

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HILDE REITER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Inge Karo
Date: July 18, 1989

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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HR - Hilde Reiter¹ [interviewee]

IK - Inge Karo [interviewer]

Date: July 18, 1989

Tape one, side one:

IK: This is side one, tape one, an interview with Mrs. Miriam Reiter, R-E-I-T-E-R, by Inge Karo. Could you please tell me where you were born and when and a little about your family?

HR: I was born in Bad Neuenahr, West Germany, on June the 6th, June the 30th, 1920.

IK: Would you mind spelling Bad Neuenahr, is that B-A-D?

HR: B-A-D N-E-U-E-N-A-H-R.

IK: Thank you. And what was your life like before the war, or before your life was changed by the Nazis?

HR: Well, I went to school and after a certain time my father couldn't do much business anymore either and he was in business with his father.

IK: Was it a store?

HR: They had *Viehhandel* [cattle dealers] and *Metzgerei*, [butcher shop] I don't even--a butcher store.

IK: Cattle dealing, and a butcher store.

HR: Cattle dealing and butcher store, right. And they, my uncle got part of his share, and he went to Israel in 1934 and my father was left and business slowly came to a halt, practically.

IK: And what kind, did you go to a Jewish school or to a Catholic school?

HR: No, I went to a Catholic Cloister school, to a *gymnasium*.

IK: Technic, T-E-C-H-?

HR: Catholic.

IK: Catholic, I'm sorry, and what was the second word?

HR: Catholic Cloister School.

IK: Cloister.

HR: Where there were nuns.

IK: Oh, oh. Okay.

HR: And it was a *gymnasium* just for girls. Actually, the nuns were okay, but the, I mean the sisters, you know, the school itself, the teachers, they were all sisters, they were all right, but the students...

IK: Were you the only Jewish student, the only Jewish girl?

¹née Miriam Vos. The interviewee's release form is signed Hilde Reiter. She also uses Miriam as a first name.

HR: No, we were four in my class and my cousin and two friends, and my cousin left for Israel with her parents and one of my friends moved away in 1935 to Berlin with her parents and it was not that pleasant anymore, besides my father couldn't afford it anymore either.

IK: Now when you say it wasn't pleasant in the school, could you tell me was this already before the Nazis came that they were nasty, because you...

HR: No, no, that was after, it was afterwards.

IK: After.

HR: Afterwards.

IK: And how did this manifest itself, I mean did they call you names, did they ostracize you?

HR: No, but before we were friends but when they saw me on the street, they would go to another side, you know, this type of thing.

IK: And did your family experience antisemitism before the Hitler period? If so, could you tell me about that?

HR: The family, no. There were, occasionally, they would call you dirty Jew, you know, or something like this, but not really, not really. Occasionally there was antisemitism, but this was really in the midst of it all.

IK: Did you or your family belong to any Jewish organizations, or to a synagogue?

HR: I belonged after '34 to *Habonim* [Zionist youth organization].

IK: How about, did your family belong to a synagogue?

HR: Yes, oh yes, yes, we belonged to a synagogue, and...

IK: Was it Conservative or Reform or Orthodox, do you know that?

HR: Conservative.

IK: Conservative. Did any men in your family serve in any national army in Germany?

HR: In the army?

IK: Yeah, German army.

HR: Yes, my father did and my uncle too, his brother and my, his brother was killed in World War...

IK: In World War I.

HR: I, right. All three brothers served and the youngest one was killed in the war.

IK: Do you remember how members of your family reacted when Hitler was appointed as chancellor in 1933?

HR: Yes, I think my father thought it wouldn't last long, [chuckles]. Maybe hope was more prevalent than belief, I don't know.

IK: Did your father also feel that because he and his brothers had served in the army that would protect them? Do you know?

HR: Maybe, maybe.

IK: Did you or your family have any contact with the *Reichsvertretung* or Council of German Jews?

HR: My father belonged to, what was that called, the J.F.,² that was a Jewish Veterans organization, and we used to get their newspaper, I don't remember what it was called, something with a J.F., but I don't remember. [tape off then on]

IK: All right. Were you affected by the boycott of April 1, 1933, by the Aryan Paragraph? That was the earlier one, before the Nuremberg laws.

HR: By the boycott or by the laws? I don't remember the laws.

IK: No, this is the boycott. Okay, well, how about between 1933 and the Nuremberg laws of September, 1935, was your life changed at all? In other words between the time when Hitler came to power and the time they passed the Nuremberg laws.

HR: Oh yes, there were people that didn't want to do business with Jewish people anymore.

IK: During this early period, did you or any member of your family discuss the possibility of leaving Germany? Please tell me any details that you can remember.

HR: Well, my older sister left in 1934. She, as soon as Hitler came to rule, she wanted to leave. And she wrote to our aunt here in the United States and she...

IK: Well, did she want to leave because she didn't feel the way your father did, that she felt things were going to get bad?

HR: This while, yes she felt there was no future for Jewish people and that she was learning a trade and she was in a different part of Germany and all this antisemitism was more prevalent.

IK: She was an adult already at that time?

HR: Yeah, she was 20, 21, when she left.

IK: But your parents during this early time still didn't think they had to leave?

HR: No, they thought that would all pass.

IK: And how about once the Nuremberg laws were passed, how were you affected by them?

HR: Well, we had in the house you know, was all changed because women, younger women, couldn't work any more in Jewish households, it was only women over 55, I believe. And, what?

IK: I remember, yeah.

HR: Yeah. And that changed tremendously, and besides it affected the business of my father. He couldn't do business anymore. We had cattle, and we had milk, and we used to sell the milk and we weren't allowed to sell to Christians any more and only to Jewish people and even the Jewish hotels, it was the result that the Jewish

²*Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten*, "RJF", German organization of Jewish soldiers.

hotels were affected and then they forbade us to sell milk all together.

IK: Did you think that this would be as bad as things were going to get at that time or did you think that things would get worse? In other words, did you think that this business of not having contact and not being allowed to earn a living, things would stop there or did you at that time think that something worse might happen?

HR: No, no, no I pursued already my *aliyah* to Israel, and I thought things would probably get worse, but I didn't think they would as bad, would get as bad as they were. First of all, you could see that Germany was preparing for war and that a war would come because you couldn't miss it. They were building up and building up, and building up. And people, I was in agricultural school, and people was, were mobilized to have to build the Siegfried Line and other things.

IK: Did you, when you were preparing for *aliyah*, was that in connection with *Habonim*, or was that another group?

HR: Yes, no, it was *Habonim*.

IK: During this time from 1933 till 1938, did you or your family still have any contact with non-Jews?

HR: Yes.

IK: And how would you, how did they behave towards you?

HR: Well, there were few but they were friends my father grew up with, and we always had lived there for I think 2-, 300 years.

IK: And did they still stay friends with you, or-?

HR: There were some people, yes.

IK: Do you think some of them stopped because they were afraid or because they believed all this propaganda?

HR: Some believed and some were afraid and some kept contact.

IK: How about the nuns, did they, where you went to school, did they have, did you have any contact with them?

HR: Not after I left school, no. But they were not antisemitic, absolutely not. There was a cloister in our hometown and they did business with my father and they kept the contact up, and...

IK: Did they ever try to convert you, to Catholicism?

HR: None whatsoever.

IK: Did you have any Jewish education since you went to a Catholic school?

HR: Yes, I went to Hebrew school.

IK: In connection with, from the synagogue?

HR: Yeah. We had, when I was younger, a Rabbi, and he also used to teach us religion and Hebrew and--twice a week. He was also the *shochet*, [butcher] and it was a small community, a small town.

IK: What was your, did your father deal in kosher meat or in non-kosher?

HR: We had both.

IK: Both.

HR: But it was separated.

IK: And the--your were joining *Habonim* and wanting to go on *aliyah*, where did you--how did you get that idea? I mean, did you, the...

HR: [unclear].

IK: I'm asking because I was Zionist in my family and my parents weren't, and I'm wondering whether this was your family, or...

HR: No, no, no, no. First of all, when I left school my father sent me to a big hotel to learn cooking.

IK: What was the name of that place where you learned cooking?

HR: Hotel Bismark.

IK: Oh, Hotel Bismark.

HR: That was in our hometown and there were people working, they were Zionists, younger people, and we got friendly and they used to come to our house on Saturday afternoon when we weren't working, and they got me and my brother interested in joining *Habonim*. My parents didn't object, and as it turned out, my father happened to know the family. They used to live in the next town when they were younger and he knew the father and so on, and from there I went to camp, to summer camp, and...

IK: This was a *Habonim* camp?

HR: *Habonim* camp. And we had an Israeli *Shaliach*.

IK: Do you remember what year that was?

HR: Yeah, 1936. In the summer.

IK: And the German authorities didn't object to that type of camp in 1936?

HR: None, no, and we had, I don't know if it means something to you, Berl Katznelson's daughter was the counselor in the camp, and she ran the camp.

IK: Who? I didn't get the name, whose daughter?

HR: Berl Katznelson, he was an Israeli, a very famous Israeli.³

IK: No, I, I don't know him.

HR: B-E-R-L, I don't remember, I think her name was Esther.

IK: Oh, B-E-R-L?

HR: Yeah, the father's name was, Katznelson.

IK: K-A-T-Z-?

HR: -N-E-L-S-O-N.

IK: S-O-N, okay.

HR: I believe her name was Esther but I'm not sure. This is a long time ago.

IK: Yeah, sure.

HR: And from there on I wanted to go to Israel and my brother too and then I went on to *hakhsharah*⁴. First I went to Nieder Schoenhausen, and...

³Labor Zionist and leader of the second *aliyah*.

⁴*hakhsharah* - agricultural training in preparation to immigrate to Israel.

IK: Could you, would you mind spelling that too?
HR: N-I-E-D-E-R...
IK: "D", like in David?
HR: Nieder Schoenhausen. N-I-E-D-E-R...
IK: S-C-H...
HR: S-C-H-O-E-N-H-A-U-S-E-N.
IK: Okay.
HR: I was in Havelberg.
IK: That's H-A-F-E-L?
HR: H-A-V-E-L, Havelberg, that's on the Havel. There's a river that's called "Havel".
IK: Okay.
HR: And from there I went to Gut Winkel.
IK: What was that where you went?
HR: Gut Winkel. G-U-T capital W-I-N-K-E-L. It was also in the suburbs of Berlin. This was agricultural, it was a farm that was owned by Schocken. They owned the department shop.
IK: The publishers?
HR: Department, Schocken, they owned the department store in Dresden, I believe in Leipzig also, and they owned this. They sold it later on, they got out. They had also a publishing house, Schocken, yes.
IK: Yeah, that's a [unclear] name.
HR: And that is the Schocken that are here today, right.
IK: How many young people were in these camps, in this...?
HR: We were about 200 there, and they were helping to preparing us mainly to Israel, but if somebody wanted to go to South America, South Africa, they helped too. And the people that worked for them and came to Gut Winkel, they gave them the complete outfit, to leave, all the money, everything.
IK: And where did they get the funds from, to [unclear] to give them money?
HR: From the department store and publishing house.
IK: Oh, Schocken gave the money to outfit all these people.
HR: Mmm hmm, mmm hmm [affirmative], they were an great help. And we got our cultural training, and from there I went for a short time to Paderborn.
IK: Paderborn?
HR: Mmm hmm [affirmative].
IK: P-A-D-E-R?

HR: P-A-D-E-R-B-O-R-N, Paderborn. And we built there a new *hakhsharah kibbutz*,⁵ and one young lady and I were supposed to cook and wash and take care of the fellows [chuckles] that were building the, that were putting up the buildings.

IK: That was pre-women's lib. You didn't know about women's lib in those days.

HR: We knew but basically Marianne and I did, but it didn't do us any good. I must say I enjoyed being there. We had unlimited money. To cook, we used to go to the market and buy, you know, we could cook what we wanted.

IK: Well, when you were in these camps in the *kibbutzim* to prepare for *hakhsharah* did you have any contact with the outside, with the people in the neighboring communities, or...

HR: None whatsoever. Only with the people that taught us, the, mostly the counselors and, yeah, the counselors, and the...

IK: The staff.

HR: Administrators were Jewish but the teachers, some of them were Christians.

IK: Oh, they were.

HR: Yeah, and they used to work there before.

IK: And there was no problem? The Germans didn't mind that you still had non-Chris-, non-Jewish teachers?

HR: No.

IK: And nobody from the surrounding neighbors persecuted you because here was this whole group of Jews?

HR: We had no contact with them. There was really in itself, you know. And we had everything there, and we used to live there. And we had everything there and the cultural events, and the teaching, and the practical and theoretical, and we had very little outside contact except with the people that lived in the village, they used to come to our neighborhood. But there was no problem in that respect.

IK: So how long did you stay there, until what year?

HR: I left in October, 13th, on a Friday, 1939. We were supposed to leave on, the war broke out in September.

IK: September.

HR: Two days after the war broke, the war broke out on the 2nd, and we were supposed to leave on the 4th, on a German boat to Israel, and they cancelled because the times were already critical and to our luck we weren't on our way because we would have gotten all shotten down by the English, since it was a German boat. And then they reorganized the trip for us to leave. I believe we were...

IK: When you say they reorganized, the Germans or the *Habonim* people?

⁵*kibbutz* - Hebrew term for "community" which refers to a voluntary collective community (usually agricultural) in Israel.

HR: No, no, no, that was in co-ordination with Is-, with the Jewish agency in Israel. They, we had *Shlichim* [representatives] from Israel and they organized this. Actually it was illegal *aliyah*.

IK: Yeah, well sure. And did you actually, did you, were you able, was your group able to go on the ship?

HR: Yeah, we went.

IK: Oh, you did. Where did you sail from?

HR: We went from, we went on train from Berlin. The whole, everybody met in Berlin and we left Friday night in Berlin on the train to Vienna. And in Vienna the SS gave us a very nice, gift. When the train entered the Vienna train station, we were there, we were already surrounded by the SS. And they took everybody off and separated men and women. And everybody had to take his own little luggage--we had only 10 pounds--and took us in the train station which was isolated from everything else, and...

IK: Separate area?

HR: Separate area. And check everybody, everybody from head to toe, except three, and I was among the three.

IK: And why was that, you don't know?

HR: We stood in rows and they picked them up and then we were about twelve left and then they picked five in front and the rest from there and said, "You stay here." And we looked at each other and we thought already, that's the end of us, and we are not going to leave.

IK: And how, excuse me, how old were you at that time?

HR: At that time I was 19.

IK: 19.

HR: And he took the other ones in the room where they were checked, and then he came out he said, "You can leave." Why, what, nobody knows.

IK: Now when you say you can leave, was that just the three of you or the whole group?

HR: No, no, no, we by ourselves left.

IK: Oh, and what happened...

HR: We could leave there, and we went from there to buses. They took us to the ship in the Vienna Harbor.

IK: But that was only three people that were allowed to leave and the rest of the group had to stay?

HR: No, no, no, the other ones came too afterwards...

IK: Oh, oh.

HR: After they were checked they could leave, but we were the three that were not checked from 350 people. And don't ask why, I don't know.

IK: Now, but this whole trip, the Germans knew, I mean, this was officially sanctioned...

HR: We had...

IK: The Germans knew that you were going on the train, and you were going to Austria. This was not done in secret.

HR: We all had passports and we had...

IK: So in other words...

HR: Bolivian, I believe, Bolivian visas. They were bought with money under the condition that we wouldn't use them.

IK: But do you think the Germans knew that you were planning to go to Palestine or do you think they thought you were going to Bolivia? You don't know.

HR: I assume they knew, but as far as we were concerned, we had our passports, we had an exit, we had a visa. We had to go to and this is what they are concerned about. They are to get rid of you and that was all they were concerned about, that you had legal papers to get out.

IK: Well, this is why I'm going back to this because I think it is sort of important that as this was in 1939...

HR: After the war had started.

IK: After the war had started. That, in other words there were still Germans who didn't particularly want to exterminate you, as long as they got rid of you because, I didn't know...

HR: They let anybody that could go out; they let out. When did you leave Germany?

IK: We left December '39.

HR: '39?

IK: Yeah.

HR: Oh, so you left after me.

IK: After, yeah, just before the invasion of Holland. But now who, do you know who paid for these Bolivian visas, was that done through the Jewish agency, or through *Habonim*?

HR: There were the *Hehalutz* [Zionist youth organization], *Reichsverband*, first of all, we had, we were young people and they had elderly people too, and as I understand it the elderly people wanted to get out. They took them but they had to pay a lot of money, and I think part this, the family probably financed part of the trip. My father had to pay too, for me, and this was all part of it, you know, and on the boat, we were four months on a boat.

IK: And what, who owned the boat, who owned the ship?

HR: That was bought by, I think the boat on the Danube was rented and later on when we went from that boat on the, in the Black Sea on a bigger boat.

IK: Oh, oh, so in other words you went...

HR: That was...

IK: From the...

HR: That belonged to the Jewish Agency in Israel.

IK: Oh, so you...

HR: Or the *Histadrut*, whatever.

IK: So after you, after you got out of the train station in Vienna, you took a boat on the Danube. And that went to the Black Sea and from there you went on a big ship.

HR: Right.

IK: Right? Okay.

HR: Yes. And we were almost four months on the boat, and I must say if it wouldn't have been for the Jewish communities in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, we wouldn't have survived.

IK: Well, did you, in other words you land-, you stopped in various ports?

HR: Four months, yeah, we were four months on the boat.

IK: Yeah, but during that time you stopped.

HR: We stopped and they always brought us food. They brought us clothing if we needed it. That was something we didn't, but they brought us many food and medical supplies and these type of things.

IK: And how did they know that the ship was there, these communities, do you know?

HR: Pardon me?

IK: How did they know, whenever you landed someplace, how did the Jewish community know that the ship was there?

HR: They knew, we were not the first one.

IK: Oh.

HR: In fact there was another ship we saw them and I understand that they drowned...

IK: And what...

HR: They were also with Jewish, you see there were ships that were well-organized like ours from the *Hehalutz* and from the *Sokhnut* [Jewish agency]. And there were other ships they went and they tried.

IK: And did you, was it like a dormitory? You were all like on a deck with-- or did you have a lot of cabins with a lot of beds in it, or what?

HR: They were, we used to sleep all over. We were by then like 400 people.

IK: Both young and old.

HR: Young and old. Right.

IK: Were there any families there? Or just...

HR: There were couples, right.

IK: And children, with children?

HR: Children, no. We had pregnant women, no children.

IK: And were there any doctors on board in case somebody needed assistance?

HR: Yes. There was a doctor and there were a couple nurses. And they had a little infirmary on the boat and they, what was I going to say?

IK: You were talking about the infirmary and doctors.

HR: Yeah, no, I wanted also to say something else. I cooked also on the boat. They took me for cooking, for everybody.

IK: For the whole group? Did they, did everybody have to do some chore?

HR: No...

IK: Or you were just unlucky.

HR: They needed a cook, and there were people that knew that I knew how to cook so they took me.

IK: They didn't, like, different people would clean?

HR: Yeah, and we used to do our own laundry and, oh, what I wanted to say-- we were about 400 people and that was a luxury...

IK: Right.

HR: Riverboat, you know, and you can't put 400 people in there. It was meant maybe for 150. It used to travel on the Danube, up and down, and...

IK: In other words it wasn't an ocean, it wasn't an ocean liner?

HR: No, no, no, no. No. And we used to, I remember I used to put chairs on the table and used to sleep a couple of chairs together and used to sleep on there and once somebody slept under the table and wherever you could find space.

Tape one, side two:

IK: Okay, now, when you were on the ship, who, was all the crew, were the crew all Jewish, and...

HR: No, nobody, nobody. It was a Yugoslavian crew that were on the ship before and actually we were supposed to be only a couple days on the boat, but it turned out we were a few weeks and then we got to the Black Sea and, in fact, we had a fire on the boat too and somebody got, died from the fire, got burnt.

IK: That must have been frightening.

HR: Yeah. We were all trapped. And we had also, there was a storm and three cables, we were tied to a wave breaker and three cables broke. We were only tied on one cable and by luck and maneuvers from the captain we were saved. We had sent S.O.S. out and the Germans were the only ones that caught it, and they advertised the next day in the newspaper that this and this boat sank with everybody aboard, and my parents thought that I was on this boat. They weren't sure. We went on the Black Sea and we stood there for weeks. And finally we started to travel and the English caught us at the end, at the exit of the Dardanelles, the Bosphorus. And they captured us. They came aboard and took us to Haifa.

IK: And they, in other words they, they kept you on the ship and they just escorted you to Haifa, or they took you off the ship?

HR: No, they left us on the ship and they escorted us to two miles out of the harbor from Haifa and they left us standing there since we had visas to South America they wanted to take us to Port Said, and from there ship us to South America.

IK: Excuse me a minute, do you remember what date that was that they brought you to Haifa? Was that 1940?

HR: That was already 1940, in January, 1940.

IK: And also do you remember the name of the ship that you were on, because that might be important.

HR: No, they named it "Hilde"⁶ [chuckles].

IK: "Hilde"?

HR: Yeah. Why, I don't know, but they named it "Hilde".

IK: You know, there may be somebody who...

HR: Oh there, sure there were books written about this voyage. And we sabotaged the boat⁷ and we had taken, we had...

IK: When you say they, the British, or the...

HR: We, we.

⁶The ship Mrs. Reiter called *Hilde*, was actually the *Atlantic*- escorted into Haifa Bay by the Royal Navy, on Nov. 24, 1940, as cited by Martin Gilbert in his book *Israel*, page 105.

⁷The sabotaged boat was "The Patria"- "explosives planted by the *Haganah*, to immobilize the ship to prevent deportation," as cited by Martin Gilbert in his book, *Israel* page 105.

IK: You sabotaged the boat.

HR: And not only this, we had one sheet we took with us, and we donated the sheet and made a big sign that we're there. We wanted the Jewish people in Israel to know that we were there. We wanted, we were seeking contact. Finally, we had a pregnant woman and she was about due and we thought that she was in labor, and that she had to get to a hospital in order to have the baby. We had two other babies born on the boat and they finally, the English consented, and they took her and her husband went with her after many discussions, and squabbling, and they contacted--in the Jewish hospital--the Jewish Agency, and told them that we were there. And then the Jewish Yishuv in Israel mounted a strike and they went to Haifa and they demanded to take us off and they really didn't have much choice. They let us land in Haifa. And they took us in and they sent us to jail, to jail!

IK: The British?

HR: The British, right.

IK: A British jail?

HR: Of course, at least.

IK: And when you say you sabotaged the ship, that was so they couldn't use the ship to transport you to Port Said, right?

HR: Right, right. And after that...

IK: Now where do you, where was the jail that they put you into?

HR: It was not too far from Haifa Athlit⁸, that's a famous jail. They put all the illegal immigrants in...

IK: Do you know how to spell that?

HR: Yeah. A-T-H-L-I-T.

IK: A-T-H-L-...

HR: I-T.

IK: I-T.

HR: Athlit.

IK: Okay.

HR: And there were so many Jewish people coming in they didn't have enough room. So they let the women out after two weeks, we were there, and they let the women out and kept the men. And they kept them there for a half a year until they let them out too.

IK: When you were let out, where did you go, to a *Habonim kibbutz*, or...

HR: The Jewish agency took us to Haifa until we could find places. They kept us there in a, in a home.

⁸The Atlit detention camp (also spelled Athlit) was constructed by the British Mandate in what was then Palestine, at the end of the 1930s, as a military camp on the Mediterranean coast. It was converted by them between 1939 - 1948 to a detention camp for "illegal" immigrants who found themselves, yet again, incarcerated behind barbed wire. (jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

IK: Did any of you speak Hebrew?

HR: Few words. And then they, they processed us. They had a regular...

IK: When you say they, the Jewish Agency, or the...

HR: The Jewish Agency processed the *aliyah*. Processed. They gave us our identification because the English had confiscated our passports and the ten marks we had that we could take out, they confiscated that too. They gave us an identification card and then they processed us as immigrants and sent us to the Department of Destinations. Some they wanted to go into a *kibbutz*, some had relatives, they went to them, and, you know.

IK: So you didn't stay with the group, you went as individuals.

HR: Well, I was in a group of six people and I was the only girl and there were five young men and they were in Athlit so they processed women first and they sent me to a *kibbutz* where the group that I belonged to was, that was in *Hashofet*. And in the meantime I had changed from *Habonim* to *Hashomer Hatzair* and from there I was sent to another *kibbutz*, *Ein Hamifratz*, and later on when the young, the five young men were released, they joined me there in *Ein Hamifratz* and we stayed there a year. I stayed a year and they stayed less and from there we founded our own *kibbutz* in Ra'anannah and the name was *Kibbutz El Gabish*. [tape off then on] My...

IK: Wait a second. That was, the *kibbutz* your group founded was *Kibbutz El Gabish*. E-L G-A-B-I-S-H, which means "crystal," right?

HR: Correct. And my future husband gave the *kibbutz* the name. I met my husband in *Ein Hashofet*, but then we were separated and once we came to *El Gabish* we got to know each other and later on we got married.

IK: Was he a German refugee also?

HR: Yeah, he was from Berlin.

IK: Now, this other name, the *kibbutz* where you were before you went to *El Gabish*, what was that, *Atsophet*?

HR: *Ein Hashofet*.

IK: E-I-N-...

HR: Yeah.

IK: H-A-T-S-O?

HR: H-A-S-H-O-F-E-T.

IK: Wait now, H-A-S-H-O-F-E-T.

HR: *Ein Hashofet*. And that means "I'm of the judge" and that was named after Brandeis, Judge Brandeis. And from there I went to *Ein Hamifratz*. E-I-N H-A-M-I-F-R-A-T-Z.

IK: F-R-A-T-Z.

HR: It's very hard to spell German letters.

IK: I know. My husband would be better interviewing you. He was very active in *Habonim* and *Hashomer Hatzair*, and he would probably recognize the names, but I don't.

HR: Well, and we were there three years in Ra'anannah, in *El Gabish*, and then the main administration from *Hashomer Hatzair* movement asked us to go to join another *kibbutz* and the *kibbutz* is *Kfar Menachem*. K-F-A-R M-E-N-A-C-H-E-M.

IK: Yeah, okay. That one I knew from...

HR: Mmm?

IK: Thank you.

HR: And there I stayed until I came to the United States.

IK: And about what time period was that? When did you go to *Kfar Menachem*?

HR: 1943.

IK: 1943. And how long did you stay?

HR: Until 1957. My children were born there, two sons, and I lost my husband from the Independence, from injuries he sustained in the Independence war. We were both in the army. He was and I was and in '57 I came to the United States.

IK: What made you decide?

HR: Well my, I hadn't seen my mother for all these years.

IK: Oh, they, they were here.

HR: They were here, yeah. My father had passed away in the meantime. I actually came for one year to visit and I stayed [chuckles].

IK: Well, it's very interesting. I'd like to go back unless there is something else, did you have something else you wanted to say?

HR: Well, what you want to go back to?

IK: I wanted to go back to the time on the ship, this long time you spent on the ship. Did they have any activities for you, like classes for the younger people, or Hebrew classes, or...

HR: We had, no...

IK: Any kind of indoctrination?

HR: We had some Hebrew classes and we had Israeli geography, and especially when we were on the Danube, we had more room there, a little bit. They, we slept in the dining room and in the salons, but during the day everything was put away, you know, and, so we had a little bit more room there. Once we got on the other ship, the whole interior of the ship that were shelves and we laid there like the sardines in a can. One next to the other.

IK: Did, were there any people that were religious, was there any kind of religious observance?

HR: Yes, we had a very religious group, and they conducted their religious life, you know.

IK: Did they have kosher food?

HR: Yeah, we had a kosher kitchen, and they wanted me to cook there too, on the big boat, but that I refused.

IK: Did you, were you used to keeping kosher?

HR: Yeah.

IK: Oh, you...

HR: Yeah, my parents were strictly kosher.

IK: Oh.

HR: And when I learned cooking that was a very strict kosher hotel, absolutely.

IK: Okay. And then I wanted to go back to the earlier time, now during, was your family affected during *Kristallnacht* in November 1938? Is there anything you want to talk about *Kristallnacht*?

HR: Well, yeah, on *Kristallnacht* they burned the synagogue down. And somebody came, a Jewish woman came to tell my father the synagogue was burning and he jumped on his bicycle and tried to rescue the Torah scrolls and whatever he could.

IK: Was there only one synagogue in Bad Neuenahr?

HR: Pardon me?

IK: Was there just one synagogue?

HR: One synagogue. It was a small resort town. And another man, in fact his sister came to tell my father that the synagogue was burning. Across the street from the synagogue lived the fire marshal and my father went to school with him together and he came to ask him why doesn't the fire...

IK: Department.

HR: Fire fighters come...

IK: And put out the fire.

HR: So he said he is going to take care of it. My father went three times and then the third time he said to him, "I'm telling you this as a friend but I want you to keep your mouth shut and never mention that I saw you. This fire was set."

IK: The fire marshal told your father that.

HR: He, "That was set deliberate. And I was told not to do anything about it, so my hands are tied." They, while they were trying to rescue the books in the synagogue the police came and arrested him, and arrested my father and the second man that was trying to rescue the synagogue.

IK: The regular police or the Gestapo?

HR: The regular police.

IK: As were any, as far as you know, were any of the Jews in your hometown attacked physically?

HR: Every home, Jewish home was destroyed. Our home was saved. We had rented the--we had a very big house--and all three apartments in the front of the house were rented out and one of the tenants had put a flag with the swastika out. The SS from

my hometown, they were supposed to destroy the Jewish homes but they refused, so they took them to a different location and they sent the SS from a different location to our hometown. We didn't know the people and they didn't know anything, so they were told...

IK: That happened in several places.

HR: They were told any house with, without a flag, destroy it. And in the same street where we lived, there was an uncle and aunt of mine, they had a, a store for crafts and--how should I say this?

IK: You mean like hand, hand made things? Hand made things?

HR: Hand made things, yes, like laces, hand crocheted and scarves and knit and embroidery, this type of thing. And the whole store was glass. The ceiling was milk glass. The showcases were all glass. And they went in with iron poles and destroyed it. And my mother told me that she heard it, and that was quite a distance. It was like the least two blocks away.

IK: She heard the glass breaking.

HR: Yeah, and then there was, a little further up was a Jewish hotel, they destroyed that too. All the homes were destroyed. And, thanks to the flag, our house was saved.

IK: Now...

HR: And my mother-, my father was arrested, and my mother was home with my younger sister and she had later on said to me she had a little suitcase packed. If they would have come in the front, she couldn't have watched that. She would have gone out in the back and would have left the town.

IK: Sounds like my mother.

HR: What?

IK: My mother always had a suitcase packed.

HR: That was the first, the only time.

IK: And did they, were the men that were arrested, were they released shortly afterwards or were they kept for a long time?

HR: They took him to jail with the other Jewish men from, from our hometown to the next hometown. They were a few days in jail and then from there they went to Koblenz and from Koblenz they went to Dachau. They were in concentration camp.

IK: How long did they stay in Dachau?

HR: My father was in Dachau I believe ten days.

IK: Did he tell you anything how he was treated in Dachau during that time?

HR: Never spoke about it. And they had all to sign that they wouldn't reveal a thing, and I tried to, I did try to ask him, I mean, I tried, but he didn't say anything. The only answer he gave me that he would get out and once he was out he would write a book.

IK: And did you, did the Jews of Bad Neuenahr realize, think at that time it was only happening to you or did you realize that this was happening all over Germany?

HR: Oh no, they knew it was happening all over Germany. They knew that.

IK: Now, after this, if your business, if you weren't allowed to work any more, how did your family and other Jews support themselves?

HR: Good question. [laughs] My, well my father had the house and it was rented out, you know, and he had also assets. My grandfather bought a lot of properties and at the end, when his sister came to live with him, she helped him out with money.

IK: Now, once Germany invaded Poland, did that make any changes? Of course you weren't there for very long afterwards, but...

HR: No.

IK: Did the fact that Poland was invaded, did that change anything for you?

HR: For me, not really.

IK: Or your family?

HR: I was back in Gut Winkel and in fact, then in 1938, when Chamberlain came to Munich, and he capitulated to Hitler, which he really did, my father said it's time to get out.

IK: And this was in, this was when, in 1939, right?

HR: No, no, no...

IK: 193-...

HR: It was in September '38.

IK: September '38.

HR: Mmm hmm [affirmative].

IK: But until then your father hadn't, still hadn't talked about leaving.

HR: Well, it wasn't that simple...

IK: No, well I know that.

HR: He had three young children at home, you know, they had, my father wasn't going to go out and leave children behind.

IK: Was he able to get the papers to go the, did you have a number and a visa for the United States?

HR: Yeah, my sister arranged that.

IK: Now during the time that you were separated from your family, when you were stranded on the ship, were you able to main-, once you were, got to Israel, were you able to maintain contact with your family at all? I mean, how did they find out that you weren't dead, for instance? How did you know that they weren't dead?

HR: I didn't know. But when, my parents didn't know that I was leaving for Israel because I was supposed to leave so many times and every time it didn't happen and the time it happened, I had written a postal card and before we went on the boat, I dropped it in the mailbox and this is how they knew I had left. And when I got to Israel I wrote five letters. I had a sister in Holland--this was before Holland was invaded. And I

had a sister in the United States. I wrote to Holland three, and two to the United States. And interesting that my, the on-, the third letter my sister in Holland received--two days before the Germans invaded Holland--and she sent it to my parents and I had written in the letter that I don't know if they would receive the message, but in case they should, everybody had written they should contact Gut Winkel and let them know that we are all safe in Israel. And...

IK: That was your sister in Holland.

HR: No, no, no. My sister sent the letter to my parents.

IK: Yeah, but where was your sister?

HR: In Holland.

IK: In Holland.

HR: And she got that letter. The third one. And when my, when my parents received the letter, they called Gut Winkel and notified them. And he said, "How do you know?" And he said, "I got a letter from my daughter and she's in Israel and she said they all got safe to Israel." And he said, "Thanks God, this is the first message that we-. There's something on you, a little fly [chuckles]. How did that come in?

IK: Maybe when we came in.

HR: And they, that was the first and only message that was received in Germany that we were safe.

IK: None of the other people had been able to get a message out?

HR: They all tried to write but none got through. And...

IK: But you were able to get one out.

HR: How do I know this? When my brother came after me to Israel and he told me about it.

IK: And when did you actually find out that your parents had survived?

HR: When my brother came.

IK: When your brother, when was that?

HR: That was in '41.

IK: 1941.

HR: He was on the famous ship, of the Patriot, that sank. Luckily he was saved.

IK: Is there anything that you feel you want to talk about the education of Jewish children while you were still in Germany? Once you, for instance, once you could no longer go to the Catholic school, did you have any education?

HR: No, actually in Germany they go eight years to school and I was already beyond this, you see.

IK: Oh. So you were already, you had finished eight, eighth grade.

HR: Eight years of school. My father sent me to a private teacher I should continue my French and English, that was about all. And then he sent me to learn cooking and I learned how to sew and after that I went to *hakhsharah*.

IK: Do you remember when you first heard that Jews were being murdered or were being gassed? Did you hear that when you were in Israel, or...

HR: Yes, oh yes, we knew.

IK: How did you, how did you hear that?

HR: We knew from people that came. First of all there was the Anderson Army, I don't know if you know what that is.

IK: No. Anderson?

HR: Yeah. There was a Polish General that refused to buckle under, under Hitler and he left and went to England and they, he had organized an underground and the Polish soldiers who were indoctrinated into the English army and they came to Israel, we heard from them.

IK: You believed it, you didn't doubt that this was true?

HR: No, they, in fact my in-laws were killed. My in-laws came originally from Poland, and in '38 the German government sent our Polish citizens back to Poland and my father-in-law, he hid when they came, somebody had called him and told him about it, and when he saw them coming, he went up to the roof and when they asked for him, his wife said he had already left for work, and when they left, he packed a suitcase, went to the train station, bought a ticket on his own to go into Poland but he was detained at the border and he left a message with his wife in case his son should come home. He was already at work. She should have a suitcase ready for him, give him money and he should buy a ticket to his hometown to the parents' hometown in Poland.

IK: In Poland.

HR: Not only to the border, to the hometown, which he did. And this is how they got out of the camp in Splenshen [phonetic] where they were interned, first by the Germans and then by the Polish government and everyone that had a ticket could leave and they went to there and he walked there and my father-in-law too. My husband came to Israel in May, '39, and...

IK: Also as an illegal?

HR: Yeah, but they made it. The English didn't catch them. It was before the war, and my in-laws, they took 90,000 people. They had dug a ravine, and...

IK: When you say they, you mean the Germans or the Polish?

HR: The Germans, the Germans, and took all the 90,000 Jews and pushed them into the ravine and shot them.

IK: Do you know where this was in Poland?

HR: Yeah, that was near Kolomea.

IK: Could you spell that too?

HR: K-O-L-O-M-E-A. [Also Kolomyja]

IK: Thank you.

HR: And Christian Polish soldiers came to Israel with the Anderson Army and they knew that my husband had aunts and uncles in Israel. He knew them when they

were born, you know, they were later on in Germany, but they were born in Poland. He found them and he told him, he told us about it, I mean, he told them and they told us.

IK: So now who, which members of your family survived, your parents?

HR: My parents and my two sisters and my brother.

IK: You all found each other after the war was over?

HR: Well, my parents and my two sisters were here, and my brother and I were in Israel. They knew where we were.

IK: Okay, unless there is anything else you want to add, yes, thank you very much.