EL: Oh, I would say about, it started about '35, '36, that the Aryan children were not allowed to talk to us anymore. They were not allowed to play with us anymore, and they would pass us on the street and even in school they hardly said anything anymore. But at that time I was in, I was going into high school, which we started sixth grade, in Germany, you started high school. And I went to the *Lyceum*, which was a private institution at that time and it was run by Catholic nuns. And I went there till 1938, November 10 we were not allowed to go back.

FS: Let me ask you a question here. Did the nuns in any way have to give Hitler salutes at the beginning of classes?

EL: Yes. Yes. We had to salute the flag every morning. And I...

FS: All children?

EL: All children.

FS: How many Jewish children were in your class?

EL: Three. My sister and I and one more girl.

FS: These chi-, were these children, the Christian children, did they speak to you?

EL: Not officially.

FS: Did you, in class, you were, were you isolated in class?

EL: No, we were not isolated. We had to participate. And we were with all the other children, but I recall that one morning we were outside and saluting the flag, and I did not raise my hand, and there was a big to do about it.

FS: Do you recollect any acts of, any remarks of antisemitism by any of the sisters?

EL: No.

FS: Were there no lay teachers whatever?

EL: There were some lay teachers.

FS: And how did they react to Jewish students?

EL: Well, they just treated us like all the others, except when, you know, raising the flag and things like, they had to. Evidently were told that they had to do something.

FS: Now you could stay here up until what time, in this school?

EL: I stayed until 1938, November 10. *Kristallnacht*. That was the end of it.

FS: Do you remember any inst-, how old were you then?

EL: Thirteen.

FS: Do you remember, can you tell us what happened in that night, if you recall.

EL: Oh yes, I recall very well. We were awakened early in the morning by a lot of noise. Our front door was-- the glass was shattered. The SA walked in. My father, who had been on his way to the station to take the train on business, had been taken into jail. He was, they were marching him through the street. The SA came into the house. My mother and I were home alone. My sister at that time was in Hanover.

FS: Your sister was younger, or...

EL: Older. And we had locked the doors, but they came in. They went into one of the rooms which was a living room. They took a large crystal ball, which they threw into the picture of my grandparents. They threw over a credenza, which had my mother's dishes and things in it. They stamped on chairs, furniture. They broke every piece which was in the buffet and which had a lot of, crystal and statues and very valuable things.

FS: All of this was broken to pieces.

EL: All, everything was broken to pieces. They came a little further into the house, and then they left.

FS: Did they try to molest you...

EL: No.

FS: Or your, you or your mother in any way?

EL: No. No. They left us alone. We were very well known in the town. If you know with a small town. My father was very liked over there. And the Nathan family had lived in that town for many, many, many years.

FS: What kind of work did your father do?

EL: My father was a cattle dealer. He originally was a butcher. His father was a butcher. He learned the butcher trade, and they had a store in the house where we lived. But later on he gave that up. He became a cattle dealer and the store was made into a living room, dining room, and *GuteStube* [salon].

FS: Did your father-- did any of your father's customers take advantage of this anti-Jewish feeling by not paying their bills that you remember?

EL: I was a little bit too young to, that, my parents discussed it, not with me.

FS: What happened then, in days following the *Kristallnacht*?

EL: Well, my father was in jail for a few days.

FS: This was in the town?

EL: Mmm hmm [affirmative]. He was not sent to Dachau, or Buchenwald or any of these places. He was set free, and of course then he, my parents tried very hard to send us children to England. My sister and I, and meantime my sister had come back from-- I don't remember.

FS: Doesn't matter.

EL: We were just home. We were not allowed to go to school. My sister went to, she was in Cologne when all this happened. After that she went to Hanover. And she went to *Ahlem* [Jewish Agricultural School].

FS: Yes.

EL: [unclear]. And I stayed home with my parents till '41. My mother...

FS: What did you do in this interval? This was three years.

EL: Yeah. I worked, just about two years. This was the end of '38, till the beginning of 1940. I was just home helping my mother, cleaning, cooking, because she could not have a maid anymore. And doing floors, and, you know, the usual, ironing, and sewing. I sewed a lot at that time because we were preparing to maybe go to America.

FS: Excuse me, let's step back. As far as the maid is concerned, did your parents have a maid up until 1935, until the Nuremberg Laws were passed? You don't remember, was the woman who was your maid, was this because of the law, or was she dismissed previous to that?

EL: I really don't recall exactly. Like I say I was pretty young and my parents didn't discuss these things with us at the time. Times were different than they are today. You know, they protected their children.

FS: Did your parents have a waiting number to come to America?

EL: Yes.

FS: Did you have relatives here?

EL: Yes. We had a lot of relatives here.

FS: But your...

EL: In fact we had wealthy relatives here.

FS: Did, I don't suppose that your pare--, your, did your father try earlier to get [unclear]?

EL: Not, not until after '38. That's when he realized that he was not as safe as he thought he would be. And that's when he tried to come over.

FS: You don't remember what gave him that feeling of security in Germany up until 1938, do you?

EL: Well, he thought here, he was born there, he fought in the war, and he had his Iron Cross, and nobody would ever do anything to him-- like so many other Germans at that time.

FS: So now we're up to the end of 19-, to the beginning of 1940.

EL: Yeah. '40, '41. My sister was in Hanover. I went to Frankfurt to take up sewing. There was a Jewish lady who taught sewing privately. I lived with a Jewish family next to the *Philanthropin*[1], and I really enjoyed it, because for, for, well, it had

[1]*Philanthropin*: "Jewish school in Frankfurt from 1804 until it was closed in 1942. With up to 1,000 students, it was the largest and longest-standing Jewish school in Germany." From the description of the

been many years since I had been with Jewish children. I was there from January till about June, July. And then the school was liquidated and all the children, all-- children, we were already young girls by that time...

FS: Young ladies.

EL: Were going, were forced to go into a factory. It was an asbestos factory. And I wrote home that I wanted to stay there and I wanted to go into the factory. And the answer from my parents was, "No daughter of ours is going into the factory." And I had to come home. And after about, a short while, I would say till September, I applied to go to *Dortmund*. That was another school, privately owned...

FS: Yeah.

EL: A lady who gave sewing instructions. I went there. I was allowed to go there. I lived again with a Jewish family, and here again I was with a lot of Jewish children. And till December...

FS: 194-...

EL: '41. And that's when it started that they were sending people into concentration camps. Now...

FS: By people, you mean families?

EL: Families.

FS: Not just men.

EL: No. Families.

FS: When you say concentration, did you have any idea where they were going?

EL: Well, let's say people, the Jews were being sent away at that time. Nobody knew where. There was something in Poland where we knew some people were being sent, and so I had to come home, and my sister had to come home. My parents insisted that we should all be together. And so, December 10, we all had to leave our home town.

FS: December 10, of '41?

EL: 1941.

FS: '41.

EL: We were allowed to take [unclear] with bed clothes, and we were allowed to wear things, what we had on, jewelry or-- prior to that, all our values in, silver and we had to already take to one place in the town where they collected everything. And...

FS: This was in your town?

EL: Yes.

FS: And who did the collecting?

EL: The-- [someone in background asks FS a question.]

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book: *Festschrift Zur Jahrhundertfeier Der Realschule Der Israelitischen Gemeinde (Philanthropin) Zu Frankfurt Am Main 1804-1904.* Frankfurt Am Main: J. Baer, 1904.

FS: No thank you. The local police or the [unclear]?

EL: I would say, I would say the police probably had to. I am not sure.

FS: Let me just ask you two questions, just to step back. In, at the *Kristallnacht*, the SS men who ransacked your house, were they local men?

EL: Yes.

FS: They were local men.

EL: Yes.

FS: Did you know them? Did your parents know them?

EL: Yes.

FS: Did they make any explanations for that?

EL: No. Nope. No explanation.

FS: Does the date of September 1, 1939 mean anything to you? That was the invasion of Poland by Germany. Do you remember that?

EL: I do remember. I remember the invasion of Holland a lot better, because we were right at the border.

FS: But you don't remember this, the beginning of the war.

EL: Not too well. Not too well. Too many things happened after that.

FS: Okay, before we go back to your departure from your hometown, what, because this date is previous to your departure. What happened, what do you remember about the invasion of Holland?

EL: I remember all the troops. I remember the bombings. We had quite a few bombings.

FS: Were there, was Germany bombed by anyone?

EL: Yes, indeed. Our hometown was bombed.

FS: By whom?

EL: By the Russians.

FS: Couldn't have been the Russians. Must have been the French.

EL: French or England, probably. English. No, I think they were Russians.

FS: No, Russia wasn't in the war until January 22, 1942. Okay.

EL: '42? We were gone already.

FS: Yeah. That's when the [unclear].

EL: Oh.

FS: That's when Ger-, when Hitler invaded Russia. Yeah.

EL: Our town was bombed a few times.

FS: '41. How did we get to '42? '41. Okay. Let's go back to your departure.

EL: Back to the departure.

FS: Your town was bombed?

EL: Yes. A few times.

FS: And, ...

EL: We spent many nights in our basement, which was, you know the way houses looked over there. It was very sturdy. In fact we had beds down there and tranquilizers, because I was always very upset when these things happened.

FS: How close to the border were you?

EL: Four km.

FS: To the Dutch border.

EL: Yes. We used to go there and roller skate. We used to write to America from there, because the mail in Germany was censored. We used to go over and we would write, until of course the time came you couldn't go there anymore either. My parents sent a lot of things over to Holland, on valuables, on, on, silverware, on, jewelry.

FS: You had relatives there?

EL: Yes, but they were all gone.

FS: Now, you had, you had to leave your town? You had to [unclear].

EL: We were all, we dressed as much as we could get on. One pair of slacks over another pair of slacks, another sweater, another sweater, because we felt what we had on already would take away, maybe that we could keep it.

FS: When was this month of the year?

EL: December, 1941.

FS: '41.

EL: We were gathered at the station, the train station, where they took quite a bit away yet what we had taken with us.

FS: You mean the suitcases?

EL: Probably suitcases. And we were sent to Düsseldorf, where we were gathered in a slaughterhouse. That's where they put all these people together from different cities. They called it one transport, which was gathered, and that was usually 1,000 people. We spent there a night on the floor, and once the 1,000 people were together we were shipped into trains and...

FS: And were these passenger trains, passenger cars, or cattle cars?

EL: Partly passenger cars. Because I remember a passenger car we were in. Of course there wasn't room for everybody. And there was just one bathroom, which was very bad. There was very, very little food, and there was no water. But we were going east towards Latvia.

FS: Do you remember any, were there many children in your car?

EL: Yes, or, at that time, I still felt I was a child. I was 16 years old.

FS: What, how did the children behave? Was there any panicking?

EL: No. There was no panic. We were gathered together. We talked. We played games. We were not panicking.

FS: At the stations where the trains did hold, did any *goyim*, any...

EL: No.

FS: …local people come to there?

EL: No. No. They knew they wouldn't let anybody go near the trains.

FS: Did, on the way did any people pass away that you remember?

EL: No. Not on that train.

FS: Who was in charge?

EL: A man by the name of...

FS: A German or a Jew?

EL: Well, it was a Jew in charge, but of course there were Germans all around.

FS: Now how much power did the Jew have? What did he, what was his function?

EL: Nothing. Just to keep the people together, and keep them quiet. When, as we got further east, there was a lot of snow, because it was winter time. They stopped the train every so often, and we could go out and we could stretch a little bit, and we had the snow for water. So we had, we had a little bit of food with us, and I don't even recall any more if they gave us anything to eat. The only thing which stood out in my mind was that I had started to smoke in Germany and my father was very much against it, because a lady in Germany didn't smoke. So when I was in the train with my parents and my sister and somebody offered me a cigarette, I asked my father, "Am I allowed to smoke?" And he said, "Well, now I can't give you anything else anymore. You can smoke."

FS: And then, tell us about your arrival. Where did you go to? Now, Emmi, we were, you were, I believe you were going to start tell us about your arrival.

EL: Yes. We arrived in Riga, and there was the SS waiting for us. We did not get our baggage, luggage. We were divided into older people, younger people, sick people, well people, and we were very fortunate. My parents, my sister and I were kept together, where other people, mostly older and sick people, were put into trucks, and they were told they were going into another village, where, like a retirement place. Well, there was never anything heard of them again. We were brought into a ghetto, which already had existed. The Latvian Jews had lived there, and as we found out, they had all been killed in order to make room for us.

FS: Who told you this?

EL: There were some of the Latvian men were still alive. They were living in a ghetto right across from where we were. In other words, they had divided the ghetto. There was a street in between the German ghetto and the Latvian ghetto. The, there were only men, young men, capable men, who had been at work when all these women and children and older people, their whole family, had been shot and killed.

FS: When did the shooting take place, from what you heard?

EL: There were a lot of mass graves that they, on one cemetery, which was in

the ghetto, in the German ghetto. I believe the shooting took place just about [unclear], inside the ghetto.

FS: Can you describe to the listener, what was a ghetto?

EL: A ghetto was a complex of houses which was fenced in by wire. And it was just a big gate where soldiers waited for us...

FS: German soldiers?

EL: German soldiers, and Latvian soldiers, for us to come in and out in order to go to work. They watched, and they were there with their guns and their rifles and so on. And it was just one place where only the Jews lived. There were no stores there when we came in, because there's only one room where they kept groceries and bread and, let's say, food rations, which everybody got, like two slices of bread a day. At night you could go and you got some soup.

FS: Where did you get this?

EL: This one room, which was made into commissary...

FS: Yeah.

EL: …something on that order. And you had your daily rations.

FS: Were these Jews who were doling out the food?

EL: Yes. Yes. They were...

FS: Did they give them out equally?

EL: Well, as far as we know it was. But I guess whoever was there helped themselves, which you can't blame them for, because there was, you did these things to survive, and you couldn't blame anybody. We lived there about 12, 14 people in one room.

FS: You lived with your parents?

EL: I lived with my parents, plus a lot of other families, in one room.

FS: How did these people, these 12, 14 people in one room, how did they get along with each other?

EL: We got along. We tried to cook together. We slept on the floor. There was no difference in sexes, if they are men or women, everybody was just glad to have a little space where you could sleep if you could sleep. And you tried to do the cooking on your own, because everybody, as we were going to work and had to work, tried to steal something, tried to find something in order to survive. Because you could not live on two slices of bread a day.

FS: Tell us an instance when you were able to steal something.

EL: Well, a lot of the Latvian Jews when they left the part of the ghetto we were living in, put, put into the other ghetto after their families were killed, they had hidden a lot of things, buried them in the ground. In fact there was even food in the ground. But we also found clothes. We found a little bit of jewelry. We found some silverware, and as we were going outside the ghetto to work, and in the first month -- it

was deep winter in Latvia -- our job was to shovel snow, clear the streets, and chuck the ice off of the streets. We were, quite a few people I would say worked together like 10, 12. And of course there was always a soldier there. There was always a Latvian soldier there. And they had their rifles, but we managed once in a while if we had to go a bathroom to take some of the clothes which we had hidden on our bodies and show them to some of these Latvian people who we met there, in order for them to give us a piece of bread or a piece of butter or whatever. And since we figured, "We're not gonna live too long anyway," we took chances. We just didn't care.

FS: Now, did you actually discuss with your sister or with other young people or with your parents the possibil-

Tape one, side two:

EL: We worked, and we exchanged things in order to live, and my, we came home in *Kolonnen*, whatever you call it? Where many people...

FS: Columns. Columns.

EL: And one day as we came back to the ghetto, there was a lot of excitement. A lot of Jewish police came and tried to tell us that whatever we had brought home, we should throw away before we were going into the ghetto. Well, I had a knapsack, which on the outside contained wood, which we were allowed to bring in. But on the inside were potatoes, and I also had brought in a German newspaper, for my father, who was at that time in a hospital, very sick.

FS: Where did you find the paper?

EL: I must have gotten it from somebody, and I wasn't gonna part with it. I just kept it and just prayed that nobody would see it. As we came into the ghetto we were led past a street where they had put up a gallow. And one of our friends had been hanged because they had brought in food and they were caught doing it. Here I was, with my newspaper and my potatoes, but nothing happened. I came home safely and like I tried to do everyday, brought the newspaper to my father, who, at that time, was not well at all. He didn't even recognize me any more. He had contacted diabetes. He had a toe amputated which wasn't healing, and at that time was in a coma and I, after the nurse had told me that he would not live too much longer, I decided not to go back because I wanted to remember him the way he was [weeping; tape off then on]. That was May 10, '42, my father died. Before my mother even had a chance to go to the hospital, to bring him or bring some clean clothes for him to be buried in, he was already taken away, thrown into a mass grave somewhere in Riga on a cemetery. And we just had to go on, and there was no *shiva*, there was no mourning period.

FS: There was, was there a funeral?

EL: [pause; probably shakes her head]

FS: None. You were not there when he was taken away?

EL: No. We just went on to work as if nothing had happened. We were not allowed to do anything at that time. We didn't even have services or anything. Later on we managed to have one room, when the holidays came, that we, one of our fellows conducted services and we all went there, so at least we knew it was a holiday. It was just somebody who evidently counted days and knew what day it was, because we didn't have a calendar or anything, unless we went to work and we saw, you know, the days in the newspaper or something. Life went on.

FS: Let me ask you a question. Were any of the girls or women molested by Latvian or German soldiers?

EL: Well, there were a lot of girls who, I don't know if it was willingly or not

willingly, but in order to have a piece of bread, and in order to maybe have something to eat, they would just let themselves go.

FS: And where did this take place? In the ghetto?

EL: Most probably. Places where we worked. I don't think it happened in the ghetto as much, but there was even our commander who had a Jewish girlfriend.

FS: Did she go, have to go to work?

EL: She worked for him.

FS: She, in other words she stayed in the barracks. Did she ever have contact with the rest of the Jews?

EL: Yes.

FS: Did you ever speak to her?

EL: Yes. She was a very good friend of mine.

FS: And, you remember her name? You feel like talking about any of your conversations you had with this young woman?

EL: Conversations?

FS: Or any facts [unclear].

EL: Well, she had a mother who was not well, not well at all. In fact she was a cripple. She was very fortunate that she had gotten into the ghetto, and in order to save her mother, she became the *Kommandant's* girlfriend.

FS: Did any of the Jewish women become pregnant?

EL: Yes. A lot of girls became pregnant, but they were not allowed to bear children. They had abortions. They had to have abortions.

FS: Who performed the abortions?

EL: We had a Latvian doctor who had to do it, and of course there was always SS around, and there were no children to be born, at any time.

FS: Were there any, at this time, would you say this was around 1943, after your father died?

EL: My father died in '42. This was, any time after that.

FS: Were there any children at all in the camp?

EL: Yes.

FS: In the ghetto.

EL: Yes.

FS: Was there any education for them?

EL: Very little, because everybody had to go to work.

FS: What happened to the children during the day?

EL: Well, they worked at home. There was probably somebody with them. I really don't know of any little children. They were all more or less my age or about two, three, years younger, but they could go to work.

FS: Did you hear anything about the progress of the Russian armies against

Germany, or the invasion of the American armies into [unclear]?

EL: Oh, we didn't stay in the ghetto. We-- well, a lot of things happened during that time.

FS: Go ahead.

EL: They, they, when we first came to the, to the, they took all the young men and sent them to a different place where they had to work, and that was worse than the ghetto, at that time. Very few of them came back. It was called Salaspils[2]. And very few of them came back. One young fellow was shot because he tried to flee from there. And then in, also in March, '42, they had all people-- they, everybody had to come onto one big place and the SS came and they again started to sort out people and sent the older ones and some who had gotten sick to different places. There were three of these transports in March, April and May of '42, and all these people were never heard from again. July, '42 was one day which we couldn't forget because eight women who had gone to work and had evidently stolen a few things had been shot to death. On October 31, in 1942, some of the Latvian Jews-- brilliant young people who were police in the ghetto-- had tried to bring some ammunition into the ghetto in order to maybe try and free all of us, try to do something to the Germans, try to save us from God knows what was ahead of us. Well they were caught doing this and 39 of them were shot.

FS: Do you know what the reason was for them being caught?

EL: Well, they were just caught bringing ammunition in, burying the ammunition, and one of them just, they were, tried to get things underground and, brilliant people, all of them. And they were just shot to death. In '43, May '43, my sister was sent away out of the ghetto to a place where they-- I don't know what it's in English, what's *torf* in English?

FS: What?

EL: *Torf*. You know? [Peat]

FS: Oh, brown coal.

EL: No? [someone in background says something]

FS: Yeah.

EL: Which had to be cut, and stapled to dry, and put in, in, how you [person in background says, "In bales."] To dry, and I was sent to a different place, and my mother stayed behind. And I, I got sick. I got a staff infection all over my arm and my legs. And since there was no medication or anything in order to clear it, the only medication I was told is, "Go behind a bush, take off all your clothes, and lay in the sun, because the sun will heal it." While nobody was watching, otherwise we had to work. Well it didn't get any better, and I was sent back into the ghetto. And, of course my mother was

[2]Salaspils: Concentration camp 18 km from Riga near city of Salaspils. It is reported that nearly 60,000 people were murdered there. (Wikipedia)

very happy at least I was back, but there was a doctor and he tried to help me with some kind of medication, but it was very ugly looking. There are a couple of little spots left on my leg which, of course they are not too, too well to see anymore. And my sister also came back. In the meantime, we were-- the ghetto was liquidated, which was in November, 1943. We were all sent to another concentration camp, and from there into another place which was controlled by the army. It was called the *Armeebiekleidungsamt*, which means, the army was sending all their clothes back from the front of the killed soldiers.

FS: Quartermaster.

EL: Right. And we had to sort out the bloody clothes, put it into trucks or buses, load them, and send them into laundromats. Take them to laundromats, where we had to unload them, and then had to take the clean ones back, and at that time, my mother was in one of the halls where they separated dirtier things and cleaner things and gas masks, and partly some ammunition was in it yet, and belts, and hats, and you know, everything was separated.

FS: Yes.

EL: And that's where we found some elastic, which was on masks, on glasses...

FS: Yes.

EL: And that was for a long time our livelihood. My mother cut it off, hid it in her clothing, and while I was going to take the things to the laundromat, I was able to get in contact with Latvian people, who at that time did not have any elastic at all.

FS: What's elastic? Rubber?

EL: *Gummi Band*!

FS: Oh. Rubber bands. Yes.

EL: Yeah. And they gave us bread and butter and bacon and cigarettes. And that's what we lived on.

FS: Now how often did you make this trip?

EL: Oh, we made these trips almost every day. That's why I have a bum back, from all the carrying. Well, we stayed there till November, about that time.

FS: November, '43.

EL: '43.

FS: Yeah.

EL: We were [pause; tape off then on]

FS: Yeah, November, '43.

EL: We were sorted out, and we were sent again to another place.

FS: Also in Latvia.

EL: Also in Latvia. There we were all gathered together again and all the children at that time, there evidently were quite a few smaller children, I would say, nine,

ten year olds...

FS: Yeah.

EL: …eleven year olds. They were all gathered together. It was a horrible sight. They were pulled away from their parents, and they were put onto trucks, and they were never heard from.

FS: Was this when Max Getska's daughter was...

EL: No. [unclear].

FS: I see.

EL: Yeah, because she evidently was already taken right from the ghetto. We at that time were not in the ghetto anymore.

FS: And this, these were the last children around.

EL: The last children I knew of.

FS: Yeah.

EL: Then, in July-- and I remember exactly. It was my mother's birthday. It was July 28, 1944, a soldier by the name of Krepsbach, who also was an SS man, came and he looked around to again sort out people. My mother at that time was very sick. She was in a hospital.

FS: So in other words, soldiers participated in this too, not just SS.

EL: Not just SS, no.

FS: Yes.

EL: The army too. This was a...

FS: And this was an enlisted man or officer?

EL: They were officers.

FS: Yes.

EL: And this man by the name of Krepsbach sorted out the people and it was just very lucky that when he went into the hospital, one of the soldiers my mother had worked for was with him. And when he came to my mother's bed he said that she just had a cold, that she had two daughters who were working very hard, and that she would be all right within a couple of days.

FS: Who said that?

EL: A soldier who my mother had worked for...

FS: I see.

EL: Told this Krepsbach.

FS: Krepsbach.

EL: And he just left her there, where other people were sent over to the other side and never heard from again. It was always, every so often people were sorted out and if you were not strong enough and you were not able to work, you were just put away. In August '44, they again gathered all of us and the first transport was sent to Stutthof, which is another concentration camp, which is east, more, it was further down

into Ostpreussen.

FS: Yeah.

EL: I believe, and in September again another transport went. In September, '44 we were sent to Libau, which is also Latvia.

FS: Yes.

EL: And there we were still quite a few people. We worked again. We were sent into a shoe factory. That's where we lived actually. We slept on the floor, of course. And with what we had, much prior to this, we of course were wearing uniforms. We were wearing striped clothes, which, dresses and jackets and a kerchief, much prior to that our heads were shaved. And when we had to go to work, and we were sitting in trucks and buses being taken to work, we would remove our kerchiefs so people on the outside could see what we looked like, and whoever was with us, or an SR or SS or soldiers, were very upset. They made us wear our kerchiefs. And as soon as they went back into the car or truck in the front, we pulled off our kerchiefs again, so everybody could see what we looked like. We had gotten then to Libau, and there were a lot of Russian bombs coming over Libau. We were sent into a bunker one night in December and again somebody up there was with us. My mother was not well. She had a big gash on her leg since she had been on an open wagon and something hit her leg and it never healed. So she couldn't walk too well. She was not working. But that night bombs were flying. We went into a bunker. As we entered the bunker there were a couple of benches on the side and one of the younger girls got up so my mother could sit down, but she said, "No, I'll go with my girls." And she went all the way in the back with us. And the bomb hit the front, and the people who sat on the bench were killed. So, there were quite a few young people there. One of the soldiers who was there lost his leg at that time also.

FS: German soldier?

EL: German soldier. A couple of people there also were shot because they had stolen food or brought food from where they worked, and in, on February 19, which was my birthday...

FS: 1944?

EL: 1945.

FS: '45.

EL: Yes. We were shipped to Germany. We were in a freighter, in a cold ship. We were on the bottom. Lot of people were sick and a lot of people, I don't know if they died or not, they just disappeared. We, I don't remember how many people we were, but we were...

FS: Were there left, there were no children left by then?

EL: And, mostly young people, of course at that time my mother wasn't that old either. In '45 she was in her early fifties.

FS: Yes.

EL: We were sent to Hamburg. On the way we were starting to rebel a little bit, because we were passing Denmark and Sweden [unclear].

FS: Yes.

EL: It was the Baltic Sea. And we kept talking a lot if we maybe hurt, killed the Germans on the boat, and maybe could make it our way to Denmark.

FS: The Ger--, did any of the Germans listen in on this conversation? No.

EL: It was not. But I guess we weren't brave enough to do it. There were too many soldiers. In the meantime we didn't know what was going on. In Libau we were not on the streets like we were in Riga, that we were in contact with the people.

FS: Yeah.

EL: So we didn't even know if Denmark was Denmark, if Sweden was Sweden. And it was decided that there was not much we could do. Of course we had to leave Latvia because the Russians were coming closer.

FS: And how did you know? Did you have news, or...

EL: Well, we-- some people evidently had gotten some news. And there had to be something, otherwise we wouldn't have been shipped back to Germany. So, some of the Latvian Jews who were first of all very intelligent people, second of all they were doctors, lawyers, but most of all they were mechanics there.

FS: Yes.

EL: And there were a lot of people who had a trade.

FS: Yeah.

EL: And you know were able to work. And they, knowing the language, had of course connections on the outside. And through them we got news that what was going on in the outside world. And we were shipped back to Hamburg. We were brought to Fuhlsbüttel[3] into a prison. There we were separated-- the men and the women. And as we found out later, the men were sent to Bergen-Belsen, which was another concentration camp in Germany, and we stayed, we stayed in the prison. The only kind of work we did there was, we were in the morning taken to another cell and we were stamping bags for--we had to stamp little bags for different spices. We were a group of girls together, and we just had to do something in order to, not to go out of our minds.

FS: Did you have, what did they feed you there?

EL: They fed us soup, which was water. They fed us a slice of bread, something. If we found some cigarette stumples which somebody had left somewhere, we rolled them in toilet paper and we smoked them.

FS: Did the Germans molest you in any way?

EL: No. We didn't even see them. We didn't see anybody. We were just in one big room during...

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[3]Fuhlsbüttel: A subcamp of Neuengamme Concentration Camp.

FS: You were locked up?

EL: We were locked up. We had some bunk beds for some people and other people slept on chairs. In fact some of the chairs we tied together, because if we didn't tie them together somebody else would take it in order to have a place to sit. And, so we tied chairs together so we had something to sleep on at night. And while we were in these cells, stamping these bags, we made up poems. We talked about everybody we knew. We talked about what the future might bring. We talked about ice cream and whipped cream. We talked about marrying rich people. We talked about everything and anything you can think of. Just, we made up [unclear]. We had English lessons. We tried to talk French. We tried to talk about opera. We tried to talk about everything you could think of, to hope to stay normal.

FS: Did you suspect by then that the war for Germany was lost?

EL: We had no idea. At that point we were in no contact with anyone. It was just our own people. We heard bombs fly, and we heard alarms go off, and that's another thing which, it's very much in my mind and I'll never forget. This friend of mine who had been a girlfriend to the officer in the ghetto, was with us. Her mother was still living. They came from Berlin and the mother had had her horoscope read while she was in Berlin. And she had told me about it once. And she told me that her horoscope told her that she would die of a natural death. And whenever bombs would fly, I ran towards her. And I figured, if she dies of a natural death, a bomb isn't gonna hit me!

FS: [laughs]

EL: And nothing ever happened. So we left Hamburg. This is also '45. I jumped quite a bit, but you know, you can't go into all these other details. We walked from Hamburg to Kiel.

FS: It's approximately how far, would you say?

[Someone in background says, "70 km."]

FS: 70 km?

EL: It took us three-and-a-half days. [Person in background, "Well, how many miles can you walk a day? How many kilometers can you walk?"]

FS: [unclear]. [Person in background, "That's right."]

EL: Well, it took us three-and-a-half days.

FS: Did you have SS men walking with you?

EL: Yeah. Well, some of them were driving, and we had trucks. So some people who at times maybe couldn't make it, but...

FS: Were you mistreated in any way at this point in time?

EL: Eh...

FS: By the SS?

Tape two, side one:

FS: Okay, now. You went from Hamburg.

EL: We went from Hamburg to Kiel. My sister had terrible blisters. My mother was doing pretty well. And we arrived in Kiel where we lived in barracks. There were no more men with us, since they all had been sent to Bergen-Belsen, which was another concentration camp in Germany [tape off then on]. We lived in barracks. We had nothing, only what we were wearing, our striped dresses. And we did go to work there where we sorted out bricks-- whole ones and half ones and other ones. Every morning we had to assemble and whoever wasn't well or couldn't come outside was put away. We lived on stolen beets, raw beets, and raw vegetables, just in order to stay alive. My mother got very sick again, and at one point a friend who was sleeping next to her moved away because she thought she would not make it during the night. My sister was terribly upset. She realized one morning she had lice. But she was not the only one. We all had them already at that point. You could not get washed. There were no facilities. The only place was a lake. And we went there once a day and tried to keep clean. The soldiers were watching us with rifles. They were afraid we might run away. It was kind of cold. We went to work on one day; we were told that we were going to Denmark, that Count Bernadotte had paid a lot of crowns to get us out and have us come to Sweden. Of course we didn't believe the story. We saw a Red Cross truck who wanted to take sick people and of course wanted to take our mother, but we would not let her go. We had been fooled too many times that we were afraid she was gonna be sent to some place and we would never hear from her. But we were all put into trucks and we were sent over to Malmö ...

FS: In Sweden.

EL: Malmö is Sweden. But first we were, we came over to Denmark. We had a discussion about this not too long ago and we just don't remember how we got there. Some people say by truck and some people say by train. I was pretty sure it was a train which was put onto a ferry which took us there, but I just cannot remember. We came to Denmark and all our clothes were taken away from us and we were given clean clothes. We were bathed and cleansed and deloused and then we were sent to Malmö, Sweden. We were given Red Cross packages containing food—bread and butter and jelly, and a lot of people got very sick, because they just ate and ate. They were very hungry and didn't realize that too much food can kill you also. So, we still were dragging our mother with us. In Denmark she was already taken care of a little bit. In Sweden we came into Malmö, where lights were on at night. We were taken into a school building, which they had gotten ready for us. They had put up beds, with of course sheets on them, but it was a sight which we had not seen in many, many years. And we were just so overwhelmed to see lights after the dark years of the war, plus the

white sheets. And then we started to believe that somebody could actually take care of our mother and we let her go to a place to be taken care of, to get medication and to have her leg taken care of, and so on. And she recovered. We were from there clean, sent into, a little bit further into Sweden, to a place which was called Holsbybrunn. There we stayed in quarantine for a few weeks in order to be sure that we were well. And we were fed properly. And then we were sent into a little resort town where we were living in little bungalows, but we had a dining hall where we all went for our meals. We were very well taken care of. We started to con--, contact people who we knew in America where we still -- in fact I still had addresses which I had kept on my body all along, of an aunt I had in San Francisco, of an uncle I had in Texas, of some relatives who had left Germany prior to our dep--, departure. We tried to contact these people and through the *Aufbau* -- who is a German-Jewish newspaper, and it's distributed actually all over the world-- our names were published that we were safe and sound in Sweden. The first mail I believe we got was from a mother of my sister's boyfriend, who had left Germany in '38. He had been in the American army, and his mother had seen our names in the *Aufbau*. They contacted us and we wrote to them. We got in touch with people from our hometown who had left Germany to go to South America. They had seen our names. They contacted us and were nice enough to send us some money. Most of all we had found my mother's sister, who had lived in Sweden, went on their way to Israel from Germany had stopped in Sweden, were not able to leave Sweden any more, and had lived there. We-- somehow they heard of our coming to Holsbybrunn, contacted us, and my aunt came to see us, and my uncle. Their children had left for Israel early in '33, '34, from Germany. They had one son who had gone to Switzerland and had from there gone to America. They came of course, they were the first family we had seen in many years, they helped us. They bought clothes for us. They brought us things and we felt like, like family again. They tried to, as soon as we were able to, get us out to come to Stockholm where they lived. We, we were one of the first ones to leave from Holsbybrunn. We went to Stockholm. My uncle was able to get us jobs. My sister-- the only job available was housework, of course, since we didn't know the language. My sister lived with a Jewish family and did housework for them. I went to another Jewish family and worked for them. And my mother was still in one of the-- how, yeah, it was more or less like a rest home...

FS: Yes.

EL: …where they, you know, people who didn't have jobs were just living there...

FS: Yes.

EL: …because there was no other place to live. People were very nice to us. The Swedish people were marvelous. They tried to help us in any way they could. We worked. We tried to get together. One after the other came out of the resort town into

Stockholm trying to find a job. And of course we girls all tried to get together during the week, on our day off. We would meet in a café and we would have cake and we would have whipped cream, and we would dream what the future would bring. And finally we were able to come to the United States. We had relatives here, distant relatives, they were cousins of my mother [tape off then on]. [unclear].

FS: To close this tape, I'm gonna ask Emmi, this was the story, is the story of a sad life. It really has a happy ending, and Emmi is gonna give you, in just a few sentences, the balance of her life.

EL: Well, I came to the United States. I did housework. I wanted to go to school. I was told, "It cannot be done." And, "You have no money, and you'll just have to work and do housework." My sister took care of a cousin in New Hampshire, and my mother stayed with a cousin in New York because we decided that she had been through too much to ever go to work again. I was told to stay in Philadelphia. I worked, as I said before, and after a very short time I met a young man who at that time had sent an affidavit to very good friends of ours who had been with us through all the years during concentration camp.

FS: How old were you at this point?

EL: I was 21 years old. I-- he came with his parents to my aunt's house trying to find out what happened to their friends and what they could do in order to bring them to the United States. We told him, "Make sure to send money. Make sure to have enough affidavits." And they did. Well, this young man turned out to be my husband [weeps]. We got married in March 1947. He had just come from the army, had even tried to contact his friends in Sweden, but was not able to. We, we were happily married, had a very nice small wedding, lived happily ever after, had a nice family...

FS: Had two daughters.

EL: Had wonderful children—two daughters. And, we're very proud of them.

FS: Thank you very much.

EL: You're welcome.