

Today is Tuesday, February 21st, 1995. I'm Judith Anne Tillman with the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco. And today, we're doing part two of Fay Nilsson's videotape.

We'll be discussing some of her documents. And she'll be reading a poem. And we'll see a photograph. Fay, if you'll describe the first document that we see?

It's my father's birth certificate. His name was Alfons Georg Gross. He was of Catholic faith and married my mother, who was Jewish. And if it wouldn't have been for him, we probably wouldn't be alive today, my mother and my three brothers and sister.

And why is that? If you can just expand.

Because during the War in Germany, anybody related to a Jewish person had to go to a concentration camp and never made it back. But since he was German and we took on his faith, we survived the War and Holocaust.

And he was born what year?

He was born in 1901, August 4th, 1901 in Lanshut, Germany, which is not far from Munich, Germany. He met my mother. He was in the cavalry when he was a young man. And he was stationed in Anspach where my mother lived at the time.

And that's how they met. He saw her riding around on a bicycle and he said, cute. And he said, I want to meet that girl. And that's what happened.

OK, Faye, if you would describe this document.

This is the birth certificate of my mother, who was Karole Uhlfelder, was born on July 18, 1902. She was of Israeli or Jewish faith. And her father's name was Mauritz Uhlfelder, her mother's name was Ida Uhlfelder, who later died in a concentration camp.

Did both of her parents die in a concentration camp?

No, just-- Mauritz died of wounds from the War, of the First World War in 1936. But my grandmother Ida died in a concentration camp.

Where was your mother born?

My mother was born in Nurnberg, which is north of Regensburg. It's about 200 kilometers north of Munich.

OK. And if you would describe this document and tell us what it says, and the date, and the circumstance that it surrounded.

This says in other words, it was done by the government of Regensburg that they were saying that my grandmother, Mrs. Ida Uhlfelder, was taken with 105 other Jewish people to Piaski bei Lublin, which is in Poland.

And we found out later that she actually died in Majdanek. But since we never saw her body or anything, we really are not 100% sure. But this is a verification that she left on the 2nd of April, 1942 to never return to us.

And when did you receive this certificate of verification?

That was in October of 1949. I'm sure my mother had that made out by the government to perhaps later. Because I think we needed it-- first of all, to come to the United States. They helped us to do that, get special rations. After the War, there was no food.

So it's assumed then that she was killed in Majdanek.

That's what we heard. That was the latest that we heard that she died in Majdanek.

All right. And that is your maternal grandmother who was Jewish?

Yes.

And her full name again is?

Is Ida Uhlfelder. Maiden name was Goodman. Isn't she beautiful?

And Faye, if you would tell us about this photograph, when it was taken, where, how old she was if you know.

It was taken, I believe, either 1941 or 1942 as a passport picture to come to the United States, which she could never use.

And this, again, this is your maternal grandmother?

That's my maternal grandmother, Ida Uhlfelder, who died in Majdanek, Poland.

So this was taken about '41, you think?

I believe, because it could have been either the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942 when she was she was 65 years old, I believe. Because she was born on February 26th, 1877.

Birthday is approaching. And do you know when she was planning to come to the United States?

She had two tickets when she left.

When she was taken away?

When she was taken away, she had the tickets. But they could no longer honor them. No one left anymore. I think in '41, she could have manage to leave, but not in '42. The War was too far gone. She was a beautiful woman.

What's one of your greatest memories about your grandmother, the strongest?

The memory before she left and my mother washed her hair, her white hair. And I think I mentioned that in the other thing. And said goodbye. And she said, they already killed them in the wagons, in the trains. They already gassed some of them. She said, I don't even know how far I might get. I will make it.

So she knew.

She knew. She took things along. She dressed like this when she left. She always was beautifully dressed and took along beautiful clothes, a big trunk, which she never received, and jewelry, and whatever. But she never received any of it.

And I believe I mentioned when we were talking about her that she sent a card from-- how we know it's Majdanek, because the card, I believe, states that. And she said, take the children to the sun. And also said, I have the key to my trunk--

So you have the key, never got the trunk. In fact, my brother was telling me he never-- the stuff was left right there in the railroad station. Never even was put on the train.

That's what they did.

Yeah, I wonder who has that stuff.

OK, and if you can describe this document, please.

This was an ID card that all Germans had to have. And for Jewish people, they had a big J, as you can see on the left side of the picture right here. And my mother had to sign it. Her name was Karole Gross. And they made her sign Sarah in front of it because of her Jewish background.

And as far as I know, she never wanted to show it. If she had to go somewhere where she had to show an ID, she just acted like she didn't have it along.

Because she was too afraid that if she showed it, they would either throw out of the train, or out of stores, or whatever where you have to show your ID. And you see the Nazis-- see this? You see [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]? See the swastika there?

Part of the swastika, you see it.

Yes.

So now was she ever in a situation where she was walking without it and Nazi or SS stopped her?

It happened a few times. And as far as I know, they said, well, you better carry it. They just told her, you better have to carry it. So in the future then, she stayed at home more and more.

Didn't go very many places. Because she just was afraid that if she had to show ID, she couldn't produce it and didn't want to produce it. But she didn't want to put us in jeopardy, you see.

What about you and your siblings? What did your IDs say? Did it say half Jewish, half [INAUDIBLE]?

We didn't have-- children didn't have IDs. My brother, my oldest brother might have. But I don't know what it said on his. I have to ask him. And when we went anywhere, we just didn't say anything.

In fact, if they asked what my mother's maiden name was, I used to say, Uhl, U-H-L. Because I was afraid to say Uhlfelder, because that's a very Jewish name.

And because of your father's kindness, she survived and all of you, all the kids.

He took good care of us. My father took good care of us. He had many times, opportunities where they encouraged him to divorce my mother or leave her.

And it would have meant the death penalty for all of us. And he knew-- he didn't know it as a fact, but he had an idea that we couldn't survive this War.

Let's keep this picture. And if you'll tell us about this last document that you're going to read while we still look at your mother.

OK. My mother died on January 8th, 1979. And my youngest brother Frantz wrote a poem to our mother.

Where did she die?

She died in Vacaville.

California?

California. Yes, in California. My mother died before my father. So he wrote this poem. "Our mother who was born under the Star of David, but saw her future and believe in Jesus Christ for the great love of our Father, she was an intelligent, proud lady with great strength.

She changed her religion by conviction and Jesus asked her to stand up and be counted. God gave her tests. She nursed all five of her children back to health when four of us were down with listeria and her youngest girl near death with a heavy pleurisy all at the same time.

She was the lady that had to stand by and watch her mother being dragged off to a Nazi concentration camp, never to return. She was the lady that had to handle the shouting abuses from Nazi neighbors because she came from a Jewish family.

She was the lady that held our hands and found shelter after the bombing raid when no one wanted us because she was born under the Star of David. She was the lady that gave her last bread rations to a young Russian prisoner of war to keep him from starving.

She was the lady that convinced the village leaders to remove a road blockade to save the small town from annihilation by American gun power. She was the lady that put food and bread on the table when things were very tough.

She was the lady that stood in 18 hour bread lines in order to feed us. She was the lady that walked for miles and miles and crossed rivers when there were no bridges to look for her oldest son to come home from the forced labor camp.

She was the lady who always mended our clothing when there was no thread. She found a way. She was the lady that taught us right from wrong and gave us strength. She was the lady that gave us pride.

God gave her the tests and she responded. God also rewarded her by giving her five children who loved her sincerely. God rewarded her by keeping all of us alive during the bombing raids, the Russian front, the forced labor camp, and bringing us all back together in one piece as a family after World War II.

God gave her the foresight to leave the city and go into hiding during the last year Of the war to save us from annihilation by the Nazis. God gave her the foresight to encourage her two oldest sons to emigrate to America and spearhead our whole family.

God rewarded her by giving her good health all of her life. And God helped her by making her passing as easy as he could. This, in a brief synopsis, is our mother, wife, grandmother, and great grandmother, Karole N. Gross."