HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

LEONORE J. MEYER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Renee Hartz
Date: June 2, 1983

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LM - Leonore J. Meyer [interviewee]
RH - Renee Hartz[1] [interviewer]
Date: June 2, 1983

Tape one, side one:

RH: Interview of Leonore Meyer by Renee Hartz, June 2, 1983. Please tell me where you were born and when and a little about your family.

LM: In September 1911 and was the younger one of two children and the youngest one in the family because my mother was the youngest of 10 children. And so I was born into a family that was very nurturing and cohesive and very much showing love and protecting each other. It was a time that most people in this middle class environment were quite secure apparently--although in my immediate family my mother had had to take on the leadership and was the bread-earner--which was sort of unusual. And my closest relatives--both geographically and in feeling--were the two sisters of my mother who lived just a few streets away and we saw each other very frequently including my next older cousin--three years older--who very much followed the same career I did. And we are still very close to this date. Most of my relatives were in either professional life or in some position in business, but most of them professionally.

RH: What do you mean by professional? Doctors…

LM: …one was…

RH: …lawyers?

LM: …one was--yes--my grandfather had been very insistent that his children got the best of education that they could take. So the oldest one was a lawyer and the next was a doctor--and then the girls became--two of them had teacher training and one a business training--one uncle was a pharmacist and one was a historian. So the family met very--at every occasion possible; family birthdays, Jewish holidays, and from my point of view it looked like a very secure environment at that time. I was not quite three years old when the war broke out--First World War--and that, of course, made a great deal of difference. My father was too old, my brother was too young, so the immediate family was not involved in military service. One of my cousins--two--some other relatives were soldiers. And at the end of the war my father who had--who was a great deal older than my mother--his world had come to pieces really pieces--had gone down the drain. He never adjusted after that to what had happened. My mother was a very progressive, forward-looking person and adjusted and made her life. She was a professional person. She had changed from--partly from teaching. She had trained--wanted to be an actress--which my grandfather did not permit, but she did take training with an actor and then found she needed more basic things like--well--let me see how I pronoun--say it in

[1]The interviewer also goes by the name Ruth Hartz.

English. It was speech training and a variety of things that were basic to reciting and really built her own career as a dramatic recitalist. She taught literature and gave book reviews and was the first woman on the Berlin radio in 1923. And she expanded her work into being a very well-known performer. She--before radio she regularly gave children's story hours in recital halls as a fairy-tale princess or grandmother or something--dressed up and reciting. But there were many other things into which she expanded until in 1933 her career was cut short, of course, by Hitler. She was dismissed from the radio, and the things that followed about cultural life in Berlin may not be necessary for this interview. They are well-known generally.

RH: Yeah, well there'll be more questions on that. What would interest me is how was your feeling as you were growing up towards Germany versus Judaism. What came first in your mind?

LM: Alright.

RH: And why?

LM: Before 1933. Yes at the age of 12 I became part of the Jewish youth movement in which all my cousins were active and a group that was started by this next older cousin, where she was the leader. It was called German Jewish Youth Organization, *Kameraden* [Ger.: close friends]. And we felt that we were Jewish by religion but German in upbringing and German culturally. And it did not seem to be any conflict there.

RH: Was this youth group a Zionist group?

LM: No, it was not. It was German-Jewish in contrast to the Blue-White Organization which was the Ger--the Zionist organization. And I was very much involved in all kinds of German cultural background in my--well, we, we did not sing--we--I was in Hebrew school for a short time as a child. We went to synagogue. We were observing but not Orthodox--liberal. And that was part of my being and my family and my upbringing and I never made any--I never found it a stumbling block but I as well was very much familiar and observant of German cultural background, literally and musically and holidays, and, and the observances yes. I found as little conflict there as American Jews find in being Americans of Jewish religion.

RH: Right, right. That's a very interesting parallel. But did you experience any antisemitism before the Hitler period?

LM: As a child I may have. I remember one incident where somebody called me a Jew-killer and I said, "I didn't do it" or something like that and it did not hurt me. I had been warned that things might be said to me and so you dismiss that.

RH: But there wasn't any antisemitic…

LM: …no…

RH: …feeling at school.

LM: I did not. We had a comparative--we did not have a large contingent of Jewish children at school but it was in west--in the western part of Berlin--where there

were a good many Jewish families and maybe we constituted something like five or six percent of students at the school. I remember for instance I was drawn in with playing the violin at various things including Christmas play and this cousin I spoke of who had a very distinctly Jewish face and was a gifted child--she acted as Maria in the Christmas play because Maria was a Jewish woman and this was a very suitable person to take that part. One teacher in high school--and this was the same school--it went from first grade…

RH: …oh, I see.

LM: Yes, to it was a *gymnasium*…

RH: [unclear], yeah.

LM: …attached to it--right--was known as being a member of a party that was distinctly German anti-Jewish, but she herself I did not encounter a discriminatory attitude or action from her. Maybe others did. It was more that we knew where her political affiliation was and the same with the principal. But it did not seem to reflect in her teaching.

RH: Or her grading.

LM: Her grading…

RH: …of Jewish children.

LM: No, I cannot say that. Now there were students--Jewish girls--it was an all girls school--who were so oversensitive that if something happened--that they were criticized about something they called it antisemitism. Maybe justly--maybe unjustly--I am not sure.

RH: I see that is very interesting. Was there some immigration at the time from Eastern Europe into Berlin?

LM: Yes.

RH: And how did German Jews feel about the Polish and Russian groups coming?

LM: I started school in 1917 and in ‘18 and ’20, families came and children joined us who were of Eastern background. One girl in my class--and I have a class picture of first and second grade--her name was--I translate it into English: “death-head”, *Totenkopf.* And, of course, the family changed the name. This was impossible to people. And a very nice family and child that I did not feel any--I was a good friend of hers for a while--children change. I was not as much aware of it in the western part of Berlin as it was in the eastern gathering section of Berlin where--but I knew about it from my older aunt who was a social worker, which at that time was not a training--it was a matter of social work volunteering…

RH: [unclear]

LM: …within the Jewish community. She had been to Poland in 1918 assessing the situation--bringing people in. I have a postcard she sent me from Warsaw. I knew vicariously about the immigration into Berlin by refugees from the East. I did not

meet most of these people until much later in my teens. We were segregated communities, but the spirit was--"oh, Eastern Jews are ill-educated, ill-mannered, pushy." There was a very distinct patronizing as well as an attitude of non-acceptance--caring financially but not really bringing them into the community of the well-established Jewish communities.

RH: So there was a segregation.

LM: Very much segregation--yes, yes.

RH: That's very interesting. That is what I heard from my own family.

LM: Ah hah yeah.

RH: So I am trying to confirm and see if it was true all over Germany. Okay, did your family belong to any other Jewish organization besides the one you have mentioned.

LM: Well, you may know that the organization of Jews in Berlin was like Federation in Philadelphia; a Jewish community called the "Jewish Congregation", taking care of all synagogues no matter what their ritual was--from the most liberal to the most orthodox they were all--they belonged to the Jewish Congregation of Berlin. And the rabbis were employed by the congregation and each…

RH: So people sent dues or?

LM: to the…

RH: …was it?

LM: Yes, it was the general congregation.

RH: Was it voluntary?

LM: No, there was a…

RH: …or was there a fixed amount?

LM: A church tax which is still…

RH: Oh I see.

LM: True in East Germany. I don't know that it is in West Germany but in East Germany there is a church tax and for all--there were people who exempted themselves by saying we don't want to belong but the majority of people paid a tax and out of this tax the institutions were supported. Of course, there was an addition…

RH: I was going to say, yeah,

LM: Yes, for the hospitals, for the schools, for the special, for age, old age, for all the charitable institutions that had to be raised separately. And that's where I heard a great deal. As I say, my older aunt was very active within the congregation, the community, the Jewish community of Berlin. And my oldest uncle--and the organization that has later been charged with a very poor political view is *Centralverein*, Central Organization of German Jews. *Centralverein, Centralverein deutscher [Staatsbürger] Juden jüdischen Glaubens*.[2]

[2]*Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger judischen Glaubens* – Central Association of German Citizens of

RH: So it automatically…

LM: Yes.

RH: …kept the other Jews out.

LM: No.

RH: No.

LM: No, but it believed in being German citizens of Jewish religion and still into the early '30s didn't see what was coming. And fighting much like the ADL [Anti-Defamation League]. Teaching, bringing information, giving information, on the strength of being German citizens. And many--then there were--only one of my uncles was in the veterans, Jewish veterans organization. There were many Jewish…

RH: Was that the uncle who was in…?

LM: …who was…

RH: …in World War I…

LM: …had been in the war. Yes.

RH: Yeah.

LM: About the others either been older or too young. I think he was the only one. And there were many organizations as we have within the federation, groups that supported various institutions whether they were the rabbinical seminary, the--as I say, the hospitals, the old-age home, the Jewish Institute for the Blind, the Jewish Institute--various things of that sort.

RH: A very active community.

LM: And my family was very much involved in many of them. My mother read regularly at the Jewish Institute for the Blind, but she did also at the general Institute for the Blind and spread her activities in all directions.

RH: Well, I assume being on the radio she must have been well-known.

LM: Yes, oh yes. Before that she was well-known. She had a professional career since the '90s of the last century.

RH: That is very interesting.

LM: I have yet to write her mem…

RH: Biography.

LM: Her biography. I have too much material. That's what it is.

RH: Can you trace back your family--I mean do you know when they came to Germany?

LM: Yes. I have a family tree that reaches back into the 1700s and my brother has been careful in gathering information. My mother especially concentrated on it after '33. I know that the family apparently--the date from which we have--from what time we

the Jewish Faith, commonly abbreviated as C.V. (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-position-of-the-german-jews-as-seen-by-alfred-wiener-of-the-leadership-of-the-centralverein).

have the most information is from the late 1700s in Danzig, (Gdańsk). And so apparently the family has come from Poland.

HR: Right.

LM: The great-grandfather of my mother's had come from Fürth (Nürnberg) so there was a longer German background on that side. My father's family also came from Gdańsk, from Poland. And my paternal grandmother from Silesia, so they must have come from Poland also. But they were established bankers in Silesia in the early 1800s and I have a very extensive family tree from about 1800 on.

HR: That's very nice, that's very good. Do you remember how you and members of your family reacted to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January of 1933?

LM: Now, I have to especially go back to my brother. He was academically not very successful, and as a young child fortunately with the help of educationally interested friends and relatives was put into a training school for landscape gardeners. He mingled with people in a very different realm and very different background and very different lifestyle and as a young man in his late teens was meeting with young people in active political life--very different from what we knew. And he had worked in Holland, he had worked in Germany--and in '27 when he was in his early 20s he said, "I'm getting out of here, and something is coming--you don't know that is absolutely ruthless." And my oldest uncle in this organization of German Jews said, "Oh, don't worry about it." He said, "Yes, I do worry about it. And you have no idea how strong the support for this is." He went to political meetings and he wanted to go after he had been in Holland to the Dutch Indies and for my parents that was too terribly far away. He came to the United States, where my mother had a cousin who wrote the affidavit[3].

RH: What year was that?

LM: That was in '27. And as things became more polarized between the Communists, Socialists and the Nazis the Jewish youth groups were breaking up. My one cousin became very strongly Zionist. Another one became very strongly German and I was on the Communist side. I joined a Communist youth group.

RH: When you say German, what do you mean?

LM: That is a military…

RH: [unclear] almost.

LM: No, German. They were all German Jews but militantly German in their activities and I think uniforms, I'm not sure. We went into various fringe groups really at the time. And the political situation became overpowering. You had to almost align yourself with some party. And with some kind of fighting one another. I was teaching, I had opened my private kindergarten in the fall of '32.

RH: You were very young then.

[3]Affidavit=guarantee of support.

LM: Yes. And you see--the training at that time like normal school here was two years. And so--and I had been skipped at school--so I was 18 and a half I started working as an assistant at first and then I opened my own private kindergarten. Now the early '30s were already very threatening between Communists and Nazis and you became fearful and you saw these people who stopped at nothing. But Berlin was still a safer place than some of the smaller communities in Germany. People began to move into larger cities: Munich, Hamburg, Berlin to find the anonymity. Again, in some other smaller communities in southern Germany the community in which families had lived for hundreds of years protected them. It was both ways.

RH: Yeah which was the case with my parents.

LM: And then many of us--I had a non-Jewish boyfriend--were torn there. What's going to happen? We thought we could fight it politically. Now in '32 was the last time that I voted and I think it was the second time that I voted for something like this. We came out of the voting booth and we were given a pin saying "*Ja*" meaning we had voted for Hitler. It didn't matter what you did--you were given the pin. No more voting after that, no more election after that! And at the election in '32 trucks with SA[4] men had driven around--voted in different places--beaten up people--especially where they saw Communists. It was constant fighting--physical fighting--terrorism. And they marched and they sang. There was a time and I belonged to a mixed choir--mixed I say now--where we made fun of it.

RH: What do you mean by mixed?

LM: Christians and Jews. We went through--we went on our weekly hikes and we made up songs to well-known Nazi songs which ridiculed Nazis. And we walked through little communities and we marched and we sang those songs so the people didn't hear the words.

RH: They thought they were the original.

LM: Yeah, yeah, and we thought that was funny--you see. We could not im-, imagine what would follow. We could imagine that these rowdies that nobody had taken seriously earlier were actually gathering strength and taking the political leadership. And the political situation was deteriorating because after '29 and the Wall Street crash the economic situation all over Germany--all over Europe, had deteriorated to such an extent that the Communists were gathering strength and the nationalists were gathering strength. And it was really this fighting against each other. But as many academically trained people in Germany said, "I don't want to involve myself in politics, I'm non-political. Keep out." And yet, we younger people tried to, to work in some way--but we were not ruthless party members spending all our time in that way. Maybe it was partly our fault. I look at it now as a steam roller against which we could not have gathered enough

[4]SA=*Schutzabteilung*=Brown Shirts.

strength. But from some of the books I have been reading maybe we could have done something. I'm not sure.

RH: Well, everybody has 20/20 hindsight, so.

LM: Yes. Yes.

RH: Did you have any contact with the *Reichsvertretung*, the Council of German Jews?

LM : That came into existence after '33…

RH: Right.

LM: …and I don't know exactly at what time Leo Baeck was designated the leader of it. He had been a rabbi in Berlin--I could still hear his voice.

RH: [unclear]

LM: I heard him. And he was a scholar. He was not that kind of aggressive leadership but with--and many of the people that I knew particularly through my aunt were then taking hold--as people came into the Jewish community, because they were dismissed somewhere else: academics and business people and it was a restructuring including giving courses--short-term courses to make them--give them some skill before they would leave the country. My mother took up insurance for children. My father had died early at 33. He didn't even know anymore that this was coming--that this had been established. A Kindergarten-nursery and Kindergarten training school began. I was drawn into that and taught music and handicrafts. There were music courses, there were candy making--any kind of courses and arrangements to send children out of the country. Which of course meant that people believed it was to stay. Otherwise they wouldn't have taken those steps to send children out and the very first people who left were *not* Jews they were Socialists. Now there were Jews among them but, Social Democrats--any political opponents were in greater danger than Jews. Jews…

RH: That's a very…

LM: Jews may have been re-channeled into other work but they were not as much in physical danger as Socialists who--I opened the kindergarten in '32. My first was a neighborhood in the outskirts of the city: young families, progressive, liberal families. And they left--and they left overnight. And they were in greater danger--among them Jews.

RH: Do you know where they were headed?

LM: Wherever they could find a place--some England, some Switzerland, some United States where there were relatives, where they could get in. And…

RH: What plans did your family make at that time?

LM: Well--I--my boyfriend and myself were considering at that point still to stay. We had no plans to leave that early. In '35 with the "Nuremberg laws" in quotes--when it became very dangerous--we made--we took steps at that point. My--the cousin I spoke of earlier who was a teacher taught in a Jewish school in the Jewish more orthodox area of Berlin was very much more aware of it earlier. She had in her training met Buber

and Rosenzweig in Frankfurt. She was very much Zionist oriented. She was one of the first at the youth and y-… [End of tape one, side one.]

Tape one, side two:

RH: Leonore Meyer by Renee Hartz June 2, 1983.

LM: In ’34 she took a group of children to Israel and later on left that group--went to another *kibbutz* and that’s where she still is--had an educational career in Israel. Various--I was asked the other day by my cousin--I was--on Memorial Day I was visiting some younger cousins, and they asked about when they were children, one year old, five years old, as they were leaving what do I remember from that time--of the early 30s which they don’t remember too much about. And I became more and more aware as I was answering questions we lost track of each other. Each person was aware of “what’s happening to me, my work, where can I go, will I go?” That we were not seeing each other as much and I personally was much more involved in my immediate problems than in those of my wider, greater family. My mother was in no mood to leave Germany at all. She said, “Nobody will do anything to me.” In ’35…

RH: …we’ve heard that before.

LM: Yeah. When things became much more clear and it was a very dangerous thing--my boyfriend, myself saw each other every day and our two mothers were near breakdowns. I made inquiries about leaving, because he had tried and we had tried various leads none of which were possible for us. And then joined--in ’36 I went to England as matron in a boarding school that had German and Austrian children and therefore I got permission as a German speaking member to be there. At that point…

RH: Were these refugees--children?

LM: Yes, they were sent out…

RH: Right.

LM: …many of the children had been sent wherever their…

RH: [unclear] their parents alone.

LM: …their families could take them. The parents were still left. They may have had applications in various consulates and not been able to, to go anywhere.

RH: Was it easier to send the children out?

LM: Yes. There were families and institutions taking children, including sending them by Youth Aliyah to Israel, children to Sweden. There were various countries that accepted children. And it was--my brother had visited in ’36 after nine years in the United States and said, “You must get out of here.” And I was already on the way. I left that same fall--and my mother said, “No.” When the--when Hitler marched into Austria the support for the Austrian children was cut off and they were distributed in English families which adopted them and the latest staff member was the first one fired. I wrote to my brother and I was ready to leave for the United States. I had my application in already anyway, and at that point my mother said, “Now I am leaving too.” Some of my relatives had gone to France. One cousin was caught by the Nazis in Paris, taken to

Gurs[5], taken to Auschwitz, I traced it later through Beate Klarsfeld[6]. Others had found a place in Manchukuo[7] in inner Mongolia or outer Mongolia whatever it's called. One cousin, Shanghai. Others went to England, they went to Holland. They--some were caught in Holland. My--one uncle of mine had gone to live in Italy as a young man--the historian--lived all his life in Italy. He said, "Nobody will do anything to me." The 81 year old man with his wife and son were deported from Rome by the Nazis--killed in Auschwitz. Some of my relatives took their own lives, when they knew what was happening. When they had been--one of my uncles I am sure--it did not say so in the letter we got--but he went to the hospital on April 1st--that was a crucial day that had been the day in '33 that was the boycott day and some years later--he had married--a second marriage--a non-Jewish woman. That marriage was later dissolved. She married someone else but they still took care of this older man. He then had to live with a Jewish family--a rabbi--this was in Hanover. We heard or got the letter--he left that morning--he was a doctor. He said he wasn't feeling well. He went to the hospital and he died that day and I am sure, whether he had a notice for deportation or not that he wasn't going to be taken. There were others. So.

RH: So what was the exact date that you and your mother left?

LM: I left for England in the fall of '36. My mother left for the United States in July '38. And I had come here April '38. I had preceded her. We welcomed her together--my brother and I in Chicago. And as I said, my father had died early '33. And later on the--some of the other relatives made it to Israel, so I have cousins in Israel--quite a bit of family in Israel. Some who had been in England are now in Australia. My mother kept the threads as best she could and I inherited that and I am in touch with whoever is…

RH: …that's wonderful, because I write to some cousins and they never respond.

LM: Yeah.

RH: So you are very fortunate, yeah. Okay, so you really weren't in Germany when Germany invaded Poland.

LM: No I was not.

RH: So I really think you answered most of the questions.

LM: And I was not in camp. And only…

RH: …and you don't know any member of family…

LM: Yes, was in camp, on the 10th of November in '38, concurrent with *Kristallnacht* all men between 18 and 80 were taken to concentration camps. So my old uncle who later took his life as far as I know and his son. And most of our family by that time had left. One was a doctor, younger doctor, who had been front--he was a cousin by

[5]Gurs - a collection camp located in France. (Holocaust Chronicle in the Appendices.)
[6]Beate Klarsfeld - French Holocaust survivor and Nazi hunter (Holocaust Chronicle).
[7]It appears that Mrs. Meyer means Manchuria and she uses this term later referring to same.

marriage--front soldier--so that he had release for sometime to keep on practicing. And I think he left later than '38. He is the one who went to Manchuria. This…

RH: You said they only took the men--not the women and children.

LM: Not the women. And this one cousin who was in camp later was--he was married to a non-Jewish woman and they didn't make it out of Germany. She pulled him through the war on her ration cards. They lived in Hamburg. He was in slave labor, he was an actor, they…

RH: What do you mean in slave labor?

LM: …demolished buildings, well…

RH: …they worked for the Nazis?

LM: …worked, he was in a slave camp, yes, demolishing buildings. The picture I have is as--looks as much as if he had been in a concentration camp. But it was a yes, a…

RH: It was considered special treatment I mean.

LM: Work camp, near Hamburg. And later after the war, he was quite ill and then he had Parkinson--well other people get Parkinson too, and she nursed him till the end of his days. She was a very wonderful person. He was the only one who was in Germany throughout the war and later and I did not see him--did I see him after that? '59 I went back. No, he had died by then, yes. I saw her but not him.

RH: So you don't have any direct accounts of the camp experience?

LM: No, the cousin who had gotten to Gurs, we did not hear from her at all. I traced it later. She had two sisters in England, both of whom were unmarried and they died in England in the early 50's. Now--and the only account that I have is from a fourth, fifth cousin who lives in New Jersey now in Vineland. And I never asked her about the experience until about two years ago at the marriage of her son, and I spoke to him as a son of a survivor. Has mother talked to you? And he said, "Yes, she has and she is talking in groups and to schools, but my wife has not heard what she had to say, ask her in our presence" and I did. And that's the only--and not a very close relative who was talking.

RH: What did she have to say?

LM: She is an artist.

RH: And how did she survive?

LM: And she had skillful fingers.

RH: Yeah.

LM: And she was put in some, not as artist but with technical, mechanical things where they needed skillful people she was working.

RH: Which camp was that?

LM: She was in several.

RH: Theresienstadt?

LM: No, no it was somewhere--she had been in Holland and then they brought her back in Germany. I don't think it was Belsen. It might have been. And when she was rescued she was brought to Sweden to recuperate and stayed in Sweden for a year, but she did not speak or was not physically attacked. This I don't know. She was not a victim of medical experimentation that much I know. What other treatment or mistreatment I don't know. That she didn't say--but she worked through that time. And with a very sturdy spirit survived it. That's all I know. The rest of her family has, has disappeared and her younger son now to commemorate the family has hyphenated his name with his mother's maiden name--family name. So that the name will remain alive.

RH: Do you remember when you first heard that Jews were being murdered in mass numbers or were being gassed and how was your reaction and when and how did you hear it?

LM: I heard it in this country, of course. And the messages that came through during the war were every three months a Red Cross message of 10 sentences to the closest relatives. So my mother had gotten messages from Italy and China, Jap--no it was China. Somehow she had gotten some just that they were alive, that was about all. And when the war was over and I heard things--I did not hear details but I didn't doubt it. Of course I didn't doubt it, because I knew enough about the frame of mind that I believed what came out, but so much came out piecemeal. We had the *Aufbau*[8] and got information from that.

RH: During the war?

LM: Oh, yes.

RH: Yeah.

LM: The paper…

RH: …they talked about concentration camps.

LM: Yes. Whatever information they had. And…

RH: I mean that Jews were being massacred and gassed in huge numbers.

LM: That we didn't know.

RH: No.

LM: No.

RH: This was not mentioned…

LM: …that was not

RH: …in media or anything.

LM: …wasn't known. Wasn't generally known.

RH: Well, it was known…

LM: …yes, it was not…

RH: …but apparently it was not publicized.

[8]*Aufbau*: Reconstruction – a German Jewish paper founded by refugees in New York for immigrants.

LM: That's right, that's right. It wasn't. And later we heard of this deportation of the family in Italy and I have the account of this in a book, *Black Sabbath*. I don't know if you know the details.

RH: No.

LM: We had known then the date, 16th of October '43, before the Germans left Rome and the accusation is that the Italian Jewish leadership sold out and gave them the card file.

RH: Hm.

LM: To save themselves, which of course they didn't anyhow. It was so much of this desperation for survival that people with not a strong character fell victim to it. We have these stories from camps too. No, I didn't know of any details. We gradually heard, we gradually read.

RH: After the war really.

LM: After the war. Not…

RH: Anything you heard you believed.

LM: …during. Later. Yes, definitely. And of course much more from Babi Yar--from the Eastern regions and through Israel we heard more. They seemed to be much more knowledgeable earlier. They had their groups in Europe even during the war. Somebody like Gruber,--wait a minute, what was her name?--who went with one of the groups rescuing people from Rumania and Bulgaria and those things came out later and in book form. And when we began…

RH: …but who did…

LM: …to search in '45, who is there, where are they, '45 then we began. But we also traced back our German friends, my teachers.

RH: Mmm hmm. The Gentiles.

LM: Yes. And we sent packages.

RH: What happened to your possessions?

LM: Well, I had taken…

RH: …were you able to take most of them?

LM: …what I had. Yes, which was very little, I had very little. My kindergarten had been sold and I took what I needed, my musical instruments, my books, and it wasn't that much. The last money I had in the savings bank became a typewriter and my mother sold some valuable things like pictures and rugs in order to finance her transport of her household to the United States and this is all our old household from my grandparents which came in a container, compact, the silver, the dishes, the linen, the household goods…

RH: Is that something you had passed…

LM: That was in the summer of '38. Later that same year people were only allowed--people were only allowed one set of dishes, one set of flatware, what they--the rest was confiscated.

RH: Right.

LM: My mother had to pay a high tax for what she took out, so that she had sold what was possible to sell…

RH: …it was probably a lot of taxes, yes.

LM: …to finance that.

RH: Mmm hmm.

LM: …to come over--but she was able to bring family--and she brought a great many documents which are deposited at the Baeck Institute.[9] There is quite a collection. Some of it was at YIVO at first because that was a stam--was brought over earlier. And then when the Baeck Institute was founded we also started a collection there and later it was possible to combine the two collections.

RH: And where are these collections?

LM: Baeck Institute is in New York and is concentrating…

RH: …is that open to the public?

LM: Beg your pardon?

RH: Is that open to the public?

LM: Oh yes, oh yes, it's a research institute and it is concentrating on German speaking Jewish history which is not only Germany--it's part of Czechoslovakia--mid-European--from the time of emancipation to the time of Hitler and destruction which is about 125 years. But they have records going back--both corporate records, villages, congregations, organizations and individual records and memoirs and pictures. Anything that pertains to that life of Jewish groups.

RH: Could you give us the address.

LM: Oh, of course.

RH: Where is it located in New York.

LM: 71st street I think. I have it here. And my mother felt that it was safer to give things to an organization. Unfortunately, a couple of books disappeared--and one I think was stolen. They haven't been able to appraise it--the 1695 Haggadah from Amsterdam.

RH: Oh my.

LM: Those things are purposely stolen and go on the black market. But I have a xerox copy of it, because they didn't want to give it back to me. They xeroxed it and later it was stolen and I have the xeroxed copy. I had two copies made for my cousin in Haifa and myself.

RH: That's very unfortunate.

LM: And I don't want to waste the time now.

RH: No, that's okay.

[9]The Leo Baeck Institute is now located at the Center for Jewish History on W. 16th Street in New York.

LM: But I will give you if you are interested. I don't know how much can be useful. A family. It's the record of a family foundation that was established by an uncle of my mother's in 1889. And finally we were able to dissolve it in '78 I believe, not much earlier than that which was through the efforts of my mother and several lawyers reestablished in Berlin with one piece of property that was there--a small apartment building. And the money that was possible to use beside restoring the property and paying an administrator helped education within the family needs, medical needs, etcetera for all that time. And finally as we were able--nobody was going to go back and live in Berlin--which was the original provision…

RH: Idea, yeah.

LM: And had to be changed and that wasn't easy to change a testament and will. But we finally managed this and then the rest was distributed among the 15 surviving members of that branch of the family.

RH: I see. That's very interesting.

LM: And I have that book. We published it here and it may be of interest. It has pictures. It has a description of what--how these 15 people survived and where they lived, etcetera.

RH: That would be of great interest to us.

LM: The Historical Society, the Jewish Historical Society has one--Cincinnati. They just asked me for another copy for a library and I sent that--and who else--Baeck Institute does and of course, all of the members of the family. I had quite a few, I had 50 copies made.

RH: Do you have any particular message for the young people today about this era in our history…

LM: Yes.

RH: And the lessons that can be learned from it?

LM: Well, one thing is that everybody says that we must not forget. Alright--you must not forget either that it was not an open society like the United States--where news would be available to everybody--where political happenings would be available. When the Reichstag was set on fire any thinking person knew--that it wasn't Mr. Lubbe[10] from Holland. There were many things known sub-rosa. And yet the power to combat it, it was partly not there, not--because a dictatorship let's go of the leadership--the cream first. Then you find a people without leadership. And even well-meaning people--there are very few that will risk their lives. But people did. People did help others, people risked their lives to protect others--but only a minority. We have to see all aspects and see them in proportion. Our society may be subject to it and susceptible to demigods for a short time. I doubt very much that with our means of information and with our--I

[10]Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutchman, was arrested for the crime of burning the Reichstag building. Although many suspected the Nazis were ultimately responsible for the act, the Nazis managed to blame the Communists, thus turning more votes their way. (jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

would say in Yiddish *davka* [out of spite]--I was told when I came, "You teach American children? Oh, they are so undisciplined. They are awful." I said, "Good."

RH: [Laughs.]

LM: They will not be overrun by somebody who tells them what to do. They will have their own minds. Maybe they are harder to teach--okay. But this is important--to keep your mind open to not follow a trend because it's a trend--or temporarily as teenagers do--but not to be overrun by political leadership without questioning it. This is important. And if you are a rebel--alright--I've been a rebel all my life. You still will find [unclear] within a society and put your rebel spirit to constructive use--don't just say no. The young man who occupies my first floor apartment did not vote this year. And I was at the polls from 7 in the morning until 7 at night. And I said, "I didn't see you." "No, the system is terrible and I can't do anything about it." This is wrong. Involve yourself. Try what you can do. Inform yourself and work with intuitive information for yourself and others. And it may be hard, but defeatism is a very, very bad thing. It opens the way to that kind of overpowering destruction.

RH: Well, that's an invaluable lesson. Thank you so very much. I couldn't agree with you more.

[End of tape one, side two. End of interview.]