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Summary

Hanna Silver was born in Berlin, Germany in 1910 and lived there until she immigrated to the United States in 1948. She said that she could not leave Germany before because she had to stay with her mother. Silver was an only child and lived with her mother in modest conditions until her mother died, presumably of natural causes, in 1943 or 1944. Silver graduated high school where she received a rigorous education and learned to speak French and English. She became a secretary before the war and worked in responsible positions in the sheet metal industry during the war. Silver never registered as a Jew nor did she wear a Jewish star on her garments. While never hiding from her friends and neighbors that she was Jewish she passed as an Aryan in the street, though she did not have Aryan papers. Her mother, however, did insist on registering as a Jew, as did Silver's two aunts. One of the aunts was deported to Riga, Latvia and never heard from again. Her younger aunt survived Theresienstadt.

Silver described many incidents in which non-Jews helped her and other Jews. She said that much of the help was minor but essential for survival. Most of the people who helped knew and liked her, and that appeared to be more important than Silver's religion in the tolerant, largely Protestant Berlin. She offered many examples of help from non-Jews. For example, her employer in 1942 requested that she sign an affidavit in 1942 that she was not Jewish, but when she refused to do so he still hired her. An anti-Nazi he and his wife later offered to house Silver and her mother after they lost their housing during the Allied bombing. Other examples of small gestures of help included an agent in the registry office who knew her and recommended that she not register as a Jew, her apartment building superintendent who knew that she was Jewish but told Nazi authorities that no Jews lived in the building, and a woman who used part of her ration card to help feed Jews who could not get a card. Her name was Rosie Lamm, and after the war Silver helped Lamm by giving her a job so that Lamm could get a better ration card. Another woman helped Silver and her mother find an empty apartment, owned by a Nazi, when Silver's apartment had been bombed. Finally, she mentioned Helga Basis (?) about whom a film was made. Helga ran a "transit hotel" in her house allowing Jews to stay there overnight without any questions.

Asked about the motivations of helpers Silver reiterated that knowing and liking the person was probably most important. She also said that Berlin was a large, cosmopolitan city with many anti-Nazis and that before the Nazis came to power people did not ask what religion someone was. Silver emphasized that many people helped Jews and political "undesirables" and therefore she did like it when people in the U.S. painted all Germans during that time as Nazi collaborators. After the war, Silver stayed in touch with many of her German friends who helped.