Interview with RITA KUHN

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Q WE ARE INTERVIEWING RITA KUHN FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

MY NAME IS PEGGY COSTER AND WITH ME IS RICK LEVINE, THE PRODUCER IS JOHN GRANT.

OKAY. WHY DON'T YOU JUST START TELLING US WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU WERE RELEASED?

A I think I told you that when we came out I don't remember whether my father was with us, whether he was released with us or just my brother and I were released. And I think I mentioned last time that I saw people, not many, on the street. I didn't see any protesters anymore, because by that time I think the protest had died down. And soon after our release I think most people were released.

So I saw one man across the street from where we were held and he waved to us. A welcome sign. And that was reassuring. I thought that was very comforting. I remember that feeling that there were some people who are glad to see us come out. And he was not Jewish, of course, he was German.

And then there were some other

people further down the street milling around, probably waiting for others to come out. And that also was reassuring. I felt immediately that -- I mean the sense of isolation was gone.

So then we came home. We went home. My brother remembers it. He covered his yellow star. I don't remember that. I don't remember getting the papers, the release papers, but I know they gave them to us because they gave them to everybody. But as I say, the whole thing is really a haze to me. I think we went home. My mother was not there and she was two houses away at her sister's place. We went there, and again I don't remember much of that. I just was so stunned. I still was numb. I couldn't even cry, I remember that. The same thing that happened with my first arrest. I couldn't really rejoice at being free because I remembered all these other people who were separated from their families. People left children at home alone. Just too much had happened.

But in any case, again I don't remember how long after we were released I was called to work again. So that must have been

sometime in March, '43. I don't remember when I -- when it was. But I'm sure they called us very soon because they needed workers and I was 15 at that time. And I started working at a railroad station called Stettiner Bahnhof. And there I remember the interview I had with the, whoever it was, manager or boss, in his office. And he pointed to a window behind him and said, "That's where you'll be working." And all I could see was the railroad yard and the tracks just crossing each other. I couldn't see any way to walk. I said, "I'm supposed to work there?" I just had nightmare that night because I really couldn't see anything from where I was. And I asked my father because he had been on a railroad. He worked on a railroad before. And, actually, he was called back to the same railroad station. And he told me, "Yes, there is room for you to walk."

Q WHAT WAS YOUR JOB?

A Well, then the next day when I got there, they told us -- again I don't remember whether they gave us work clothes or if we had to provide them for ourselves, because it was really

dirty work.

And what we had to do was wash windows of trains that had come from Russia from the eastern front that had been traveling for days. And the windows looked just like the cars. You couldn't even distinguish the windows from the grayness of the cars. They were so dirty after days of traveling. It was soot and dust and whatever. And it was winter. It was in the winter time so the windows were frozen. And as I say, I don't remember, I think we had to provide for our own clothes. So I wore heavy pants to keep the cold out and also to keep the dirt out. And we had to clean those windows.

There were just, I think, two other workers. [Reaching for picture] In fact, I have a picture of the -- I don't know how I got this picture of my other two Jewish co-workers and one of the French co-workers because it was forbidden to take pictures. It's not a terribly good picture but you can see these are my two friends. [Showing picture to camera] Can you see? And this girl here, right here, this is a French force laborer. And this girl and these two were

good friends.

Now, the story -- I have to tell you a story ahead of time. This girl -- you know I'm writing my own memoirs and I'm talking about these people. And I couldn't remember their names and I sort of thought I made up the name for her. I still don't remember this girl's name (indicating). And I made up the name Margot. (Showing picture to camera.)

Q YOU KNOW WHAT WE'LL DO AT THE END IS --

A Yeah. Show the pictures -- I just wanted to say that.

Anyway, and her name was Margot. I found that out later on. I'll tell you.

So we carried our ladders. We had ladders on this side, on our left side. And pails with some kind of detergent, and we cleaned windows all day. And in the winter time it was rough. It was very cold and I remember after a while our hands and our feet were just frozen. I had frostbite many times. So that was one of the jobs we did most of the time.

We wanted to work in the inside of

the railroad cars but the Ukrainians always beat us to it somehow. And I don't know -- one of the advantages of working inside the car was that they, the soldiers, had left cigarette butts and the Ukrainians would pick them up. Just clean the cars and keep the cigarette butts. And I often wondered what they did with it. You know I never saw them smoke. And someone told us that they sell the tobacco on the black market or they exchange it for food or whatever they need. So that was a high paying job to work inside. It was also warmer. It was shielded from the cold wind. But they always coveted that job and our foreman also encouraged them. I think maybe he was in on it. He maybe got some commission from their black market activities. But anytime we wanted to go in -- my mother unfortunately smoked. She was forbidden to smoke because, I told you, she had TB. But once in a while my mother's stress became too difficult. She would like a cigarette, wanted to have a cigarette. So I often just wanted to get just a few cigarette butts, maybe one or two cigarettes, and the Ukraine wouldn't let us. There I really met the

antiSemitism often. Just remarks. Either little annoyances.

Q WHAT KIND OF REMARKS WOULD THEY MAKE?

A I don't remember, but it was obvious. Whatever the word. I don't remember, but it was obvious to us they didn't like us.

And then one other -- and that -- so anyway most of the time we washed windows outside. One other job -- and I'm still having difficulty. I am writing about it now. I'm still having trouble even talking about it because it was, for me, nightmares at the time. We had to go underneath the cars. We had -- what you call those things? Channel? No. Ditches. You know, the car would -- the railroad car would be on top and underneath you could work on it. And our job was to carry this big -- this can of thick, black oil and we had to oil certain parts that we were told to do. And that was the most disgusting job. I still have shivers down my spine. I remember going down because the worst part of it was that we had to oil something above the lavatory. That job was -- there was nothing

we could do about it. We had to do it. And so that's really -- most of the two years that's what we did.

And I remember just a few incidents that happened. I mean our friendship with other force laborers. I don't think that -- there may have been one air raid when I was there during the day when we weren't allowed to look for shelter. And railroad was always a target. But I remember only one air raid and it didn't hit our station. Unfortunately, it didn't hit our -- well, they would have sent us someplace else.

And only one incident that I remember quite vividly was that one day we came to work after especially heavy bombing. I don't know what year it was. I mean they got worse, the bombing, the attacks. But after one heavy air raid we came to work and we noticed the smell right away all around us of, sort of, sulfur. You could tell burning smell. And it was all around Stettiner Bahnhof. And we found out from one of the French co-workers that was in the picture, he told us that the foreign laborers, force laborers, were in barracks not far from the

station that had been hit. Several barracks had been hit. And he told us that one barrack was completely leveled, another one was partly demolished. And he saw two of his friends in bed with no injuries, nothing. They probably died from smoke inhalation and the pressure. It was a couple. A married couple. So they -- he told us they died in love's embrace. It was very ironic. So that's the only thing, really, about those two years of force labor.

Q SO WHAT TWO YEARS WOULD THIS BE FROM ABOUT WHEN TO WHEN?

A Well, from '43 to '45. I don't remember when I stopped. Because in April '45 -- let's see. June the -- whatever the Russians came -- what? In May was it? Something like that. And at the end of April the Russians were outside Berlin. So they -- there was constant artillery fire. I don't know when that started. I think it was the end of April and I don't think we even went -- nobody went to work. But I don't remember when I stopped going to work. So it must have been around that time.

Q HOW DID YOU GET TO WORK? I MEAN

WERE THERE LAWS THAT SAID THAT JEWS COULDN'T RIDE THE TRAINS IF IT WAS UNDER A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF, I THINK, 7.5 KILOMETERS OR SOMETHING?

A Something like that.

Q SO WERE YOU ALLOWED TO RIDE?

A Yeah. I had a (passierschein), a permit. For mine it says you can go from whatever station I took, Charlottenburg I think, I took the elevator train to work. From there and to the station. And that's all.

spelling

Q WAS THAT BECAUSE IT WAS FURTHER THAN THAT DISTANCE, OR WAS THAT BECAUSE YOU WERE PRIVILEGED BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER WAS CHRISTIAN?

A Huh-uh. No, that was for all Jew workers. They only had the permit from home to work and back again. That was all. I mean everyone got it because that was the only transportation they had.

Q NOW, DID YOU HAVE TO WEAR THE STAR?

A Uh-huh, yeah.

Q THROUGHOUT THE WAR?

A Throughout the war. Yeah that's -- I had to wear it at all times. I mean, I was -- I covered it a lot.

Q YOU COVERED --

A I covered it with either a shawl or maybe a pocket book that I had for that purpose. But I don't know -- you know, people ask me how could you survive Berlin wearing the star until '45. And there weren't that many Jewish stars anymore walking around, but I didn't know.

I told you what Goebbels had written in his diary. "I don't want to see any more yellow stars." In '43 he said that. So he wanted to make Berlin Judenrein, which means no more yellow stars. And I didn't know that. Maybe if I knew that I would have hidden it all the time. But I didn't dare.

At that time we had also heard of a Jewish -- she was a Jewish woman. There is a book on her now. A spy called Spitzel who would observe -- if she saw anybody not wearing the star, and there were a lot of U-boats as they called them, people had gone underground. And somehow she knew them. She knew them from way back or she just had kept an eye out for them. She was responsible for, I think, sending 2,000 of them.

Q WAS THIS STELLA?

spelling

A Stella (Kreebler).

So I heard of her. In fact, the author of the book called me and said, "Did you hear" -- "Did you know her?" I knew her personally, but I never seen her. But we certainly heard about her. Das blonde Gift, the blond poison. So I knew about her, but I always felt her -- about her activities -- I mean, I just -- I was young and foolish, I think, covering my star whenever I felt safe.

Now, you must remember I left -- when I left the house it was dark. When I came home it was dark. So I felt perfectly safe and that's about the only time I walked the streets, anyway, when I went to work. But I know I covered it sometimes when I was riding the train. My brother did not wear it anymore after '43.

Q WELL, I THINK ONE OF -- MY QUESTION TO YOU IS: DID YOU -- WERE YOU IN ANY DANGER FROM THE CATCHERS SINCE YOUR MOTHER WAS CHRISTIAN, I MEAN, AND YOU HAD THIS SPECIAL STATUS?

A No, that I can say is a definite

no, because I have a friend. She's in my group now, the survivors group. She was in the same situation I was, except -- no. Her mother never even converted. Her father died in '38 or '39. So she was actually protected by her gentile mother. Even more protected than I was who was living with a Jewish father still and a mother who converted.

Q TO JUDAISM?

A To Judaism. So she -- her brother had emigrated to America, so she was left with her mother. And she -- her mother wanted to visit her relatives in Dresden. And she knew that she has to wear the -- her daughter had to wear the yellow star at all times. And, of course, in order to travel, she didn't wear the yellow star. So they got to Dresden to her mother's family and at 5 o'clock the next day, the morning, the Gestapo came and got this friend of mine and they sent her first -- somewhere outside Berlin. Uemlmbach, I think, labor camp.

So that was in 1943 and '44, and then she went to Auschwitz in '44. And she went on a death march and survived. She escaped from

the death march. So that was a no, no.

She had slight privileges in Auschwitz because of her mother. Her mother could send her once a month, I think, a food package. And they could correspond. They could write, that's all. But she almost didn't make it. She almost didn't make it out of Auschwitz.

Q SO IN SPITE OF HER STATUS, BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T WEAR HER STAR AND SOMEBODY RECOGNIZED HER --

A No, not that somebody recognized her.

I think what happened -- I'm not sure what happened. I don't want to take her story, but I think -- well, I really don't know. I can't say with authority what happened. But I think somebody went to her apartment and realized that she was gone and denounced her. Something like that. But it's not because somebody recognized her. I think somebody went to the apartment.

"Oh, she's not here? Where is she?"

"She's in Dresden."

"How come she's in Dresden?" And the Gestapo -- somebody went to the Gestapo right away and the Gestapo was there the next day. 5:00 o'clock in the morning they knocked on her door.

Q SO THE GESTAPO WASN'T REALLY CONSISTENT IN WHAT THEY DID?

A How do you mean? They were very consistent. If you wore the star, you had to wear it all the time. If you didn't, it was punishable by deportation and then death.

Q OH, I GUESS I WAS MEANING BECAUSE IN ONE OF THE BOOKS I READ, IT SAID AT ONE POINT THEY DECIDED NOT TO MAKE THE JEWISH PEOPLE WHO WERE LEFT IN MUESSLING WEAR THE STAR BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO PROVE THAT BERLIN WAS UNION; RIGHT?

A Right, but we never got the, whatever, permission or order not to wear it. I know that's one thing that Goebbels said in his diary. That make -- I don't remember what the word was. He said, "Let them be assimilated." I don't know what, "Let them be part of the whole population." But we never had that -- but we never got a permit for that. We never were told

not to wear the star. We didn't have to wear the star. And I wore it at work all the time. I wouldn't dare not.

Q DID ALL THE OTHER JEWISH PEOPLE WEAR THE STAR?

A The two girls, yeah. And we were the only ones.

Q THAT WORE IT? WERE THERE MORE JEWISH PEOPLE THERE?

A At the Stettiner Bahnhof? Uh-huh. The rest were all foreign laborers. My father was the only Jew working there and there is a really nice story. When -- after my father was arrested and released again, he went back to the same workplace. And as I told you, he stole cheese for us. And after (Orsenstraus), after we went back, his co-workers -- some of his co-workers told him, "Oh, come on. Don't wear the star anymore. You've been released. They probably not mean to do anything more to you." They said, "We don't want to see that. It makes us feel ashamed." So they didn't want to see it. But, no, I don't think he would dare not wear it at work. Maybe going back and forth. But you

spelling

never knew at work what could -- what could happen.

Q WHAT KIND OF ID WERE YOU GIVEN?

A How do you mean?

Q WELL, DID YOU HAVE ID WITH SOME KIND OF INDICATION THAT YOU WERE --

A Oh, yeah.

Q THAT YOUR MOTHER WAS CHRISTIAN?

A Huh-uh. No, no.

I should have brought a picture of one. What it looked like. And we had the ID. It's a J on top of a little card. A J on top and a J in the inside and our name signed Rita (Zara) Kuhn. There was no indication by my mother or anything. I mean, I had the same ID that full Jews had.

spelling

Q WERE YOU EVER STOPPED AND ASKED FOR YOUR ID?

A No, no. No, never. Even before the yellow star came. No, we were never asked. Because, I mean, you had to wear the yellow star. It's obvious. Why should they? And I never traveled anywhere.

Q WELL, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN

ANSWER THIS QUESTION BUT -- BECAUSE, I MEAN, IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE YOU WOULDN'T KNOW.

BUT IT JUST SOUNDS LIKE SOMEHOW THEY KNEW WHEN PEOPLE WERE LEGALLY ABLE TO STAY THERE AS JEWS. AND OTHER JEWS HAD TO REALLY HIDE AND THEY HAD TO BE AWARE OF THE CATCHERS ALL THE TIME AND THEY HAD TO BE AFRAID OF EVERYBODY.

SO DO YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW HOW THEY WOULD KNOW? OR MAYBE THEY ASSUMED THAT BECAUSE YOU WERE WEARING THE YELLOW STAR YOU MUST BE LEGAL OR WHAT?

A Um-hum. Right. Yeah. I mean I know some of the people who lived illegally often made a mistake by not staying put. You know, by not staying hidden. They had false identification cards and so they felt safe. And if they didn't look Jewish, they felt safe.

But as I say, there were few spies who would denounce them. In fact -- and you read the book The Last Jews in Berlin. And I don't know, I saw another book recently where they talked about -- I don't know the numbers, the statistics. But there were 4,000 Jews in hiding and many, many of them did not survive because

they were denounced. A large majority of them were denounced. Mostly by people working for the Gestapo. Or perhaps by some Germans who knew them before and -- I don't know. But many of them were denounced. So it wasn't safe. I mean, it was safe if you could stay put and hidden.

Q DID YOU HAVE RATION CARDS?

A Um-hum.

Q THE SAME AS OTHER GERMANS?

A No, no.

They had -- the ration cards were -- well, we didn't get much. I mean, I can't even tell you what we did get. Actually, I have at home. I have a -- what? A diagram or a chart of what other people in Europe got. How much Germans got and how much others -- and the Jews at the bottom. And if you got -- we didn't get any meat, no milk, no eggs, nothing like that. What did we get? Very little fat and sugar and bread. But you could see. Sugar, Germans got this much. (Indicating) And Jews, maybe this much. Ours was really cut and, as I told you, we lived mostly on potato soup, (Bali) soup, black bread, some margarine. We got margarine. Maybe

Spelling

some sugar once in a while. Not vegetable or anything like that. No fruit, of course. And so after the war I was -- we were all suffering from malnutrition.

Q WAS YOUR MOTHER'S RATION BOOK DIFFERENT THAN YOURS?

A That I don't remember. It probably was. I don't remember it. You know, we all had Js, every ration card. I mean we had little stamps. They all had Js. Every one of them. So we could never even cheat on it if we had exchanged them. But my mother did not have her J on it.

Q I READ ONCE THAT WAS ALSO A WAY TO TELL WHO SOLD THE JEWS.

A Um-hum. Yeah, probably.

I just want to tell you very briefly when the Russians came. Are you interested in hearing that or do you want to ask another question?

Q WELL, ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT LIBERATION?

A Yeah.

Q WE MIGHT WANT TO GO MORE INTO THIS

BEFORE YOU DO LIBERATION.

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

I'M INTERESTED. DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECULATION AS TO -- WELL, FIRSTLY, DO YOU HAVE A SENSE HOW MANY JEWS SURVIVED THE WAR IN BERLIN? YOU USED THE FIGURE 4,000.

A Right, that 4,000 who were in hiding. I think that 4,000 survived. And that is including people like my family. Mixed families and others who survived in hiding.

Q HOW MANY PEOPLE SURVIVED (TOCHENHEIMEN) LIKE YOURSELF?

spelling

A I don't know. I think it's -- I really don't know the figure -- I just vaguely remember the figure 4,000.

Q WOULD THAT INCLUDE PEOPLE IN HIDING AS WELL?

A I think so.

I have the statistics at home if you're interested. I can give them to you. I don't carry numbers in my head. I'm terrible at that.

Q I'M CURIOUS TO RECONCILE IN MY OWN MIND HOW IT COMES ABOUT THAT YOUR FAMILY AND

PEOPLE LIKE YOU SURVIVED THE WAR OPENLY AS JEWS IN BERLIN GIVEN THAT THE FABRIC ACTION, AS I UNDERSTOOD, WAS A RATHER FINAL EXPULSION OF THE JEWS, EVEN THOSE WHO WERE DOING WAR RELATED INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES. IN OTHER WORDS, EVEN SOME PEOPLE WHO WERE USEFUL TO THE GOVERNMENT WAR EFFORT. DO YOU HAVE SOME SENSE OR EVEN SPECULATION AS TO WHY FROM SOME ADMINISTRATIVE POINT OF VIEW? IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU SUGGESTED EARLIER THE GESTAPO WERE HIGHLY CONSISTENT AND AWARE OF WHAT THEY WERE DOING, AND YOU WERE VERY WELL-DOCUMENTED. WHEN YOU WENT AT YOUR FIRST ARREST THEY HAD INFORMATION ABOUT YOU AND SO FORTH, SO CLEARLY IT WASN'T A SLIP UP, A MENTAL OR BUREAUCRATIC SLIP UP. THEY WERE QUITE AWARE OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU EXISTED. DO YOU HAVE SOME SENSE WHAT WAS BEHIND THAT? DID PERHAPS THE PROTEST MOVEMENT HAVE SOME --

A I think, basically -- I think, because at the time I didn't think that but, since I have done some reading on it myself and since it's being researched now and I have some articles on that too. I've been trying to figure that out too. Why did I survive? I mean, I've

questioned myself that all the time. And why some people like me did not, because there were others who did not. Especially, I think I read somewhere that in other cities, people like us, (gerstuszune), what they called Jews by law, did not survive. They were deported eventually. It was postponed, their deportation, because they really didn't know what to do with us. And the reason they didn't know what to do with us is they really were afraid of alienating the Aryan, quote/unquote, Aryan population. Anyone, as the Nazis termed it arisch-versippt, Aryan connected, Jewish members, they were set aside. Because I think they were really not so sure of their support from these people. So I think they kept it at bay for a while. But, as I say, I know in other cities they were deported and/or they went into hiding. Some other way of surviving.

Now, my theory is that in '43, because of the protest -- and it's documented now -- Goebbels, in his diary, he kept quite careful diary of little details, and he heard about the protest. And -- but he mixed up the streets. He mentioned another detention center where there

was maybe a protest too, I'm not sure. Apparently there was one but a very, very small one. So he said, "These people are demonstrating now. And because of that the" -- what is it? Security service, (seeshahisen). S.D. wants to deport these people. You see?

spelling

Now, there was -- your question was we were so available. And it's true. Jews were extremely available in the war effort. They were very conscientious workers and the Nazis had to admit that even. In fact, who was it? Somebody by the name of Speer, I think, who was in charge of it. He wanted -- he spoke up for the Jews. He said, "We need these people. Don't deport them." And Hitler said or Goebbels said or these (Juryofiles) said -- accused him, "Oh, no. We can find other workers for them." And that's how they imported foreign workers in order to replace us, the Jewish workers.

spelling

There was a lot of debate among the Nazis themselves. But -- so as I say, according to Goebbels' diary. And that's the only way I can explain why we survived, is that Goebbels said, "We can't deport them now. The S.D., the

security service, wants us to send them away, but not right now. We'll take care of them later," he said. And so that was in '43, now remember.

And as I said before, Stalingrad had fallen. Things did not look good in the Russian front. Things did not look good in Berlin. The people were getting more and more disgruntled because of the air raids, the rations. It was pretty bad. Pretty bad. And so I just feel that they had too much to do with their own threat. Feeling threatened by the allies. And one other thing, there is a diary of a German woman, journalist -- and again I should have brought it -- because she documents -- she talks about the Fabric Action and she goes onto '45. And there is several entries and I marked them all where she knew -- she had some connection to S.S. or -- she was a journalist so naturally she heard things. That a few times they had planned to deport us. She said, "It doesn't look good for the Mitzlinger." We heard they were going to.

And there was one incredible incident -- and I really forgot -- where she

talked about deporting us, and it was quite late in the war, and someone from the Red Cross put in a good word for something. I don't know the whole story. So it was -- something was going on.

I always felt that maybe -- my own, and I can't verify it, my own theory was that after the protest that people knew about it; that things were happening to the Jewish and that they heard about the protest; that Goebbels may have wanted to leave a few Jews as a token and say, "Well, see, we don't kill them all. We don't deport them all." That we were sort of -- but I don't know whether Goebbels would even think of that. It was possible because it was getting very, very -- and also, don't forget there were plots against Hitler.

There was in '44, too, and there were other, I'm sure, resistance. This journalist talks about she was an underground. She handed out leaflets against Hitler. So the whole thing was just percolating this situation -- and I really felt -- think that the Nazis were not as secure anymore as they used to be.

Q DO YOU RECALL ANY CONTACT BETWEEN YOU OR YOUR FAMILY AND OTHER JEWS, EITHER THOSE LIVING IN HIDING --

A (Shakes head side to side.)

Q NONE WHATSOEVER WITH PEOPLE IN HIDING?

A We didn't. We didn't. There were other people who -- there was one other family like ours. Exactly like ours. In fact, I met the man in Berlin in 1988, and I talked to him. Exactly my same position. I think the mother converted too. Maybe even not. Maybe his mother didn't even convert. Anyway, they were hiding Jews.

Q THEY WERE HIDING JEWS?

A Uh-huh, hiding some Jews.

Q THEY WERE LIVING OPENLY AS JEWS AND THEY WERE HIDING JEWS?

A Or helping them to hide. But we didn't know anyone. We didn't -- I didn't even know there were Jews living in hiding.

Q WAS THERE ANY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS DURING THAT TWO-YEAR PERIOD?

A No.

Q DO YOU RECALL YOM KIPPUR? IT WASN'T EVEN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT WAS HIGH HOLY DAY?

A No.

Q YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANY JEWISH OBSERVANCE WHATSOEVER?

A No, I don't remember. I remember only -- and I must have been very little. And it must have been before 1938, so I was less than 10. Maybe I was 8. I don't remember. Because I went to the synagogue and I observed Yom Kippur. And my mother went with me. And I fasted that day. So that's -- and as I say, my mother came with me to the synagogue. She didn't stay the whole time. She didn't want me to fast either. I was too young. But I did. I wanted to. And after 1938 there wasn't much anymore.

Q IN THE BOOK YOU MENTIONED, LAST JEWS IN BERLIN, THERE IS -- ONE OF THE THEMES THAT RUNS THROUGH THE BOOK IS THE PRESENCE OF THE SWEDISH CHURCH AS A HELPFUL ORGANIZATION IN MANY WAYS.

DO YOU HAVE ANY RECOLLECTION OF THEM?

A No.

Q ONLY YOUR READING ABOUT IT LATER?

A Right. The only one that -- the only thing -- I do want to talk about that though because that falls into the forced labor period.

This girl Margot I was showing you. Her and her brother was in an underground Zionists -- or whatever it was -- Jewish underground. She didn't talk much about it because she wasn't allowed to. But I know from the remarks she dropped that they helped Jews either get out if possible or live in hiding and some other activities. I don't know, but from her -- one day she came to work and she told us that -- and I guess that was part of their job too. She told us that a man had come to their organization who had escaped the concentration camp. I don't know which one. It wasn't Auschwitz, that I know. But he had escaped a concentration camp and he had the most grizzly story to tell us. And she told us what happened. And that was the first time we knew -- I mean, I knew all along that people died in these camps. And I knew when I was arrested that the people

who were sent left that they would not -- they would be killed.

Q YOU SAID YOU HAD A STORY ABOUT THAT? WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

A So the story that she told us was in that camp the S.S. took some of the Jews out to a lake near the concentration camp and they wanted to do their sharp shooting practices. Instead of using their regular targets, whatever it was. They had these people, some of them, go into the lake up to their neck and what they did -- one of the things -- the conditions was that the people who were standing at the shore were mostly either relatives or very close friends of these people in the lake and they would use their heads as targets. And he told us that he witnessed that because he was on the shore. So we knew.

Q THEY BROUGHT THE RELATIVES JUST TO WATCH THIS HAPPEN?

A Right. And if the relatives would do anything, move or cry out or say "Don't," or whatever, they would also have to go into the lake, if anyone objected to the sharp shooting

practice. So he told us. And I remember that so vividly. And then -- and he, himself, came to the organization to go into hiding. And he said, "I swore then -- I had a good look at these S.S. men -- I swore then that if I survive this, I will find these people. And I will bear witness." So that's the only incident that we heard about. It was enough, because we felt that -- and I don't remember what year that was when he told us that. And so, I mean, from her I knew there were underground, but I didn't hear of any others like the Swedish Red Cross.

Q DID YOU HAVE ACCESS TO BBC OR ANY NEWS LIKE THAT?

A Yeah. Well, I told you that in our apartment there was a German woman living and she had her radio. She kept her radio. My mother's sister also kept her radio. I heard regular news on her radio, but she never listened to the BBC. But I vaguely remember that (Foshmit), who lived with us, might have once in a great while. I grew up believing, as my father told me always, "Das wender hamt waren," the war has ears. I grew up believing that because I was

spelling

very little when my father told me that and everybody felt that. I sometimes even wondered what those ears looked like in the war. [Laughter] I think once in a while we did or she would do it. But I don't remember what we heard really. As I say, I just was partly oblivious to politics.

Q DO YOU RECALL ANY PARTICULAR MOMENTS OF BENEVOLENCE FROM FRIENDS OR RELATIVES, PEOPLE YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE THE WAR OR, FOR THAT MATTER, MOMENTS OF CRUELTY FROM PEOPLE YOU HAD THOUGHT WERE FRIENDS?

YOU HAD MENTIONED LAST TIME ABOUT YOUR COUSIN WITH WHOM YOU WERE VERY CLOSE AND YOU FELT RATHER BETRAYED BY JOINING THE HITLER YOUTH?

A Right, joining the Hitler youth. Right.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER OTHER KINDS OF EVENTS LIKE THAT? FOR EXAMPLE, YOUR MOTHER'S SISTER IS LUTHERN.

A Not practicing, though.

Q NOT PRACTICING?

A The whole family was not practicing at all.

Q BUT SHE WAS IN A POSITION TO, AND MUST HAVE FELT SOME PRESSURE KNOWING THAT SHE WAS AN ASSOCIATE OF JEWS IN BERLIN. SO I IMAGINE THAT SHE AND OTHER PEOPLE THAT YOU HAD CONTACT WITH FROM TIME TO TIME COULD VIEW YOU AS A DANGER TO THEM.

A Oh, they could, but they didn't. They didn't.

Q SO THE PEOPLE WHO WERE CLOSEST TO YOU STOOD BY AS YOUR --

A Oh, yes. I was working most of the time, so when I came home I didn't go visit or didn't go -- but on whatever the day off or other times, I would visit my aunt and my cousin too, I guess. Although he went to the -- in '44.

My brother visited often. And what is remarkable, I mean, as I say, I don't have any explanation for it.

What is remarkable is that right across from my aunt's house -- she was a corner house. We lived two blocks. Right across from her was the S.S. headquarters. Not head head quarters, but some branch -- overflow. And the whole house, four stories high, was full of S.S.

And they lived right across and they saw us go in and out of that store and nothing ever happened. So I had never, no. And my other aunt -- my mother's family always helped. And my father had two non-Jewish friends who came to visit us. Kept visiting us. And I told you when we were arrested, one of them even tried to -- was just shocked -- came and tried to find us and find out where we are. They kept -- they were loyal. But then again, they were also very strongly anti-Nazi.

Q YOU ALSO MENTIONED THAT BEFORE THE WAR WHEN YOUR FATHER COULDN'T FIND WORK OR EARLY INTO THE WAR, THAT THERE WAS -- THERE WERE SOME ARGUMENTS BETWEEN YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR FATHER ABOUT MONEY AND SO ON?

A Help, yeah.

Q I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THAT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A TREMENDOUS PRESSURE ON THEM NOW.

DURING THE TWO YEARS FROM '43 TO '45, WAS YOUR FAMILY LIFE RELATIVELY HARMONIOUS DESPITE ALL THAT OR WAS THERE A OF TENSION.

A Yeah. You mean my immediate family?

Q YEAH.

A No. That was not at all. I attribute a lot of my strength to that, that family unity, even now. Whatever differences there might have been, whatever problems my parents might have had under normal circumstances, completely disappeared.

My mother was extremely self-sacrificing and self-abnegating. I mean, she just always put us first. It was very hard on her. I know on her health. But she never complained and tried everything possible to find us whatever extra food or extra -- she had to wash my dirty work clothes because that's the only one I had. And they were really dirty. They were black. Oil was coming through to my skin. I had a black stain on my skin for days sometimes. And she had to wash this. I don't know how she managed all that.

And my father was often very despondent and maybe even slightly hysterical at times. More so, actually, before I started working. Like I told you, maybe when I came home late from school. I could never understand it

why he was so hysterical my coming home five or ten minutes late. I understand now.

So, no. That was the support we gave each other. And the support we got from family and friends I think is very, very important in my life. Not only just my family, but also the people I worked with. Friendships were extremely important. I don't know whether -- I sometimes think whether I would have come out sane at all if it hadn't been for that.

Q WAS THERE A SENSE THAT -- I HAD ASKED YOU IF YOU WERE FOLLOWING THE BBC NEWS AND SOON -- BUT MORE GENERALLY, WAS THERE SOME SENSE THAT YOU KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT THE COURSE OF THE WAR AND THAT YOU WERE EXPECTING THAT YOU KNEW THINGS WERE GOING POORLY FOR THE GERMANS IN RUSSIA, AND SO ON, AND THAT THERE WAS SOME ANTICIPATION THAT MAYBE ANOTHER SIX MONTHS, MAYBE ANOTHER YEAR; THAT THERE WAS SOME FEELING THAT THIS WOULD COME TO A FAVORABLE CONCLUSION AT SOME POINT?

A I don't have too much of a recollection of that. I know I remember only a couple of incidents and one was that (Foshmit's)

spelling

husband was a soldier in Russia and one of the times he came home -- and I don't know when it was -- he told us stories about fighting on the eastern front. And I remember only one thing he told us. He said that the Russians -- the mass of people they had. The mass of soldiers. Even if they didn't have as good ammunition as Germans did. He said -- and I think he was in the infantry. And I never forget that image. But he said they would come wave after wave. We would shoot the first and the other ones would follow, would step over their dead. And another wave of Russians came, soldiers. Just let themselves be butchered. He said, "It ruined us psychologically." We just couldn't shoot them anymore. That's one story I remember. There is just mass of people. They have just manpower and also cannon fire.

And I think I knew from that. We knew and we heard some reports that things weren't going well. So, anyway, we didn't believe what we heard on the radio. Like I said (Foshmit) had a radio and we heard all the "Victory. Germans are victorious!" And I heard

spelling

Hitler quite a few times. And also Goebbels. And on my aunt's radio -- and the only other that I remember that the war may be over soon. Of course, soon we heard that the Russians were not far from Berlin.

But I remember one incident in 1945 -- it must have been -- when did Roosevelt die?

Q '45.

A April, right? Sometime in April '45. And I remember coming home from my aunt's. My mother's sister had us listening to the radio. It must have been on my day off. And Roosevelt had died. And I went home. I was in a trance practically. I thought, Roosevelt dead? What's going to happen to us? Because we always thought of Roosevelt as our friend. My father always made him out to be the Moses. He's going to lead us to the promise land. He really did. He revered Roosevelt. He was a saint. And I think other Jews felt that way too. We know better now. And so when he died and I went home and I told my father, he was just in shock. And he said, "Who's going to follow him?" And we didn't know that the war was going to be over soon.

Even if the war was over, we did not know who would follow Roosevelt, and whether he would be as friendly to Jews as Roosevelt was because we wanted to emigrate. We didn't know if we would ever get out of Germany. That's the only real memory I have of the outside of listening to the news.

Q RITA, YOU WERE 14 AND 15 DURING THIS TIME?

A But by the end of the war, I was 17.

Q SO YOUR -- OBVIOUSLY, YOUR EDUCATION HAD BEEN TOTALLY INTERRUPTED?

A Uh-huh.

Q WAS THERE AN ASCENT AT HOME, TO -- FOR YOU TO READ OR STUDY IN SOME WAY, OR AT THIS POINT IS IT JUST REALLY A MATTER OF GETTING THROUGH THE DAY AND WEEK AND SURVIVING AND HAVING ENOUGH TO EAT, OR WAS THERE SOME -- STILL SOME ENCOURAGEMENT?

A Intellectual nourishment?

Q YEAH.

A I'm glad you asked that question because -- well, that brings up a lot of things.

I had access to books. First of all, (Foshmit) had sort of a library. My aunt had a library. And reading was always important to me. Not to my brother and maybe not to others. My mother didn't read much. My father didn't read much. But reading was my lifeline. And I remember in one instance too, because I was already a force laborer, and there was a woman in our apartment building, a doctor's wife, (Kaiser), I think it was. And we talked before the air raids, we were talking and I think I was always saying is what I miss is not having anything to read and not having anything to do. And so she wanted to give me French lessons. And I think she gave me two French lessons and I was too tired. I couldn't keep up. But I always read something. I always took a book and I even took books down to the air raid shelter. It was like my connection to some kind of normal life and some sanity, I think. I couldn't do much reading, but I know I tried.

And I also remember we couldn't listen to music. We didn't have a radio. Music was always important in our family. My father,

especially, because he was a musician. And I remember once during one of those dark, dark days. I heard some music coming from way back and I just soaked it up. But that's all really -- but as I say, yeah, really I tried. Even if the bombs were falling.

Q CAN WE TAKE A BREAK?

A Okay.

I wanted to show you a picture of my cousin and me. [Showing interviewer a picture]

Q OH, HOW CUTE.

WHILE YOU WERE TALKING, YOU MENTIONED YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE GESTAPO AND THAT YOU HAD A NUMBER OF THEM. COULD YOU KIND OF GO INTO THOSE?

A Well, mostly they were not Gestapos but S.S. They were mostly men in uniforms. The Gestapo didn't wear uniforms. I don't know. So I know I said that I haven't had any negative experiences. I think I told you one when this S.S., young S.S. man came to the factory and started flirting with me. And that's always -- that sort of puzzled me. And maybe that's

sexist. You told me about an incident. But they flirted with me.

And when I was arrested, not the ones -- I only remember one, actually. The other ones were all very official and took care of business as usual. But there was one when we went to Rosenstrasse, and we had to show our identification cards again, and we were -- men separated from women, children from adults. There was this one S.S. officer who looked at me and, as I say, I did not look Jewish. I was blonde and blue-eyed -- or gray-eyed. And he didn't believe that I was Jewish. And he sort of asked me and he smiled, what I thought was at the time flirtatious, being flirtatious. So that's the only real thing. I haven't -- and the same with the S.S. I had to pass everyday when I went to work the S.S. guard across the street from us. I never had any, whatever, cat calls or anything from them. They never bothered us. They just stood out. So, no. As I say, personally, I never had anything negative.

Q WELL, I HAD HEARD BEFORE I STARTED TO INTERVIEW YOU THAT YOU'D HAD A COUPLE OF --

WELL, I MAY HAVE HEARD IT WRONG. BUT I HAD HEARD THAT IT WAS, LIKE, REALLY THE S.S. HAD SAVED YOU.

WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT THAT IN THE FABRIC ACTION? WHAT YOU WERE JUST DESCRIBING?

A How do you mean "saved us"?

Q FROM DEPORTATION OR BEING PICKED UP OR SOMETHING?

A (Shakes head side to side.)

Q I PROBABLY HEARD IT WRONG.

A No, they didn't save us. Not the S.S. who saved us, it was Goebbels because he called off. He said, "We have to send these people home." Ironically -- that perhaps -- Goebbels decided not to deport us and that was after, I don't know, March 5th or 6th protest, when the women called the S.S. men murderers. But the S.S., themselves, had no power. They had no legitimacy to do anything, to release us. I mean, I never -- I know there were cases where they actually helped people, helped Jews, but I never experienced that.

Q AND WAS THAT INCIDENT THAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT WHERE THE GESTAPO WOMAN PUT HER ARM AROUND YOU?

A No, not the Gestapo woman.

Q THE OTHER WOMAN?

A In front of the Gestapo woman, put her arm around us.

Okay, the Gestapo woman saw us in the air raid shelter; right? Our cellar; right? And the first time she came, she saw our yellow stars and she didn't want to have Jews in the same room with her. So this doctor's wife, another tenant -- I started crying and so she put her arm around me in front of the Gestapo woman and said, "Don't worry. We'll find you something."

Q AND WHAT HAPPENED THEN? YOU WERE ABLE TO STAY THERE OR THEY FIND YOU SOMEPLACE ELSE?

A They found us another room right next to the big room, uh-huh. Small room where we stayed.

Q OKAY.

I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU, ANYWAY, ABOUT THE AIR RAID SHELTERS, BECAUSE YOU SAID EARLIER WHEN YOU WERE AT WORK, YOU COULDN'T GO DOWN TO THEM. BUT WHEN YOU WEREN'T AT WORK, YOU

COULD GO DOWN TO THE SHELTERS?

A We could in our apartment house, yes. That's quite unusual because Jews are not allowed to be, certainly not in public area. I mean, you couldn't go in public air raid shelters when you wore the star. And we started wearing the star in '41, and that's when the bombing started. Before that even. But our tenants, the tenants in our house, let us be down there until the Gestapo woman moved in and she did not let us be in the one big room which was fortified. But there was a room right next to it and that's where we stayed. Right next to the big room. And they let us.

I think if we had been caught -- first time I was in (Osenstrausser) there was an air raid and we weren't allowed to go down to the cellar so we had to --

Spelling

Q I READ THAT THE AIR RAID SHELTERS WERE A FAVORITE PLACE FOR GESTAPO TO GO TO CHECK FOR JEWS. DID YOU EVER HAVE THAT HAPPEN? YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE GESTAPO WOMAN THAT MOVED INTO THE BUILDING. IS THAT WHAT HAPPENED?

A What do you mean?

No, she just moved in. I mean, she took the apartment of someone else right next door to us. But she didn't come in to check our air raid shelter. No one ever came to check it. I think they only did that to public air raid shelters. There were lots of public air raid shelters. Not in private, as far as I know. I don't know. But ours was never checked. I mean, Gestapo, S.S., never came to check if there were Jews in the air raid shelter.

Q DID YOU EVER --

A But in the public ones I'm sure they did. Sometimes people were hiding in subway, down below in the subway station too.

Q DID YOU EVER ENCOUNTER MUCH ANTISEMITISM IN THIS AIR RAID SHELTER OR ANYWHERE ELSE BESIDES MAYBE WHEN YOU WERE AT WORK?

A No. You mean in our air raid shelter in our apartment?

Q YEAH.

A Hum-um. No, not that I remember.

Q SO IT WAS PRETTY MUCH UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE?

A Yeah. In fact, there was one party

-- one button-carrying member of the party who was -- had some kind of position. I'm not sure if it was the air raid warden. He never bothered. He wasn't -- I don't think he was. He may have been a Nazi, but I really doubt that he was antisemitic.

And that's another whole story with him because -- my father, when the Russians came, spoke up for him. They wanted to send him to Siberia and my father said, as a witness, "He's never, never expressed any kind of antiSemitism. Never bothered us." On the contrary, said his hi to us, good morning. Never bothered us and he spoke up for him. Because my father was called by the Russians to witness against all the others. And he -- they had a whole yard full of people, of Nazis. And my father could only, in good conscience, say, "Yes, this man." And I don't know -- my father -- because I haven't -- I was too young and I didn't. He said, "This man, yes, was a vicious Nazi." And so they took him. But they took the man from our apartment building. They didn't believe my father. Just because he belonged to the party and so -- and my

father was -- he didn't -- I mean he wouldn't have protected someone because he hated them. He called them all kinds of names.

Q DID YOU HEAR MUCH GRUMBLING AGAINST HITLER OR ANY OF THAT KIND OF THING?

A Yes, from just within our very, very close circle, like (Foshmit) and my father's friends, my father's non-Jewish friends.

spelling

Q WHAT ABOUT THE AIR RAID SHELTER WHEN PEOPLE WERE --

A I don't remember any. I don't think they would dare. Because there were a couple of convinced Nazis in the house, but I don't remember any grumblings. People were grumbling against the air raids, but people were grumbling against the British, the American plights, but not -- I don't remember any. But in close, yeah. In the close friends, yeah. We did. As much as we dared. We really -- it was feared it penetrated thick, thick walls. It's amazing how terror can do -- how terror can hold people really in silence.

Q RITA, YOU HAD SAID EARLIER THAT WHEN THIS MAN RETURNED FROM ONE OF THE CAMPS,

THAT YOU HEARD IN SOME GRAPHIC DETAIL OF THE ATROCITIES THAT WERE GOING ON. BUT YOU ALSO SAID, "WELL, REALLY WE ALREADY KNEW." YOU ALREADY KNEW IN YOUR HEART THAT PEOPLE WEREN'T COMING BACK AND SO ON.

A Um-hum.

Q WHAT IS YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THE QUESTION OF HOW MUCH THE GERMAN COMMUNITY KNEW ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE CAMPS?

A I don't know whether any -- how many people knew. I only knew from that account, I felt as early --

Okay, as early as '42, maybe even earlier, when the deportation started. Systematically, people disappeared. We heard about people being deported and, as I told you earlier, we sent them packages, sometimes, whatever we could find. We didn't have much. But we had -- they could still write cards. They were heavily censored and the only thing they could do was ask for food or for clothes, so we did. And we knew people asked -- desperately asked for food and for clothes, that things were on the edge then. And from that we felt, all

right, these were labor camps and why don't they take care of their people? They want them to work. Why don't they feed them? Why don't they clothe them? That was always our logic. And so as early as that, we knew that they were in desperate straights.

And then when -- and, of course, I don't know -- we knew also what happened at Kristallnacht. Maybe I didn't know as much about it as much as my father had, because he worked for the Jewish community and he helped people get out and often people who had just come out of concentration camp after the 1948 Pogrom. They had to leave sometimes within 48 hours. So my father took care of them and got them out and they had, sometimes, tales what happened at concentration camps.

So we knew and it was never for me -- and because maybe I was so young -- the specter of death was never as immediate. I mean, it was there, but life went on. I tried to make life livable and normal. Respective death was, of course, the bombs. Jewish death was somehow hush-hush for me, personally. And the only time

I was faced with it, when I was arrested, I told you, when I was on the truck and thought they were going to blow it up. I never heard about it. I mean, they did kill people in trucks; right? In the east particularly. I didn't know that, but I was intuitive. I felt it. I was afraid they would shoot me when I was going in.

So the idea of death was never far away; and the other people died. And I knew that those people, when I was in the huge detention hall they were going out, I knew they were going to their death. I knew it. And I also, as I said, I was sure that if they don't send me home that I may die. But we didn't have concrete reports except for this one escape.

But on the other hand, I told you this woman, this (Andreas Fisher) who wrote the journal, she knew about the gas chambers. She talks about it in her diary.

spelling

Q WAS SHE JEWISH?

A No. No. She had lots of Jewish friends, so she helped Jews go into hiding. She had a lot of Jewish friends. She names them. And she even talks about the gas chambers and

mask raids as early as, I don't know, '43, or whenever the entry came in. So I don't remember.

Q DO YOU HAVE ANY FEELINGS IN RETROSPECT, THEN, ABOUT THE GERMAN POPULATION STATING THAT THEY KNEW NOTHING, AND SO FORTH, AT THE END OF THE WAR WHEN EVERYTHING CAME TO LIGHT? DO YOU HAVE SOME SYMPATHY FOR THAT -- FOR THAT EXPRESSION?

A I have some understanding. I don't know whether it's sympathy, but I have some understanding for it because we didn't know. But that was because it wasn't Berlin. They really didn't know how to keep it. But I don't have any sympathy or understanding for people who lived near concentration camps and could smell them and could see the people come out bedraggled, emaciated. The work troops, people saw them. German people saw them and were aghast sometimes. I don't have any sympathy for them that they didn't know.

Q I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION RIGHT OFF THIS ONE. BECAUSE I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT THE ONLY THING I COULD FIGURE IT COULD BE WAS EITHER SUBCONSCIOUS DENIAL OR CONSCIOUS DENIAL OF

KNOWLEDGE BECAUSE, I MEAN, EVEN IN EARLY ORANIENBURG WASN'T IN ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF BERLIN?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q AND THE CAMPS -- THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF THEM ALL OVER OF GERMANY. SO TO ME -- I HAVE THE SAME QUESTION. TO ME, I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE COULD HAVE NOT KNOWN. NOT KNOWN, MAYBE, NOT ABOUT THE OVENS LIKE IN AUSCHWITZ, BUT ABOUT THE CAMPS. I MEAN, EVEN IN BERLIN. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT SOME?

A Well, I can and I can't because, as I say, I was young. I was really too young to understand and to know it all. I don't know how much my parents knew or the friends of my father. My father would not tell us.

My brother and I corresponded about that. He says -- because I asked him once. He said, "No, our parents" -- and especially my father because he was out in the war, "protected us from the worst knowledge." And my father, I'm sure, heard stories from people he was working with or working for. So I really -- I can't talk about it. I'm not even -- I can't even tell you whether I knew there were concentration camps in

existence. I knew about labor camps. The name Arbeitlager is very engraved in my memory but KZ was not until later.

Q KZ?

A KZ concentration camp. "Concentracion," they said.

That was not until later and that was also very, very mysterious to me. And with my father or what other people knew about it, adults knew about it, I don't know. As I say, for me personally -- but I know that there were people in Berlin who knew about it. And they also not only knew about concentration camps, but like Magdeburg, which was closed, but they also knew what was going on right in the middle of Berlin in the S.A., when the storm troopers in the cellars. People were being tortured there. People knew about that. I didn't much. So that whole question is something, I think, for history, for later historians to unravel. I mean, we can speculate.

We even had a topic in my group about bystanders and how much people knew and how much people are denying that they knew and just

don't want -- I mean, that's a very, very complex issue.

And -- or how people, if they knew, were just afraid to know. Knowledge was a fearful thing. So I don't know.

Q DO YOU RECALL THE HORST WESSEL SONG?

A I know it existed. I don't have any personal association.

Q YOU DON'T RECALL HEARING THAT?

A No. I may. I'm sure -- maybe that is one of those things I did not deny where I repressed. My brother remembers. And I told you some incident what happened to children calling me Judensau, Jew pig, and forcing me to say something in Hebrew. My brother remembers things they said. Little rhymes they said. And I don't know that he remembers the Horst Wessel song. He may. I don't know. I don't --

I don't even remember whether I ever had to raise my hand how Hitler -- because Jews weren't allowed to do that. I don't remember ever doing it. I don't remember ever singing the national anthem in school. Maybe I

did. I don't remember.

As I say, I don't remember. I was at that time 6 or 7 and 8, and then I went to a Jewish school so then I wouldn't be anyway. But very early I went to a Jewish school.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER ALL THE HARANGUING? ON THE RADIO -- I KNOW GOEBBELS AND HITLER DID IT. DID PEOPLE HARANGUE ABOUT THE PEOPLE AND JEWS IN THE STREET? DID YOU EVER HEAR ANY HARANGUING LIKE THAT?

A No, I didn't. Excuse me. But I remember parades, people marching. But I don't remember anything about them except that they marched and they sang. Whether they sang -- well, the Horst Wessel song is what?

Q THAT'S THE ONE THAT --

A Where the Jews' blood from our knives, spurting from our knives? Huh-uh, I don't remember that, hearing that.

Q OKAY. I'VE BEEN WONDERING BOTH HOW IT AFFECTED YOU, BUT ALSO HOW PEOPLE COULD HEAR THAT AND NOT EXPECT A PROBLEM HERE?

A I know. Well, my big question is: Why don't they suspect a problem in 1938 when the

synagogues were burning and Jewish stores. That was five years after Hitler. That was the first overt -- really the first overt sign and expression of antiSemitism. I mean, there were others, but they were Goebbels -- I mean Hitler never, never, never was hiding his antiSemitism as early as 1933.

Q YOU MEAN THE FIRST PHYSICAL VIOLENCE?

A Yeah. Well, not the physical violence was in '38.

In '33 there was a boycott and there was the propaganda. There was the Stuermer. And I don't remember because -- maybe I couldn't read at the time either, but the die juden sind Verderven, the Jews are our misfortune. That was quite, quite, quite common. But Hitler was -- never made any secret about his antiSemitism in his speeches. And why people didn't question themselves, "What is this man all about?" I don't know.

Q DID YOU LISTEN TO GOEBBELS AND HITLER MUCH ON THE RADIO?

A No, I couldn't. It made me sick

to my stomach and also it was frightening. I did, yeah, Goebbels. I remember Hitler was just too scary and, I don't know how, his voice, his -- I don't know how he impressed me. I thought the man was really insane because he was yelling. You could almost not hear his words because he yelled and screamed. He was almost sometimes inarticulate, as I remember. And with Goebbels, he was much more controlled. He was the intellectual and he was much, to me as a child -- I mean as a young -- was more scary because I felt he could manipulate crowds. I mean, Hitler manipulated crowds, of course. But a lot of people -- Hitler's hysteria was just always to me, was way out somewhere. But Goebbels was articulate and intelligent in some of his ways. So he was frightening to me. He was also calmer when he spoke. He was really frightening.

Q YOU DESCRIBED BEING AT A PARADE AS A VERY YOUNG GIRL.

A Very young.

Q YOU SAW HITLER, GOEBBELS AND (DEERING), ALL THREE. DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING AT ALL?

Goering?

spelling

A No, other than Hitler standing with the hand and smiling. They were all smiling.

Q ALL IN THE SAME CAR OR DIFFERENT CAR?

A Yeah. They were all in the same car as I remember.

Q WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT THE CROWD?

A Cheering. Waving their little flags. Raising their arms in salute.

Q DO YOU RECALL OTHER JEWISH PEOPLE THERE OTHER THAN YOU AND YOUR FATHER?

A Well, I don't know whether there were other Jewish people there. That was '34 maybe.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR FATHER'S ATTITUDE OR ANY PARTICULAR RECOLLECTIONS OF THAT?

A Oh, he just called them scoundrels.

Q SCOUNDRELS?

A Scoundrels, yeah. The something -- but I don't remember. And I don't know why he took us there -- took me there. I don't remember my brother being there. He may have been there. But I just remember sitting on my father's shoulder and I don't know why he did. Maybe he

just felt "Know thy enemy." I don't know. "Let's have a look at these scoundrels. What is all about them? Why are people" -- and there is something in every person.

Maybe it's, excuse me, maybe a male thing about parades. Let's watch a parade. So I don't know. I really don't know why he took us there. That was the one and only time he did.

Q DID PEOPLE GO TO THESE PARADES AND THINGS BECAUSE IT WAS SORT OF LIKE IF YOU DIDN'T DO IT YOU MIGHT BE SUSPECTED ANTI-NAZI OR NOT REALLY FOR HITLER? OR PEOPLE TEND TO GO JUST ONLY THE PEOPLE WHO REALLY WERE ANTISEMITIC?

A I don't know. Again I don't -- I can't personally vouch for that. The only thing I did come across that in, again, in that (Andreas Fisher) book, she said the people who go to parades or go to those, listen to those speeches, she claims are convinced Nazis. And they were a minority. And she felt that -- she had some theory about it that they were -- those people who went to these parades or the speeches were practically hired to cheer -- like people do that, I guess, in entertainment world too. And

Spelling

that's what she said. That's the only response I have.

That she claims there were not that many people actually. But those who did, really shouted because they were asked to. They were almost commissioned to shout and to make it even swell, the sound, like amplifying. So that's -- but I don't know what -- I have a feeling that only those who really, really, really loved Hitler -- there were some -- there were quite a few, especially women. I don't know what they saw in him, but women were just swooning over him, literally swooning. Like he was -- like they did over Elvis Presley.

Q ALICE MILLER PROPOSES THE REASON FOR THAT IS THAT THE CHILD RAISING PRACTICES IN GERMANY WERE QUITE ABUSIVE -- AS REALLY THEY ARE WORLDWIDE.

A I think worldwide, yes.

Q AND THAT PEOPLE WERE RESPONDING, KIND OF, TO THE ABUSER THAT THEY HAD KNOWN, LIKE, AS A FATHER OR WHATEVER. SORT OF LIKE NOWADAYS THEY -- IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS THAT YOU'RE VERY LIKELY, IF YOU WERE RAISED BY AN ABUSIVE PARENT,

TO MARRY A PERSON THAT WAS ABUSIVE TO YOU. IT'S SORT OF A LOVE/HATE THING.

A Yeah.

Q THAT'S WHAT ALICE MILLER THINKS A LOT OF IT WAS.

A Probably. Yeah, and I think that the hero worship and certain nations -- it's a cultural thing. I don't know why women. There may be all kinds of reasons. There may be psychological reasons why they had that kind of -- whether Hitler represented a father figure to them, or savior. Also a savior figure for many because they gave them bread and jobs.

The women didn't have it very well in Germany. Women were second class citizens. They were the breeders. They didn't have -- I mean they worked often at men's jobs because men went out and got themselves killed. But they didn't have the same status as men did. They were -- you'll see pictures of the German mother with her child, but it was as breeder. It wasn't as a person in her own right. So I don't know why they should worship a man like that.

Q ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT BEFORE THE

WAR OR DURING THE WAR?

A During the war. Before and during the war.

Q DID IT KIND OF INCREASE DURING THE WAR, DURING HITLER YEARS. BECAUSE, I MEAN, HITLER MADE A BIG DEAL ABOUT BREEDING. YOU KNOW, THE LEGENDS BORN AND ALL THE THINGS HE DID. IN FACT, I KNOW A GERMAN MAN WHO TELLS THE STORY ABOUT A NEIGHBOR WHOSE DAUGHTER DENOUNCED HER FATHER BECAUSE THE FATHER GOT REAL ANGRY WHEN THE DAUGHTER GOT PREGNANT. SHE WAS 14, I THINK. AND SO THE GESTAPO CAME AND TOOK HIM AWAY TO A CAMP FOR -- BECAUSE, I MEAN, HE WAS SUPPOSED TO WELCOME THIS CHILD.

A Uh-huh.

Q AND SO, I MEAN, HITLER REALLY EMPHASIZED THAT I THINK.

A Yeah, he emphasized having motherhood more than marriage even. It didn't matter if you married as long as you produced children for the future thousand year reich. And I suppose, as I say, that's why I say the celebration of motherhood is perhaps important to women who never knew anything else.

Let's not forget that women's liberation didn't get -- well, there was some in the '20s already going on even in Germany. But it wasn't -- it wasn't the fashion to consider yourself a person before a mother or a wife. So I think that had a lot to do with that. And you see pictures of these German mothers, statues like goddesses. And a man who can do that, create that kind of image in a women, say I am somebody. So maybe that would appeal to them. I don't know. I mean, I don't know.

The man just always sent just shivers down my spine when I listened to him. Everything about him, the voice, the looks, the -- I mean, I didn't see him much.

Q I READ A BOOK ABOUT THE NAZI DOCTORS. AND THEY HAD A WHOLE SECTION ON EUTHANASIA AND I WAS WONDERING, BECAUSE THE GERMAN POPULATION DID OBJECT TO EUTHANASIA, ENOUGH THEY HAD TO STOP IT. ALTHOUGH -- WELL, THEY KEPT DOING IT, BUT IT WAS QUIET.

A A lot of churches did.

Q WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT THAT CONTROVERSY?

A I don't know anything. I wasn't even aware of it. No, I wasn't even aware of it. And I don't know whether my father was -- knew anything about it. Because I think there was a -- I read now there was one in Berlin.

Can you open that door a little bit. It's hot in here.

There was one in Berlin, I think, where they gassed people right there in a house. I think I saw a picture of it once. I mean, what I know about it now, but at the time I didn't know anything about it.

The only thing -- I was talking to a friend of mine who is an epileptic and he's also Dutch. He's in our group. We talked about that; that he read something to me from a German book about the euthanasia program and he would have been a candidate. Now, because they equated epileptics with feebleminded, with idiots or something. And I told him, well, I had a friend in 1939 -- I had a picture of her -- who was an epileptic and I was always present at her seizures because they usually happened in the morning. And I don't know why they never got

her. I'm sure they knew about her. But she was caught in the Fabric Action in 1943 and, of course, she was deported. So she -- they -- if they had deported her or whatever or killed her because of the epilepsy, I might have known about the euthanasia program, but I didn't.

Q DID YOU EVER GET SICK?

A You know -- that's something -- that's a good question. That's something we, often, survivors we talk about it. It's amazing we didn't get sick. I don't know why that is.

Maybe you as a doctor have an answer for it.

I don't know why I didn't get sick. I got sick afterwards. After the war I came down with -- what is it? Jaundice. And after the war I had all kinds of stomachaches or colds or so. No, I don't know. I don't remember ever being sick. So it's amazing what the human body can endure under duress, and then when it's gone, somehow things collapse or so. Same thing with my mother. She went to sanatorium, I think, in '40, 1940, they sent -- the Jewish community sent her away because, I think, every seven years

there is a sort of decline and she was sent away for a while, but the rest of the time she did okay. And, of course, she became -- everything her whole -- her whole system collapsed in '49 when she came down with Parkinson's disease?

Q THIS IS VERY FASCINATING. THERE SEEMS TO BE A SURVIVAL MECHANISM. YOUR BODY HAS THE WISDOM TO NOT TOLERATE DYSFUNCTION UNTIL A CRISIS PERIOD IS OVER AND THEN ALL SORTS OF THINGS CAN COME UP.

A And talking about sickness. I'd like to just bring up -- because something that -- I don't know whether you know and I don't know.

During the forced labor, I mean, we didn't have enough clothes. We never really -- and I don't remember whether we -- whether I worked with gloves on. I must have worked with gloves on during the winter time otherwise my fingers would have fallen off working outside the whole time. So I probably wore gloves, not very thick gloves because you can't manage too well. So I remember always being cold and frosted. My hands -- even now I can't be in the cold very

long. And one of the things that -- and this is something that I just -- sort of a retrospect. In 1949, I don't know that I told you, I had melanoma. They discovered a melanoma on my left big toe. I was here. I had been here for a year. I left in '48. So they had took a biopsy and they told me what it was. I didn't even know what it was. I didn't know anything about cancer then or malignancy. So they told me they had to operate and they did a radical incision, groin incision because -- took my lymph glands out. They removed the lymph glands.

And so I think the doctors didn't know how I got this. And so I told them about my history. And at that time in 1949 I remembered more about what happened during the two years or three years of forced labor. And I just sort of mentioned and they asked me all sort of things. And I mentioned to them I wore shoes ever too tight for me because I didn't -- Jews had no coupons for textiles or shoes. So whatever shoe that was available -- I don't know where my mother got them. They were too tight for me. And they told me at the time that's why I have

the melanoma. Now, I don't know whether that's medically correct now. I think people -- I know people doubt that. Although, when my daughter was born in 1961, there was a nurse who had a melanoma on her thigh because of a garder belt. The doctors told me then because of the pressure caused the skin cancer to turn to melanoma. So the theory -- the medical theory was that because of extreme pressure that -- so that's why I also now get restitution, money, because of the damage to my health. I had other damages at that time.

Q RESTITUTION FROM GERMANY?

A Uh-huh. Well, I get it -- I have a pension, monthly, that lasts me for life because they consider that a disability and in German it's Gesundheitsscheden, damage to my health. And so I get -- some people get restitution in a big lump sum, but I get it because of this melanoma.

Q AND SINCE 1949?

A Uh-huh. No, the restitution started in -- sometime -- '50, '51. My father arranged it. And I still -- my leg swells up because of the circulation. So I feel -- I

relate it to the -- but I don't know what the medical -- so if you can think of health, I lasted till -- till I was in this country and I had nothing more to fear. Or no more so-called stress, then this came up.

Q WHEN YOU WORKED AT THE RAILROAD STATION, WERE YOU EVER AROUND WHERE PASSENGERS BOARDED?

A Yeah.

Q THE REASON I'M ASKING IS BECAUSE ONE OF THE THINGS I READ IS THAT WAS ONE OF THE PLACES WHERE THE GESTAPO WAS REALLY ON THE LOOK OUT AROUND TRAIN STATIONS OR ON TRAINS. DO YOU RECALL ANYTHING LIKE THAT?

A I don't. I don't really. The only thing, most of the time we worked in the railroad yard where the trains were kept for inspection and repair. Most of the time I worked there. Once in awhile we had to go to the platform and, as soon as the train got in, and start cleaning it. But I don't remember too often it happened. And most of the time the passengers were soldiers. I think that railroad station was mostly for soldier transport so I didn't see any

regular -- I don't remember any regular passengers. They might have used other -- because this one, this railroad connected to the east, to the front.

Q WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU BOARDED, LIKE, THE TRANSIT TO GO HOME AND COME TO WORK. DO YOU RECALL ANYTHING LIKE GESTAPOS ON THE LOOK OUT THERE?

A No, I don't recall. I always felt fairly safe when I was out so I -- if I had any kind of anxiety or trepidation then I might have had an incident. But I don't remember any incident. You mean searching papers or so?

Q YEAH.

A Hum-um, no.

Q DO YOU RECALL DURING THIS WHOLE PERIOD OF '43, SPRING OF '43 TO THE SPRING OF '45 -- AS YOU ARE RECALLING IT, IT SOUNDS SORT OF YOU HAVE A RATHER HOMOGENEOUS SENSE OF THAT PERIOD, WHEREAS WHEN YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE EARLIER TIME IT WAS PUNCTUATED BY EVENTS THAT WERE VERY SHATTERING, SOMETIMES TERRIFYING.

A Right.

Q FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN YOU WERE WORKING

BEFORE THE FABRIC ACTION, YOU RECALL YOUR GERMAN co-worker COMING AT YOU IN ANGER AND YOU FAINTED. DO YOU REMEMBER ANY SORT OF COMPARABLE DISTRESS OR TERROR OR SO ON DURING THE TWO YEARS WHEN YOU WERE WORKING AT THE RAILROAD UNDER FORCED LABOR?

A One incident, and has nothing to do with -- what shall I call it -- confrontation with a Nazi or so. I had only one to me at the time and it was harrowing experience and that was -- we had to work underneath the trains and we were on our way out. I think there were four of us working at the time and two of them had already gotten out. There were steps leading from the ditch to the ground. And another co-worker -- in fact, the girl Hanna there, I think it was -- we were still in the ditch and we saw a locomotive coming our way and we knew we couldn't make it to the steps. And I was -- we didn't know what to do. There was this locomotive coming. We were down in the ditch and, fortunately for us, our foreman saw us and he came running towards us, and he said -- he just said, "Duck down! Duck down! Go down! Put your head between your knees! Put your hands

over your head so you don't get sprayed from the steam or the hot water coming from the locomotive." So that's -- so we obeyed him and the locomotive went over our heads and no hot water dropped on us, fortunately. But we were just crouched against the wall of the ditch there. So that was the only really harrowing experience I had there, other than I hated to go underneath the trains.

No, I don't remember any other. The whole thing was -- in my memoirs I'm putting this whole period of two years all in one day. I'm saying, "All in a Day." That's the chapter, because it is what you call a homogeneous period. There are things that happened, like the co-worker telling us about the bombing of the barracks, my friend Margot telling us about the concentration camp. I heard also while I was working, and I don't remember the details, but someone visited us, I think, on the Stettiner Bahnhof and told me about my friend Mira, my best friend Mira, the epileptic. I think I might have told you that he had been in the same detention center and heard about her attacks. Eighty

attacks in a week. That's -- I heard that. But again, those were the only, what you might call, outstanding incidents that fall into that two-year period.

Q WHAT WAS YOUR FATHER DOING?

A He was also -- he was working at another station.

Q HE CONTINUED TO WORK?

A He continued (Nordhausen) Bahnhof, another railroad station which was completely bombed out towards the end of the war. Completely demolished. And he worked the same thing, unloading, loading, unloading freight trains and he stole cheese throughout the whole time and I had a lot of cheese sometimes, some days, and I earned the name of Kaese Reader, cheese reader because I shared it with all my co-workers.

Q SO AFTER THE WAR, DID YOU GIVE UP CHEESE TOTALLY?

A That kind of cheese, I did.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT SORT OF CHEESE?

A We called it Butterkaese, butter

cheese. It was from Norway. It would be -- what would it be similar to? It's a soft cheese.

Q RICH, BUTTERY.

A Well, I don't know how rich it was. It was very soft, and I don't know what the equivalent would be now because I don't eat it anymore. I don't know what the name. (Telheme)? No, (Telheme) wouldn't be. Yeah, for a long time I couldn't eat that.

Q AND YOUR BROTHER, HOW DID HE SPEND HIS DAYS?

A He was home.

Q HOME THE WHOLE TIME?

A Home the whole time.

Q WITH YOUR MOTHER?

A With my mother, yeah.

Q DIDN'T GO OUTSIDE?

A He did go outside. He went outside. And he reminded me in one of his letters, recent letters, because we are talking more about this time. I'm trying to pull his memories because he doesn't remember -- for one thing, being in the same place, speaking the language consistently, I think, helps you to

remember. I think I've forgotten so much because I had to switch language and custom and country and everything. So I don't remember. But he does remember details. More dates, names, stuff like that.

And he -- so he told me that when he was home he had to -- this Gestapo woman, (Falbogo) was her name, employed my mother as a seamstress. My mother had to do all kinds of little sewing jobs for her. And my brother became her errand boy. He ran errands for her. I don't know what. Maybe the post office, whatever. And he didn't wear the star after '43, and she still asked him to do these things. And, in fact, he told me -- which to me is -- I don't know -- they call a mind blower. She took him and (Foshmit) to the movies. A Jewish boy! The Gestapo woman taking a Jewish boy to a movie, which was really, really not at all legal.

Q HE RECALLED THIS FOR YOU?

A Yes.

Q DOES HE RECALL THE NAME OF THE MOVIE?

A No. More than once.

Q YEAH. DID YOUR FAMILY MUDDLE LINGUAL GERMAN SPEAKING AT ALL?

A Uh-huh.

Q WAS THERE YIDDISH ALSO IN THE HOME?

A No, my father used a lot of Yiddish expressions a lot. But not any other language, no.

Q AND THEN YOUR MOTHER ALSO AT HOME SEWING AND TAKING CARE OF THE FAMILY?

A Right. Oh, she had enough to do with that. Just even the laundry for two laborers like that. I mean, she was fortunate. She had her aunt. My grandmother's store was actually a -- I don't know what it is in English. A soap store for laundry, for kitchen stuff. So she probably had a little bit of help there. But still, she had plenty to do with that.

And I don't know -- I don't know what my brother did during the day. He sort of -- during those years, we sort of lost track of each other. I was often to my own thing in my world. And when we came home, I was -- I don't remember what life was like around the supper table.

We always had dinner together when we could, unless we had different shifts. And then there were always the air raids. So I remember he was always very frightened. He was more frightened than I was of the air raids. I somehow felt, and it was very, very strange, when I was down in the cellar, I remember always a suspicion or kind of belief that those people up there in the airplanes, they knew we were down here. They wouldn't drop the bomb on us. I always felt sure we wouldn't get hit. Although sometimes I doubted, because when the hit was very close, I thought, "We are next." But most of the time I really felt we were going to survive.

Q DID YOU CONSCIOUSLY CONCEPTUALIZE THEY WERE THE GOOD GUYS?

A Yeah. They were our friends. They were our potential liberators. I really felt that kind of rapport with them. It was very strange.

Q DID YOU FEEL AMBIVALENT ABOUT THE BOMBING, I MEAN, BECAUSE HERE THE BOMBING COULD HIT YOU AND THEY WERE DESTROYING EVERYTHING

AROUND YOU, AND AT THE SAME TIME THESE WERE THE PEOPLE WHO WOULD LIBERATE YOU?

A Yeah. I always saw them more as liberators rather than what the German press called Luftpiraten, air pirates or terrorists too.

Q IN MORE NORMAL TIMES, A GIRL OF 16 OR 17 MIGHT START TO DATE OR BE INTERESTED IN BOYS OR SOMETHING. DID YOU HAVE ANY OCCASION TO --

A No.

Q SOCIALIZE?

A No, nothing. I mean, that stopped quite early actually. I don't remember anything. I think that early on, perhaps when, I don't know when I was 12, 13, there was interest in boys and we talked about it among girls certainly. But I remember that as being really, really minute aspect of our lives. There were just too many other things going on. And as I say with my best friend Mira and perhaps another girl called Rita, we did talk about -- we were adolescents. We were developing and, of course, we talked about things. But interest in boys or socializing,

huh-uh. I don't remember. It was after war, yes, I fell in love.

Q HOW DID YOUR FOREMAN WHERE YOU WORKED TREAT YOU? WITH RESPECT OR HOW?

A Yeah. Most -- as I said, I really -- the foreman, especially the one who was in charge of us who came waving at us and told us duck down and cover your heads, he was always respectful. He treated us like anyone else who was under his charge. I don't remember anyone and I don't remember any other German co-worker -- in fact, whenever it was possible we had maybe five, ten minute rests sometimes between assignments when there was nothing to do. We would sit inside the cars, especially when it was in the winter time. And one time I remember -- I don't know too much about him anymore, but he was a co-worker. I don't know what he did. And he wore the button of the party and he started talking to me. He was sitting across from me in the compartment and we started talking about politics. About what was going on. And I told you earlier that I had this discussion with my cousin. I had the discussion with the Gestapo

woman. And I asked him, "Why do you believe in this man? Why are you" -- or whatever we discussed. I guess I was pretty naive.

Q MAYBE THAT PROTECTED YOU?

A It protected me in some way, I'm sure. That's why I say my father protected us from the brutal truth if he knew more than we did. I'm sure he did. And my brother said he protected us from that. The only thing is my father was cautioning us very early on and that was sort of constant. "Don't attract attention to yourself. Don't do anything." Because I was attracting attention to myself if I got into an argument about Hitler with somebody that belonged to the party. I was naive, I think. Not just naivete. I think it is more than that. And I think it has stayed with me. I think that perhaps what is -- I mean that is what I think now; that there was a belief that people are good. And I think I've retained that belief; that people are -- if you just know how to get onto their good side. If you just treat them like human beings, like equal, that they're basically good. They may be misled. So maybe

that carried me through. It's not that I believed all people were good. Those who killed and committed these atrocities but -- well, I don't know.

Even with this Gestapo woman. How do you explain that? She's never met a Jew before until she met us, and then she said if all Jews were like my father, we wouldn't have anything to hate or to persecute. Even she blamed it on -- and then she saw us as human beings, as people. There was something in her that wasn't totally corrupted. And I think perhaps that's what gave me that feeling that there must be, even if it's just minute, spark of goodness in people.

Well, in Judaism we do believe we have two impulses right in our heart, the evil and the good impulse. And we just need to combat the evil.

Q DO YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW WHAT HER JOB WAS?

A She was way up, high up. My brother wrote to me in the letter. If you want to know, I can check that out.

Q YEAH. COULD YOU THE NEXT TIME?

A I think he mentioned where she was working. Maybe not in detail, but he knew something more about her. What department she was working. I know -- that's the only thing I know about her, that I knew at the time, even during the war was that she was a spy in France. She worked as a spy in France, as a Gestapo spy. That's all we knew.

Now, I don't know how soon -- how long ago that was before she started working in Berlin.

Q DID YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HER AFTER THE WAR?

A Didn't I tell you? Oh, no, we haven't come to the Russians yet. No, we haven't come to the last 10 days of the war.

Q WELL, WE'LL GET INTO THAT IN ANOTHER SESSION. BUT YOU CAN SAY WHAT HAPPENED TO HER.

A Well, she went out for bread and never returned. And I have a long story to tell you about that.

Q GO AHEAD. YOU CAN GO AHEAD AND

TELL US NOW. UNLESS IT'S PART OF THE LIBERATION STORY.

A No, it's not the liberation. It's the last ten days of the war. I told you that we were constantly bombarded with the artillery form the advancing Russian troops so we stayed in the cellar. We lived in the cellar, in the same little room that we had for air raid shelter. And so for ten days we stayed there.

Q YOU MEAN YOU DID NOT GO TO THE RAILROAD STATION?

A Oh, no. I don't think nobody -- I don't think many people were working.

Q WAS THIS BY PUBLIC DECREE OR DID YOU JUST STOP GOING?

JOHN LIKES TO DO THIS.

SO ALL I WANT TO DO IS FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED WITH THIS WOMAN.

A Well, she went out to get bread. They sometimes took food down there occasionally. When the bombing wasn't too bad we went out and got bread and whatever other food. And she went out that morning. And my father and I went up to our apartment to get something. My father,

brother, and I were there and we went in the living room. All of I sudden we heard this tremendous noise. It was just awful. Wasn't any bomb. This particular bomb. And this whistling noise very, very loud. It's coming closer and closer and closer. My father told us to get into the hallway away from the window. So we entered the hallway. The minute we were in the hallway the bomb hit and the whole house shook. And as soon as that was over, we knew it was very, very close. I, mean as soon as it was over, we rushed down to the basement again, to the basement. And this Gestapo woman had a daughter called (Feleesitas). We called her Faye. And she was down there. And the Gestapo woman, believe it or not, stayed in our cellar towards the end. When she knew the Russians were coming she clung to the Jews. So anyway we went down and (Feleesitas) the daughter, told us --

spelling

Okay.

So, well before I get to the Gestapo women -- we went down to the cellar after the bomb hit, and so there was a lull in the bombing. And my father, when it was quiet, asked

me to go out for bread. And so I did. And there was -- by that time there was a barricade right next to our house across the street to keep the -- what are they called? Let me think of the German word. The Russian --

Q TANKS?

A Tanks. The Russian tanks or whatever came from having free access so there was a barricade in front of us.

So I had to climb over the barricade. It was possible to climb over the barricade. And as soon as I had climbed over the barricade I could see the street had completely changed. I almost didn't recognize my own street. I walked to the corner and on that street I crossed I turned the corner. There was a bakery so I went there. And before I even came to the bakery I looked around me and the scene was just incredible. The trees had all been -- whatever leaves had been on, they were all gone. And I could see from the houses the holes in them everywhere. So I walked on. I walked closer to the bakery and pretty soon I saw, instead of leaves on the trees, there were pieces of

clothes, torn clothes, small pieces. And I walked closer and there were pieces of human flesh hanging from the trees, from the balconies everywhere. And I walked on. My dad told me I had to get bread. I walked on. And just before I reached the bakery there was a woman on the street dead with her legs cut off. And from the house next to the bakery I could hear moans in the entrance. There was no one else outside. I could hear moans so I knew the bomb had hit there and when I got to the bakery, there was no bakery. There was just a hole in the wall.

So I went home and told my parents and told (Feleesitas), the daughter of the Gestapo woman, that's what happened. That's what I saw. And she said, "Well, my mom was there waiting in line for bread." So we decided, I said, "I didn't see anyone. I didn't see any bodies outside except for this one and all this, you know, everywhere in the trees, the balconies. And she said, "Well, my mom was there." So we decided -- the whole house decided somebody ought to go look for her mother and nobody wanted to do that because I told them there were some people

spelling

moaning. And nobody wanted to go. And my grandfather volunteered. He was a World War I veteran. He volunteered to go and (Feleesitas) described what her mother had on, what clothes. So he went. Couldn't find her. Not a shred of anything.

So I remember we were trying to comfort her, the daughter, and the only thing that she said -- well, since she was a Gestapo woman, the only other possibility was that she hadn't been standing in line; that she went up with the retreating S.S. and she believed that. Her daughter wanted to believe that she had gotten out. She used it as a pretext, "I'm going to get bread." And she really wanted to go out with whatever S.S. was left. So we never really know what happened to her. For all we know, she might have been blown to bits. I might have even seen part of her on the trees. Or she might have gotten out with the S.S. But as far as I know, the daughter never heard from her again. So that's the end of her (borga).

Q DID YOU HAVE GOOD FEELINGS TOWARDS THIS WOMAN? SHE TAKING YOUR BROTHER TO THE

MOVIES, IT SOUNDS RATHER NICE.

A I didn't, no. I had very good feelings towards her daughter. Oh, yes, we became friends after the war. She was younger than I was. She had nothing to do with her mother. I'm not even sure she knew what her mother was all about. And she didn't even cry very much about the disappearance of her mother, which amazed me. She never, as far as I know, (Feleetisa) never -- I don't even know if she joined the (B.D.M.), Hitler youth for girls. I don't think she ever was a member of the Hitler youth. Maybe she was too young because she was 15 at the end of the war or whether her mother just -- I don't know. But she had not an ounce of -- she knew about me. We became very, very close friends. She eventually married a British man and went to England.

I don't know what my feelings about the mother were. I don't remember. Part of it was fear, too. If I had really let -- if I hadn't been in control of my, not only my fear but my anger of this woman, God knows what might have happened. It was really -- all through the

years, whether there was air raids or Gestapo, or S.S., there was a numbing process set in. There were times when I even felt it. When I was arrested I sort of felt this numbing taking the place of real feelings.

Q OKAY, JOHN.

A That was really short for this whole tape.

Q NO. I'LL GO AHEAD AND ASK SOME MORE QUESTIONS.

A Oh, because of the liberation.

Q YEAH, WE'LL DO THAT NEXT TIME IN ONE BLOCK.

NOTHING PRESSING NOW. I HAVE MANY QUESTIONS PENDING ON THE SUBJECT OF LIBERATION.

LET ME SAY, I JUST HAVE A FEW MORE QUESTIONS HERE.

WERE YOU AWARE OF THE GERMAN RED CROSS, AND HOW DID THEY BEHAVE IN GERMANY AT THE TIME TOWARDS JEWS?

WHAT I'M SPEAKING OF HERE IS THAT WHEN HITLER TOOK OVER -- WHEN NAZIS TOOK OVER, THE NAZIS REPLACED THE GERMAN RED CROSS WITH NAZI PEOPLE TO RUN IT AND THEY USED THE RED CROSS

TRUCKS TO BRING GAS TO THE CAMPS, SO IT WASN'T USED THE WAY THE RED CROSS WAS USED. WERE YOU AWARE OF ANY OF THIS?

A No. The only trucks I knew were the S.S. trucks that they loaded us onto. But the Red Cross trucks, I don't remember. I mean, that they were staffed with members of the party or S.S., no.

Q OKAY. AND WHERE DID YOU SHOP? DID YOU GO TO THE BLACK MARKET TO GO SHOPPING OR ANYTHING?

A No. We didn't do any black market. That would have been too dangerous for us to get involved in black market activities.

We just shopped in the neighborhood stores where people had known us for years. Actually, most of the shopping was done by my mother anyway. My father went shopping after the war because my mother -- but during the war my mother did all the shopping, partly because she didn't wear the yellow star and there was -- and we didn't -- we were busy from 6 o'clock to 7 o'clock at night. My father -- and I don't even remember that there were special hours set aside

when Jews could only shop from 4:00 to 5:00 in the evening. Of course, by that time the food was all gone. Most of the food that you could -- and I don't think my mother had to hold to these hours. I'm not sure. I can't vouch for that because she had our ration cards -- with the J on it. I don't remember anything. So that's something I had nothing to do with at all. These everyday sort of domestic things.

Q SO DO YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW IF ANYBODY EVER GAVE YOUR MOTHER EXTRA FOOD OR RELATIVES GAVE HER FOOD?

A I'm sure they must have. I'm sure they must have helped somewhat, sometimes. They didn't have much to begin with. But all I remember is that what we ate and we didn't have any meat -- if there was any meat at all, it was in the soup. Maybe like a soup bone. I remember that. That either she got from somewhere or in the store or whether she was entitled to it. But I don't remember eating any meat at all for years. So -- again, I don't know what her -- my brother may remember. I don't remember what her ration was either. If she got any meat, what she

did with it, and how she used it. It was so little as I said. She might have put it in soup to stretch it out.

Q DID SHE EVER BUY PORK OR HAM BONES?

A Oh, ham bones, yeah.

Q WAS THAT A PROBLEM FOR YOU, EATING HAM BONES?

A No. I don't remember. I think we ate pork when it was still available, but that was no problem. Maybe it should have been for me because I'm a vegetarian. Have been for over 20 years now.

Q ON KRISTALLNACHT, WHEN YOU HEADED FOR SCHOOL AFTER KRISTALLNACHT, YOUR PARENTS MUST HAVE BEEN AWARE OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED. HOW COME THEY SENT YOU TO SCHOOL?

A They weren't aware. They were not aware. Before I saw the stores and after I'd seen them when I went home, is a blank in my memory.

So, the only way I can piece it together is that we didn't know about it is that there was no indication in our neighborhood where we were living at the time of anything happening.

In some neighborhoods I read accounts of it. People during the night went into apartments of Jews and smashed furniture or dragged people out. And, of course, everyone knew about it. The neighbors heard the noise and everything. As a matter of fact, I wasn't even aware of it, that anything like that happened, for maybe the first four blocks before I hit the main street, Kant Strasse. And the minute I turned into Kant Strasse I saw the stores. Before that, I didn't see anything. So I didn't suspect anything at all. And, you see, I also don't remember anything about my father. Whether we were --

Q YOU DON'T KNOW WHY HE WASN'T AT HOME OR WHERE HE WAS?

A Well, he went to work. He had gone to work. At the time he was working. But as I say, I don't remember anything what happened, especially after. I'm not even sure my brother remembers either. I think I tried to ask him.

Q OKAY.

I THINK THAT'S ALL I HAVE TODAY.