BAY AREA HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY
Interview with HELGA HENIUS
- 11/24/99

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Transcriber: Tessa Botha

Q: TODAY IS NOVEMBER 24TH 1999. WE'RE AT THE HOME OF HELGA HENIUS AT 468 IRVINGTON, IN DALY CITY, CALIFORNIA. MY NAME IS PETER RYAN, INTERVIEWER, AND ANNE GRENN SALDINGER IS DOING THE VIDEO TAPING. COULD WE BEGIN BY MY ASKING YOU WHERE AND WHEN YOU WERE BORN?

A: Of course, I was born on June 24, 1920, in Berlin and I stayed there till 1937, when I went to Holland.

Q: HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE IN YOUR FAMILY?

A: I only have one sister, who is two and a half years younger than I am.

Q: WHAT DID YOUR FATHER DO?

A: My father had a factory of medical instruments, but he got broke because he was selling things, also to American countries after the Versailles Peace Treaty, which was suddenly cancelled and he went bankrupt. And he had a lot of family money invested in his firm. And for his honor he committed suicide, when I was six years old. My mother never remarried. She and her sister…

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS THAT - HE WENT BANKRUPT?

A: 1926. They had dinner at their home, and he went into the bedroom and shot himself. And my mother never really got over that.

Q: WERE YOU THERE?

A: No, we - they had us with some friends at that time.

Q: THAT MUST HAVE BEEN A TERRIBLE BLOW TO EVERYBODY.

A: It was terrible. I wished he would have gone to America, because his older brother had gone to America in 1925, already. But, as it was, my grandparents, my mother's parents, came from

Silicia, the city of Glogau and went to Berlin to buy a very nice house in the suburb, in Listerfelder, and we stayed with them, then.

Q: YOU STAYED WITH YOUR MOTHER'S PARENTS?

A: Ja, and my mother's sister who had lost her husband in the Spanish 'flu in 1918, also a widower, stayed with us. It was a very big, wonderful villa, with a huge garden, and it's still there. Nothing was bombed. The whole neighborhood is under [denkmarschud?] which means nobody can change anything, you can't even take a tree out. And I took friendship up again, with my former neighbor, with whom we played for seven years, everyday. And the people who bought the house, lately, loved it, and kept it in the style that my grandmother had it. So I came back into my childhood, to the house. My sister doesn't want to do that, but I'm very sentimental and I really enjoy that.

Q: WHEN DID YOU GO BACK?

A: I went back several times. First, by myself. Then, I was invited by the city of Berlin. And then, another time, when we took some trips with my neighbor friends.

Q: SO YOU WERE SIX IN 1926, YOUR FATHER COMMITTED SUICIDE - HOW DID THE FAMILY SURVIVE?

A: Well, my grandfather was pretty wealthy. He had a bank in Glogau, in Silicia. I have a picture of it, for the fiftieth anniversary there, which you might want to include. And, the only bad thing of it was that my grandfather had Parkinson's and really went downhill pretty fast. We stayed in this house till 1933, and sold it - and then, moved into an apartment, in Berlin. And when I went back there, everything was bombed. If we would have stayed there - there was nothing left.

Q: NOW THAT WAS YOUR MOTHER, YOUR SISTER AND YOURSELF MOVED TO THAT APARTMENT?

A: And my grandmother.

Q: AND YOUR GRANDMOTHER

A: In the meantime, my grandfather had died. He died in '35.

Q: AND THIS WAS YOUR MOTHER'S MOTHER?

A: Yes. And my mother's mother stayed in Berlin the entire time, and she was deported to Theresienstadt with her brother and died there.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR EARLY SCHOOLING?

A: Yes I do. My first school I hated. It was a very old-fashioned school, in the middle of Berlin. Actually in a fancy neighborhood, but, most people sent their children to private schools and my parents didn't, I went with my cousin. And I stayed there for nine months.

Q: THIS WAS A PUBLIC SCHOOL.

A: It was a public school and when my father died, I go to a wonderful school - [Berlinesterverder?], which is still existing. It was just built then, and they had very good teachers. And I remember that especially - my favorite teacher, who'd caught on about my father's death, because I always started to cry when they said something about father's reading the paper or something like that. So she avoided that, and she talked to my mother, and she was extremely good with me.

Q: NOW WAS THIS ALSO A PUBLIC SCHOOL?

A: It was also a public school. And after that I went to the [Goethe ?? felder?] which was a very good school, and funny enough, I met some not Jewish people here, who had gone to the same school.

Q: WAS THAT A JEWISH SCHOOL?

A: No, no, no. I went there till 1935.

Q: NOW WHY DID YOU HATE THE FIRST SCHOOL?

A: It was terribly old fashioned, and dirty. It was not a good - later on, they never used it any more - after a few years, I heard that. They closed it

Q: DID YOU GET THAT PRESENT ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL THAT EVERYBODY DOES?

A: No. My family thought that was too bourgeois. I talked with my sister about it, and the one thing I remember is that my father sometimes drove me to school, because he had a chauffeur and we had a car - and I thought that was wonderful, even though the school was only a few blocks away.

Q: DO YOU HAVE MEMORIES OF HIM?

A: Very few. I have to tell you that I am one of the poor, rich girls of the Berlin society at that time, who were raised by nannies, and so their parents very seldom... We never, never had dinner together. Only when, after my father died, we had those wonderful dinners with my grandparents and my mother and my aunt.

Q: THOSE WERE GOOD?

A: Those were good.

Q: BUT, BEFORE THAT, IT WAS FORMAL?

A: We were having our dinner in the nursery, and the grown-ups had their dinners later. And I read that in many books about Jewish people in Berlin, who had money, that their parents didn't pay much attention to them.

Q: SO WHAT KIND OF MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE ABOUT HIM?

A: That he told me, if somebody would ask me if I have a religion, I should say: "No, I have no religion. I'm a dissident." And I had to repeat the word 'dissident' several times, till I learned it. Not knowing what it meant. And the whole atmosphere at that time was of intermarriage. My grandmother's four brothers had non-Jewish wives. Many friends of my family had inter-marriages.

Q: SO THERE WAS A LOT OF ASSIMILATION GOING ON?

A: Very much so. And that, where the twenties, in the time, that the cabaret time - that's now coming again on the stage. But Berlin was very

active in theatre and opera, and my parents went out an awful lot, and partied a lot, as I heard from others. I still have a girlfriend from that time; her father was a doctor. She's now in England, and we were together, with our nannies, from day we were born, practically. She's half a year older than I am.

Q: DID YOU HAVE THE SAME NANNY?

A: No, we had different nannies.

Q: DIFFERENT ONE. WERE THERE SPECIAL ONES FOR YOU?

A: Well, they were very nice. Not very well educated, in our opinion. But, they played with us, read to us, went to the park with us, because we all lived in apartments. And that changed when we went into that very nice house, with the grandparents.

Q: THEY STAYED THEN TOO?

A: No. No nannies anymore.

Q: NO, NO NANNIES ANYMORE.

A: No, no. That was the only part of the thing, after my father's death, that the family paid more attention to us. My sister still thinks our mother didn't, because she was manic-depressive. And later, she became a morphine addict, which I didn't find out till I was in Holland.

Q: NOW WHO IS THIS WE'RE TALKING ABOUT NOW?

A: My mother.

Q: YOUR MOTHER.
HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?

A: From other relatives who told me. I went to Holland all by myself, when I was seventeen, because mother's cousin, who was a social democrat, worked on one of the big papers - the 'Vorsichterzeitung,' in Berlin, and had to go and leave Berlin right away in '33. And mother and I visited there, in '36, and I loved it. So I told her I want to go and live in Holland

And we met a woman who had a pension, and liked me, and she said I could be there, as an au pair - with a little bit of money - pocket money. So, I arrived in '37, as a visitor, to go to Holland. And got a working permit to work in a household. You couldn't get other working permits otherwise. And I stayed in that pension for a year and learned to speak Dutch without an accent, which was very surprising. And then, through some Jewish agency I got into the household of a neurologist and psychiatrist - Dr. Gerbel, who was pretty well-known and had two children. And he had me help in the practice a little bit. And I had to do some housework and be with the kids, watch the kids. And I got very attached to them.

Q: HOW OLD WERE THEY?

A: The kids, when I got there, were three and six.

Q: WHEN YOU GOT THERE IN 1937?

A: No, I got there in 1938.

Q: '38.

A: And I stayed there till I went underground, in 1942. And - wait a minute - I think I did that wrong. It was 1943. When the Germans came into Holland, that was in 1940, on the 10th of May. I was on a bicycle trip, as a girl and we were on [Zweibening?] on the coast and saw all the planes come over, and had a hard time to get back to Amsterdam, because they had roadblocks already. And when I got home, I found a telegram, that my mother had died on the 4th of May, in a Berlin hospital, after an operation. She got a hysterectomy and didn't survive. So, that night, on the 10th of May, I cried as I never cried before. And I listened to the radio and heard that the queen, Wilhemina, of Holland, had left with the entire family, and I felt very deserted.

Q: EVERYONE'S AWAY?

A: Everyone left, which is bad for the country, because the Gestapo could take over, not like

in Denmark, where the king took up for the Jewish people.

Q: WHERE WAS YOUR SISTER THEN?

A: My sister went to England in 1938. She had met some people, on a vacation, when she came to visit me in 1937, some English girls, who took a big liking to her, and gave her papers to come to England. Because, the family we had in England was very poor, and couldn't put up the money. So she went by herself, and she was only fifteen and worked herself through very difficult times. She worked in a kennel; she worked in a TB sanatorium; she had all kinds of different jobs. And, in the beginning, we still could write to each other. But of course, later on, when the war started, that stopped.

Q: SO YOU WERE IN COMMUNICATION, YOU FROM HOLLAND AND HER FROM ENGLAND, FROM '38 TO '40?

A: Ja.

Q: UNTIL THE WAR STARTED FOR HOLLAND?

A: Ja.

Q: LET'S JUST GO BACK A LITTLE BIT TO YOUR SCHOOLING AND YOUR EXPERIENCES IN GERMANY. DID YOU HAVE ANY SENSE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON, IN GERMANY?

A: Well, the sense started when the - our neighbor boys, with whom we had played all our young years, suddenly didn't want to talk to us because they got into the Hitler Jungend. And then, in school, the teachers were not very nice anymore to us, except for one, who was wonderful.

Q: IS THAT THE SAME ONE WHOM YOU'VE MENTIONED?

A: No that was in the lower school. This was in ?? - a very nice teacher.

Q: WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THAT TEACHER?

A: He knew something was going on and he did not like Hitler's ideas. And we were close to big

[kaserne?], I don't know what you call, where there were lots of soldiers, in Listerfelder. And they turned out, of course, to be Nazi's. And they marched through the streets and sang - if the Jewish blood comes from the knives, we will be much better off - [wenn das Judenbloed van messer spritz, dan ist nogmals sehr gut?]. And when we heard that, I mean, we really knew something awful was going on. Up till now there was nothing Jewish in our family. We knew that we were Jewish, but we never kept any holiday, ever.

Q: DIDN'T GO TO SYNAGOGUE, OR ANYTHING?

A: No. The first time when I was in a synagogue, was when I was thirteen, and my cousin was bar-mitzvahed. It was in a very big synagogue in Berlin, [Prinzwegenstrasse?], in June in 1933. Six boys were on the podium with the rabbi, and two fainted. And I thought - if the good Jewish God let them faint, at their bar-mitzvah, it's not for me. So, from then on, I never had any religion. We did have religion in school. That was in the curriculum.

Q: YOU WOULD BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOL, OR YOU..

A: You know, in public schools, you get that, like every - if it's maths or reading, you get also one hour of religion.

Q: HOW MANY JEWISH STUDENTS WOULD BE IN YOUR CLASSES?

A: I think there only were two others.

Q: TWO?

A: [nods head] And I have no idea what happened to them.

Q: DID YOU HAVE FRIENDS, BOTH JEWS AND NON-JEWS?

A: Mostly non-Jews. My girlfriend, the one I am so close to who is now…

Q: THE ONE IN ENGLAND?

A: That's now in England… lived about thirty minutes away. We had to take the stadbaan to

get there. They were out in another suburb. And then, we had another friend in Berlin, to whose birthday parties we went. But, we hated that. So my sister and I always staged a big fight, and then, we were forbidden to go to the birthday party, which we wanted.

Q: WHY DIDN'T YOU LIKE IT?

A: We hated to go into Berlin itself. We had to get the streetcar, we had to get the same streetcar that is described in Kessner's ['Emil and the Didaktiver?'], - the same number that went from our house, to the middle of Berlin. And we never liked to be in Berlin. We liked to be outside, where we could play and be on our bicycles. It was a much nicer, freer time.

Q: YOU WERE IN A SUBURB?

A: Yes, a very beautiful suburb.

Q: BEAUTIFUL SUBURB? AND BERLIN SEEMED TOO CROWDED?

A: Yeah, awful.

Q: WAS IT ALSO BECAUSE YOU WERE JEWISH? WAS THERE ANY WORRY ABOUT THAT?

A: No, that has nothing to do with it.

Q: NO. WHEN DID YOU HEAR THAT SONG, WITH THE MARCHING - DO YOU KNOW WHAT YEAR?

A: That was already in 1933 - it started.

Q: IN '33. SO YOU HAD SOME AWARENESS, AT THAT POINT, THAT THINGS DIDN'T LOOK TOO GOOD?

A: Definitely. Yes. And then, my grandfather, who had always held back, because nobody wanted to do anything about the Jewish holidays, said: "It might be time now, that you realize that you are Jewish, and learn a little more about the religion, because, my father built a synagogue in Glogau," which is the town in Silicea where my mother was born.

Q: YOUR FATHER BUILT ONE?

A: The grandfather.

Q: THE GRANDFATHER BUILT ONE?

A: The great grandfather built one.

Q: OH. OKAY. WAS THE GRANDFATHER RELIGIOUS?

A: Apparently they were a little more religious before they came to Berlin. But, since my mother and her sister didn't keep anything, and they didn't want us to be educated with any religion, we didn't do anything. But I don't know if you know, there is a book about a little prince, and I don't remember who wrote it, about a boy who also had a nanny and went with her into all the Catholic churches. And when he heard that he was Jewish, he couldn't believe it - it was, kind of, a shock. And to us it was kind of, a shock that you were not accepted anymore, because of being Jewish, even though you didn't believe anything. So, then, we had to give up the house, partly because my grandfather…

Q: WAS GETTING SICKER?

A: Got sicker, right. Couldn't go up the steps to the bedroom. And secondly, because at that time, people did sell their houses, because Hitler was coming. And they were afraid, and …

Q: YOU MEAN, THEY SOLD THEIR HOUSES AND LEFT THE COUNTRY?

A: Some - some of them did. We didn't do that yet, because…

Q: WAS THERE ANY TALK OF IT THAT YOU REMEMBER AT THAT TIME?

A: Any what?

Q: ANY TALK ABOUT YOU LEAVING?

A: I wanted to leave, not right away - because we were still pretty young. I mean, I was thirteen and my sister was eleven. And after we just spend a little time in Berlin, with some family members - they sent us to [Nietendorf?], which was a very nice boarding

school. The owners were two old sisters, who were in their eighties, and many of them had seen the parents of the children who came there. We were only about thirty-five children.

Q: WAS THIS A JEWISH SCHOOL?

A: It was partly Jewish.

Q: WAS THIS THE SCHOOL THAT STEFFI BLACK WENT TO?

A: Exactly. Now she hated it and we liked it.

Q: TELL ME WHY YOU LIKED IT.

A: It was free; we didn't have too much homework. We could read an awful lot. I liked the kids that were there - it was very friendly. I got very friendly with a Polish girl, who invited me to Warsaw in 1935. I went all by myself; I got myself a passport, and I visited her, and her family.

Q: YOU WERE FIFTEEN. YOU WERE ADVENTUROUS.

A: Yes. We were very - we were raised very independent, because after my father died, our guardian was outside Berlin, about two hours by train, and mother just put us on a train, and we went, by ourselves, to visit him in the summer. And we were used to be alone, and take streetcars and the underground…

Q: BUT YOU DIDN'T LIKE TO GO TO THE CENTER OF BERLIN?

A: But we had to do it quite often, if we want to see something. My grandmother took me to the opera. You could only go to the opera when you were twelve years old, in Germany. So she…

Q: COULDN'T GO BEFORE THAT?

A: No, we didn't - children were not allowed.

Q: NOT APPRECIATED, HUH?

A: Under twelve, because they were afraid they wouldn't make noises. And from then on, I'm really an opera lover. My grandmother was

wonderful. She had all the little libretti and tiny books, and we could listen to the radio.

Q: WHAT KIND OF OPERA DID YOU LIKE?

A: I like Puccini and Verdi the most. But also, the 'Freischutz' was my first opera, but Weber - which isn't given in this country very often, and I loved 'Carmen' which was my second opera. And my grandmother took me - so. My mother wasn't that interested in it, but our grandmother really was.

Q: THOSE ARE GOOD MEMORIES.

A: Very good memories. And in that boarding school they had some nice music too, but we didn't have piano lessons, because I later found out that mother used that money, dedicated for it, to get her morphine. That I learned later.

Q: I'M SORRY, SAY THAT AGAIN.

A: I learned that the money that was dedicated for us to get piano lessons, didn't come through into the boarding school. Steffi had piano lessons there. Because, my mother took it for her morphine habit. So…

Q: TELL ME WHAT YOUR MOTHER WAS LIKE?

A: My mother was a very witty, very intelligent woman, who was loved by all children. When she came to visit in Nietendorf, the children were besides themselves, especially the boys in their puberty years came, and got advice from her. And she gave little parties, which were not allowed. We had a little wine, and some sausages, in our bedrooms. And the teachers hated her, because she was so unconventional. But, one time, she needed her morphine so badly, so she insisted she had a horrible ear infection and went to a hospital, which was about thirty miles away. So, when I visited her, the nuns there told me that she was near death, and I had to pray for her - which wasn't so; she just wanted to get the morphine. So, that was my first, what shall I say - realization, that is the word - thank you, that mother always went into the hospitals, but I

didn't know why. And always - she always said about ears, because she couldn't do too much to really see this ears - it's not true.

Q: NOW WHEN YOU WENT TO VISIT HER THAT TIME, YOU STILL DIDN'T KNOW WHY SHE WAS THERE.

A: No, and I had to bring her some, a drink, some [kumer?] - she loved to have alcohol. So,

Q: WAS SHE AN ALCOHOLIC?

A: No, she wasn't alcoholic, but she liked to have it in between.

Q: DID YOU GET CLOSE TO YOUR GRANDPARENTS WHILE YOU WERE LIVING THERE?

A: My grandfather was very hard to be close to, but he still corresponded with the bank in Glogau, and I helped him, sometimes, to get the things straightened out with his correspondence. I was about eleven years old, I remember. And I liked that.

Q: OH YEAH, MADE YOU IMPORTANT, HUH?

A: And my - but my grand mother was very important to me. And my aunt, Hilda, who was mother's sister, was wonderful, because she sometimes did some homework with me, which mother didn't.

Q: WAS SHE OLDER OR YOUNGER THAN YOUR MOTHER?

A: She was two years older than my mother. And she and my mother's father had taken some of the inventory of my father's factory, and both worked very hard in some shops they had opened with the medical instruments - that were left over. So my aunt went to work everyday. And so did my father's sister. According to my oldest cousin, who is now dead, none of the women really knew what business was like. They worked hard and they never made very much.

Q: BUT THEY TRIED TO KEEP IT GOING?

A: But they tried, but my mother never did much. Unless, later on, when we were gone already, my sister and I, she became head of an old age home - very fancy one. And that she liked

When she was in a good mood, and she didn't have her drugs, apparently, she was excellent with the old people. And she was able to handle that. And I have a photograph of her. She loved to be in a white coat - she wanted to be a nurse, but the grandparents didn't allow that, because that was not fashionable at that time. She went to art school, in [Droysen?], and did a little bit of…

Q: WOMEN SHOULDN'T LEARN ANYTHING SERIOUS.

A: No, at that time, no. They went to Lusanne to learn French, and were raised pretty properly, so my mother always, apparently, was a little bit rebellious, when she was a child already.

Q: TELL ME THE NAME OF THE TOWN AGAIN, IN SILICEA?

A: Glogau. - G-L-O-G-A-U.

Q: WAS THAT PART OF GERMANY, OR POLAND?

A: No, no, it's part of Germany. It's Poland now.

Q: DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR PARENTS WERE POLITICAL AT ALL?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: NOT THAT YOU KNOW OF.

A: My mother's cousin, the one that was in Holland. He was a social democrat, and he worked for the 'Vorsichtzeitung.' And, he was also one of the press chiefs in Berlin, and he had to leave, right away, in '33, but was able to take all his…

Q: ASSETS?

A: Assets and things with him.

Q: HE WAS LUCKY HEY?

A: He had all his books; he had all his furniture. They never had too much money, because he was an intellectual. He wrote a book about the Jews and the German economy, which was re-issued a few years ago. And I loved them; they were very good to me in Holland. I visited

them all the time. And their son and I became very close, just like brother and sister, because his parents died in Bergen-Belsen. That will say, his mother died on the freedom train, but she was so under-nourished, that she just couldn't make it and was buried in [Katworz?] before they got to the German, er, to the Dutch border. His father had died earlier. And he had to be underground all the time, and not be able to go on the street, while I was able to go outside.

Q: NOW THE FREEDOM TRAIN IS WHAT?

A: Pardon?

Q: TELL ME WHAT THE FREEDOM TRAIN WAS.

A: The freedom train was a train, which, people from concentration camps, who were liberated, and were shipped back to Holland - and they were all, of course, in terrible shape. And the ones that made it, were lucky. But they came with huge bellies and terribly under-nourished, and filled with lice. And it was awful, absolutely awful, because I witnessed a few people who came to live with the doctor's family, and me, after the war.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY ANTI-SEMITIC EXPERIENCES IN GERMANY, BEFORE YOU LEFT?

A: I myself, had very little. That's why I have a lot of non-Jewish, German friends, which some of my Jewish friends cannot understand. And we do talk German to each other. And I have two cousins, whom I found - one came here to give a lecture at Stanford about the old and new music [telephone rings and she goes to answer]

Q: NON-JEWISH FRIENDS.

A: Ja, my cousin. I saw in the flyer from the Goethe Institute that Karla Henius was going to come here to talk about the old and new music and Thomas Mans, Dr. Faustus. So I called and found out where she was staying, and wrote a little letter; sent her some flowers, and said I'm sure we are related. Because there's only one family Henius, in the whole, wide world. Lo and behold, our grandfathers were brothers

and she is only an eighth Jewish and we got to be very good friends. And I see her quite a lot, and we talk to each other regularly. She works in a theatre for new music, and just retired. And her husband was an interndant of Kiel and was just honored with the city of Kiel. And she got several culture prizes, because she had modern music introduced, in a very good form, in Wiesbaden, and I like the entrance of this cultural new world in Germany - which I can't be part of, but I like to hear about. The man who bought our house now, is a stage designer and an art teacher. And he did a lot of stage design now, in [Kamnets?] and in Berlin, and also in Russia and in Japan and in ??, in France. And through him I met some very interesting people, which to me, is always important - that you get some new ideas, and things that are going on.

Q: NOW YOUR FRIENDS CAN'T UNDERSTAND HOW YOU CAN HAVE GERMAN, NON-JEWISH FRIENDS?

A: Exactly. Many of them, not all of them.

Q: TELL US HOW YOU CAN DO THAT?

A: You know, right after the war, I had a block to speak German. It took me two years to speak German again. And I had a rage in me, too, because so many of my relatives had died. As I put on your papers - mother's sister had died in [Gehrs?]. She had immigrated to Paris - had a agency for photographs which she sold to big magazines, was picked up, and stayed in that camp in the Pyrenees, till she was shipped to Auschwitz. My mother's - my father's sister stayed in Berlin, worked first, in a factory and then, probably was shipped out. But we never could find out, because they have two big volumes in Berlin, where you have all the names of the people registered, who were shipped from Berlin, to the camps. And they have the complete date of birth, their maiden names, when they were shipped and where. And my aunt - it said - destination unknown. But we never found her. And my grandmother and her brother…

Q: BUT SHE WAS LISTED?

A: She was listed. My grand - they were listed too. She had to live in a one room, with her brother, for a year before she was shipped to Theresienstadt, where she died, of course.

Q: THIS IS YOUR GRANDMOTHER?

A: [nods] The one I loved so much.

Q: SO YOU HAD A RAGE?

A: I had a rage, but then, it suddenly disappeared. I started to read German literature again, and I started to be interested in German opera. And I met some very nice people here, in San Francisco, and it developed that I couldn't be angry anymore, because you couldn't blame the whole nation for something that some of them did.

Q: NOW, THE PEOPLE THAT YOU MET HERE - HAD THEY BEEN HERE A WHILE, OR HAD THEY COME AFTER THE WAR, OR WHAT?

A: Most of them came after the war, and then, I met some at the hospital I worked at - St. Luke's Hospital. And, I'm very friendly with one woman whose husband - whose brother was a minister, evangelical minister. And we are very good friends.

Q: WHEN YOU GET FRIENDLY WITH GERMAN PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT JEWS, AND YOU FORM A FRIENDSHIP, DO YOU FIND YOURSELF TALKING ABOUT THAT TIME?

A: Sometimes yes and sometimes, no. As I told you when you called me - I repressed a lot of things, especially the things of being underground, because they were so terrible. And I didn't want to talk too much about it. But, maybe, now it's the time to get it all out, because my sister adopted four children and some of them are very interested in what I went through. My sister, herself, doesn't care too much about it, because she had a bad time in England, before she immigrated to America.

Q: SO SHE'S NOT TOO SYMPATHETIC WITH WHAT YOU WENT THROUGH?

A: No, not too much, because she, herself, had a pretty rough time. So I only can talk to people who went through the same thing - like my second cousin in New York, the one I talked about before, who is like my brother, and his children. And he is a non-forgiving character. He has a yellow star in his living room; he has all the things from the underground still.

Q: FROM WHAT?

A: From his life in the underground. He kept it all. He took his children, who both are journalists, through all the camps in Germany, from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen to Mauthausen to Theresienstadt. And, to his mother's grave in [Katworz?] and he insisted, when he was in Berlin, to go to the cemetery where my parents and grandparents are buried - which is not a Jewish cemetery.

Q: SO HE KEEPS IT ALL ALIVE?

A: He keeps it very much going, and that's different from how I feel. I think it's - the importance now to me is to enjoy the people I like, and not blame them for something they didn't do. And I don't belong to anything, like synagogue - I never go to any synagogue, but, of course, I do feel that I'm Jewish.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOU FOUND OUT THAT ONE OF THE PEOPLE WHIM YOU ARE FRIENDS WITH, DID DO SOMETHING?

A: None of them did - I know that for sure.

Q: OKAY, BUT WOULD THAT THROW YOU IF YOU DID FIND OUT?

A: It might have, but I know that the ones I've befriended are not…

Q: OKAY, I BELIEVE YOU. SO, YOU WENT TO HOLLAND IN 1937?

A: Right.

Q: ON YOUR OWN?

A: On my own

Q: YOU WERE SEVENTEEN.

A: With ten marks in my pocket.

Q: HOW WAS THAT, TO LEAVE HOME?

A: Home wasn't very good anymore, because we lived in a flat…

Q: YOUR GRANDFATHER HAD DIED?

A: My grandfather had died. My grandmother and my mother tried to keep up good appearances, but they lived in an apartment which was filled with furniture. I never could have any friends there. It was not very comfortable.

Q: DID THEY GET FULL VALUE FOR THE HOUSE THEY SOLD?

A: More or less, they did - yes.

Q: SO THAT KEPT THEM GOING, HUH?

A: And they had some money from the bank, but later on, we got into trouble with grandma's youngest brother, who had married a non-Jewish woman and my grandmother had made out her will to him completely. So we had a big fight about things. And he had a very hard time during the war. He had to clean up after the bombings.

Q: HE STAYED IN GERMANY?

A: He stayed in Berlin.

Q: BUT THEY DIDN'T DEPORT HIM?

A: They didn't deport him. He was not in very good shape, and finally, my sister and I, more or less, took only a little bit of what was coming to us, because he was in worse shape than we were.

Q: WAS THIS AFTER THE WAR? [nods]

A: That was after the war.

Q: THEY MADE JEWS WHO WERE MARRIED TO NON-JEWS OFTEN HAVE THOSE CLEAN-UP JOBS, HUH?

A: Ja, right. Very bad.

Q: AND THAT'S WHAT HE HAD TO DO EVERYDAY?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND IN BERLIN?

A: In Berlin. Right after the bombings.

Q: YEAH - WHICH WAS DANGEROUS WORK, HUH?

A: Very dangerous. But they were so set in their own German ways, that one of the wonderful things to them were that they could have their Rosenthal porcelain back, because they had buried it in the backyard. And it came through one of the bombings. So you can see what the preference of people was - to have possessions. And that…

Q: TO HAVE SOMETHING OF WHAT THEIR LIFE HAD BEEN?

A: Yes and I think that was one of the drawbacks in my family. They were hanging on to possessions, and they hoped that Hitler wouldn't last long, and that things would get better and we would all be together again, afterwards.

Q: DID YOUR FATHER SERVE IN WORLD WAR I?

A: He did, shortly. I have some photographs in uniform. Also, my youngest, the youngest brother of my mother died in the First World War. And he did get some anti-Semitic experiences in that little Silicean town, apparently. And he wanted to show them that he was a good German. So, they fought for the fatherland. That didn't do too much for us later on. That was very prominent at that time, that you were very German, in many ways.

Q: AND THAT MADE IT HARDER FOR PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THAT THE WHOLE SOCIETY COULD TURN AGAINST THEM?

A: Exactly. Well, see, I had seen a few things, already, before I left Germany.

Q: WHAT DID YOU SEE?

A: We had to give all the silver to the Germans. And there were big, big shoe cartons full of all the silverware we had. When I came to Holland, when the Germans were there already. A Jewish woman asked me if I could come and help her polish the silver. And I told her she's absolutely crazy, because the Germans will do the same things, once they were - they were occupying already. She should rather give it to somebody and have it hidden. And she didn't want to believe me, that things like that could happen. You know when, before I immigrated, or left Germany, you couldn't sit on the benches anymore. There were several things that were already were forbidden, and I hated it.

Q: DID THEY HAVE BENCHES FOR JEWS?

A: I don't remember if they had benches for Jews, but they must have. We didn't go to the parks, but I know people went to the parks couldn't do that.

Q: COULD YOU GO TO THE MOVIES?

A: The movies, we still could go. See, in '36 they had the Olympia - Olypiade, whatever, in Berlin. And suddenly all the anti-Jewish things disappeared. It was a complete clean city and then I woke up and said now, that is a sign for me to get out of the country. I don't want to stay here. It will be horrible again, when…

Q: WHEN IT'S OVER.

A: When it's over - and it was.

Q: YOU KNEW THAT, HUH?

A: I knew that, and then in [Nietendorf?] - it was a very small place where Gerhard Hoffman, who was one of the main - one of the very famous writers of the time, who took up for the weaving communities, who were very underpaid and in horrible shape. He wrote his books there. But there was a big sign: "Jews don't enter this little - don't enter our city" - or

village, what… 'Juden halt - kert marsch.' And so, we knew, I mean, we had all the…

Q: DOORS WERE CLOSING IN LITTLE AND BIG WAYS, EVERYWHERE.

A: Right, but see, in Nietendorf, many of the old teachers were not Jewish, because they had been with the owners for twenty, thirty years. So, I remember one time, they dressed us up for a Jewish festival - I don't know if it was Hanukkah, or whatever it was. And we had to do everything very early, because they had to go into the little town for the S. Frauenschaft meeting. So, they were half with the Jews and half not with the Jews. That was very funny to me.

Q: WAS IT GOING TO BE DANGEROUS TO DO THAT?

A: No, it wasn't dangerous. I mean, we stayed there for two and a half years.

Q: WHERE WAS THIS?

A: In Nietendorf.

Q: WAS THAT THE APARTMENT?

A: No, that was the boarding school.

Q: THE BOARDING. WAS THAT A JEWISH BOARDING SCHOOL?

A: It was a Jewish boarding school, that wasn't completely Jewish at all.

Q: IT WASN'T?

A: No, because it had all the non-Jewish teachers.

Q: BUT, HOW ABOUT THE STUDENTS?

A: The students were all Jewish. And, I bonded with quite a few of them.

Q: WELL, IF THEY HAD NON-JEWISH TEACHERS, IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN A VERY RELIGIOUS SCHOOL?

A: It wasn't at all.

Q: DID THEY TEACH HEBREW?

A: They had a rabbi coming from Herschberg, which was the bigger town, about thirty miles away. He came once a week. He played football with us; he taught Latin and Hebrew. And, he was a very charming man.

Q: YOU LIKED THE SCHOOL?

A: I liked the school.

Q: DID YOUR SISTER GO TOO? [nods]

A: My sister went too, but she didn't like it as much as I did, but she loved the skiing. We didn't learn that much there. And when I was sixteen…

Q: DID YOU LEARN THERE?

A: Not enough.

Q: NOT ENOUGH. WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

A: Because the teachers weren't good enough. They didn't pay them enough; they didn't get any, I mean, for science and maths - was really poor. It was very good for languages and for literature. And we had a good library and we read an awful lot.

Q: DID THEY HAVE MUSIC?

A: They had music; we put on little musical plays.

Q: CABARET?

A: Pardon?

Q: DID YOU PUT ON CABARET?

A: Cabaret wasn't on yet. That came much later. So you mean cabaret… no, but it was serious - I mean, we did kind of Mozartian things and stuff like that.

Q: BUT THAT WAS A HAPPY TIME?

A: It was quite happy. It was not completely fulfilling, but it was better than being in Berlin, for me.

Q: AND YOUR MOTHER WOULD COME VISIT?

A: My mother would come and my aunt would come.

Q: AND THE OTHER STUDENTS WOULD LOVE YOUR MOTHER?

A: Yes, very much. So, that was - even Steffi was very much taken by my mother.

Q: SO YOU WENT THERE - WHEN, IN 1935 - '37?

A: We went there from 1933 till 30 - two and a half years.

Q: '36.

A: '36. And then, I went one year, to a Jewish school of Home Economics, which was absolutely ghastly, in a horrible part of Berlin, before I immigrated to Holland.

Q: NOW THIS WAS THE KIND OF THING WHERE THEY WERE TRYING TO PREPARE PEOPLE WITH SOMETHING USEFUL?

A: Right.

Q: WHAT DID YOU STUDY?

A: We were supposed to be able to sew, which I hated. So since we still had a maid, I let the maid sew everything. We were supposed to cook, since we always had cooks, I always burned everything. I didn't like that either. But we were reading Faust, which I liked. We had some psychology classes, and especially, child psychology, so if we would go into - as nursery school teachers, or something like that, we were prepared. And a little bit of stenography.

Q: NOW WERE THESE ALL JEWISH STUDENTS IN THIS SCHOOL?

A; [nods] Jewish - they were all Jewish students.

Q: AND THIS WAS IN BERLIN?

A: That was in a bad part of Berlin, that was later, East Berlin. Where you had to go by underground and change and all that - I mean, I just hated Berlin, always. Some people liked it a lot. I never did. Many of my girlfriends liked it, but I never did.

Q: DID THE NAZI'S BOTHER THE SCHOOL AT ALL?

A: No.

Q: THEY LEFT YOU ALONE?

A: Yes. And that was the first time I realized that there were other Jewish people who were terribly poorly off, in Berlin. I'd never know that. They came to eat…

Q: WHO WERE RICH?

A: They came from Poland and Russia. And they came to eat there. The things that we had cooked, they had to eat, because they had very little money. And one time, one of the fellow students took us to a Hasidim dance, which to me, was the most foreign thing in the whole world. That these were people who were Jewish, was to me, something I had never experienced before, of course.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR TAKE ON THEM?

A: I felt completely foreign. I didn't think that belonged into my world.

Q: SEEMED VERY FOREIGN, HUH?

A; Yeah, very.

Q: WHAT GAVE YOU THE INSPIRATION TO GO TO HOLLAND? WHY DID YOU LOVE IT SO MUCH WHEN YOU HAD GONE THE YEAR BEFORE?

A: the people were so friendly; they city was absolutely beautiful - Amsterdam, I just adored. They had wonderful museums. I went to the concert hall twice while I was there - Konsertgebau. And my family was very nice, and there was a freedom there that I appreciated. So, when I got there, I really liked it. And I

was very surprised that I learned to speak Dutch without an accent, so fast.

Q: THAT'S AMAZING, AT THAT AGE.

A: That helped me a lot, before going underground, because they tested me once, they woke me up in the middle of the night, to see if I would answer in Dutch or in German. And I did answer in Dutch. So they - later on, the underground group that placed me, could place me so that I could go out onto the street.

Q: YOU MEAN THEY PLACED YOU IN A SAFE ENOUGH PLACE?

A: Well, the first place wasn't so safe.

Q: WHERE WAS THE FIRST?

A: Should we go back a little bit first, about the star and all those things. Or you know that already?

Q: NO, NO, NO, NO. TELL US.

A: Tell us. Well, first, when the Germans came to Holland, it wasn't too bad. But in '41, it started already that you had to get a 'J' to your passport. And '42, you got the yellow star, which you had to pay with textile coupons, and sew on the left side of your garments when you went outside. And I had four. And had only one very funny accident, which I still remember. I went on the street, and a young soldier stopped me, German soldier. Took out his pocket-knife and ripped off half of the star and said: "You have sewn it on too low. You have to sew it on a little higher." And all the while he was holding my breast. And I thought - oh my God - I pretended I couldn't speak German. And I thought all these young people who had to be there, in the occupation force, actually didn't want to be there - many of them. And many of them didn't have a very good end, because you found young people in the canals quite often.

Q: GERMAN SOLDIERS?

A: German soldiers. And, in the beginning, you didn't see too much of the awful things going on. But when it started with the summons to go to the camps, then, we all knew that something awful was happening. Now I worked for - in a doctor's household, which I told you, with the two children.

Q: THIS NEUROLOGIST?

A: The neurologist. And he could write certificates for people, that they were too sick - they couldn't go to the camps. So I was lucky because I worked there; I got extensions twice, not to go to the trains, because you got a written [aufluff?] - your summons to come, a certain date, at that time, with your duffel bag.

Q: TO WESTERBORK?

A: To Westerbork. And then, I also helped in the [Judesberat?], which was an agency preparing people to get ready, with all the things that you could take in your duffel bag. It was all specified. You had to have a warm blanket, a warm sweater, mittens, a certain amount of underclothes, good shoes, and I was mending for them. And our bicycles were already taken away from us. So I had a little children's scooter - put all the stuff on the handle bars and went there, twice a week to pick up mending and bring it back again. And actually, it's very bad that I helped other people to get ready to the camps, which I realized later, wasn't the best thing to do. But it helped me too, to stay there longer. And, in 19…

Q: NOW WHY WOULD THESE PEOPLE NEED HELP?

A; They needed - they wanted all the people who went into the camps to be outfitted. Right. I don't know if you heard that from other people you interviewed. But there was a specified list of what you had to take, and what you couldn't take.

Q: AND SO YOU WERE HELPING THEM MAKE SURE THEY WERE TAKING THE RIGHT THINGS?

A: Well, I was helping the outfit that was getting the things together. They gave me some things to mend by hand.

Q: SO, YOUR SEWING CAME IN HANDY?

A: By hand, not by machine.

Q: NOW WESTERBORK WAS IN THE NORTH, WASN'T IT?

A: Yes.

Q: AND, IT WAS COLD UP THERE.

A: It was colder, and we knew that from there, trains went to work camps, but we didn't know yet, that they were extermination camps. I mean, in the beginning, we did not know. But I knew that I didn't want to go to any train, or any camp. And when the big [razia?] started…

Q: NOW THERE WAS A STRIKE IN 1941, IN AMSTERDAM. DO YOU REMEMBER THAT AT ALL? WHERE THEY WERE PROTESTING THE ROUND-UPS OF PEOPLE?

A: Well that was, I think, after they took the young people to go to Mauthausen and exterminated them there. There had been in [Wiernig?] - which was a camp to get them ready for Palestine, at that time. And that was closed, and they sent the people back to Amsterdam. I don't know exactly who the young people were, they picked them up on the street. That was before even, the yellow star. And many of the people, I knew, and my cousin knew, and that was a horrible shock for us. And then, later on, when the summons to the Westerbork camps came - it was for me, a sign, that everything would go haywire. So…

Q: WHEN DID THAT CAMP START - DO YOU KNOW?

A: I think it started already in '42. '43 the big [razia?] started. And see, in Amsterdam, the German Jews all had apartments in the new south - nieuwesuid. It was a not too expensive, modern flats, and they all had congregated there. And the Dutch were supposed to have been so wonderful, gave all the addresses and all the papers to the Germans, where the Jews had lived, which you probably you have heard

before. So, all they had to do is go from house to house and pick everybody up. And Frank had lived in that neighborhood, too, of course. And I was lucky that the doctor lived in the outer side, in the old part - it was only two blocks from the Konsertgebau, from the concert hall.

Q: WAS HE JEWISH?

A: He was half Jewish, and his wife was all Jewish. And, he could stay there. And when the big - there was a big [razia?] in '43, when they came through the streets and shouted: "Jews get ready." But they didn't ring our bell, so I was lucky. And a week after that, I said I have to go underground. And they had a group of people who helped…

Q: HOW DID YOU KNOW THEM?

A: I didn't know the people who helped me. I only came to know them, because my doctor's family was in contact with them. I sold one of mother's rub rings, I had a few things of jewelry, not too many. And I got my false papers. And I became Klara Elizabeth Rhinefern, who was a student nurse, seven years older, actually, than I was, but I looked pretty old, and was born near the German border. And they did that very cleverly, because mostly, all these identification papers were stolen, or were given by people, and then they put my photograph and my fingerprints in there, which you probably heard before. And then, you get ration cards, also.

Q: WHEN DID YOU ASSUME THIS NEW IDENTITY?

A: That was in 1943, in July. And the people in my group of the underground, placed me and two sisters, in a little flat in a very poor neighborhood, called Kattenberg, which is something like Hunter's Point in San Francisco. And we went out to clean other people's houses. Of course, the people knew that we were Jews but we didn't look Jewish, and we just earned our living that way; they didn't have to pay for us. And I didn't have any money to pay to be underground, either. It was quite nice that we could do that. But after a month they gave

us an old Jewish lady to live with us. She was from Amsterdam, but when she opened her mouth you could hear that she was Jewish, and she looked very Jewish. And her family was underground someplace else, but once a month, somebody came to visit her and bring her the news about her family. And after about half a year, we got home one day, and the whole neighborhood was gathered on the streets, and told us not to go back there; they'd picked up the old Jewish lady, from our flat. And they'd sealed the flat. Now, thank goodness, this lady didn't know that we were Jewish. She had no idea; she knew we were working girls and we were keeping her there.

Q: SO IN THAT SIX MONTHS YOU NEVER HAD ANY CONVERSATIONS WHICH REVEALED THAT?

A: Nothing. Nothing.

Q: DID YOU CONSCIOUSLY NOT TELL HER THINGS?

A: Yes, very consciously.

Q: BECAUSE YOU COULD SEE HER AS A DANGER?

A; Ja, definitely. She was about eighty years old, at that time. And very unhappy; she couldn't occupy herself too much. She read a little bit; she couldn't look out of the window too much, because, I mean, she was hidden. And it was very hard for her. She waited for us to come home and talk a little. And we, at that time, were so courageous, that we came back to the flat, broke the seal, the same night, got some of our clothes and our stamps, food stamps - which you had to have - and our cat. And the neighbors watched out for us, and then, we were placed in different houses.

And I was placed with a tailor family, who was on the Keiserstraat, which was on one of the canals, about three blocks from where Anne Frank was hidden - in a part of the town where nobody knew me. And I was the maid there and the parents knew it, but the people in the tailor shop didn't know it. All the people that worked there - didn't. And the German officers came there to have their uniforms repaired, because they were such a good, well-

known firm. And I had to open the door, with my little white apron, pretending not to be able to speak German - and thought this was very funny. But I felt pretty safe there.

Q: YOU DID?

A; Yes. I mean, you always were fearful that somebody would recognize you. But everybody knew that I was the maid there, from the milkman, to the people in the grocery store. And the people around - they had two little children too, and that always saved me. Wherever there were children, I was happy - I was reading with them and playing with them.

Q: NOW, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE THAT HIRED YOU AS THE MAID?

A: A tailor's family.

Q: A TAILOR'S FAMILY - AND THEY WERE NOT JEWISH?

A: She was half Jewish, her father was Jewish. And in the last winter, her family came and lived with us too - her parents. And I was very lucky, because they had a nice library and they were quite nice to me. I didn't like the housewife so much, but the tailor himself, was a very well read man and loved music. But in the last winter, he got open TB and was completely bedridden, and I took care of him, more or less. The children were not allowed to get into the bedroom anymore.

Q: WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO TAKE CARE OF HIM?

A: Well, I changed his linens; I took his - the bedpans, I brought him his food. The wife didn't sleep in the room anymore with him, either, because he coughed so much. And there was nothing you could do, and….

Q: WOULD YOU WEAR A MASK WHEN YOU WENT IN?

A: No.

Q: NO?

A: But I found out later on that, I did catch something there. And the wonderful thing was

he had a little gramophone, which, you of course, worked by hand, and we had very good classical records, which were constantly played. And his oldest little girl had a swing in the hall, and we were listening to the music and she was singing. She knew all the violin concertos, more or less, by heart, after he played them, over and over. And, in the last winter, which you probably have heard, was one of the worst winters for the whole of Holland - hundreds of people died.

Q: 1944.

A: '44, '45. There was no electricity anymore; no gas; all we had was water left…

Q: FOOD - WAS THERE FOOD?

A; Very little food. We went to a central kitchen. We got half a liter of sugar beans cooked with greens, and once a week, you got a tulip bulb soup - which made us very sick, but we ate it anyway, because we wanted to have something in our stomach. And I was the one that went to the central kitchen with a big bucket, and you had people who had worked on the busses and streetcars - they were the helpers in the central kitchens. And the transfers were given to us as coupons, for getting our half a liter of food. Of course, we never saw any meat, or any chicken or fish, or anything.

Q: WAS THERE ANY BOMBING IN AMSTERDAM BY THAT TIME?

A: No, only in the very beginning, but we heard the planes coming over every night and the anti-aircraft stuff was going on the roof. You know, you heard the clatter of that. And we could recognize the allied planes from the German planes.

Q: NOW, YOU WERE THERE - WHAT - TWO YEARS UNDERGROUND?

A: Yes.

Q: DID YOU MAKE ANY FRIENDSHIPS WITH PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

A: No, but I saw the girl with whom I was at [Kattenberg?] - one of the sisters. And on my twenty-first birthday, we wanted to do something to celebrate, and we took a train, which was still going, to one of the lake districts, and were lying there - on the green field. And when I got home, I was so wind burned, because I hadn't been out for so long that I could hardly look out of my eyes, and I had to see a doctor. And then, I was a little scared, but nobody could recognize me. We had to get some ointment, and the tailor family was furious at what I had done. But you know, when you are young, you do things that you would never do when you at an old age.

Q: WERE YOU AWARE OF PEOPLE GETTING CAUGHT UP IN ROUND-UPS?

A: Yes, we sometimes did see that.

Q: YOU DID?

A: Because see, I did go on the street. And…

Q: DID YOU FEEL SAFE, OR UNSAFE?

A: Safe, you never felt. I felt fairly safe - but really safe you could never feel. I mean, sometimes, you had horrible dreams. And in the last winter, we all dreamt about food, because…

Q: DID YOU EVER GET STOPPED BY THE POLICE?

A: No.

Q: NO?

A: So, that was lucky. One time before I had the star, I was stopped, because I didn't observe the curfew. And there, I was rounded up with a lot of Dutch people and we had to spend the night in a police station, but, not while I was underground.

Q: THIS WAS BEFORE?

A: That was before. And of course, to warm things was the most enterprising thing we had to do. We had to find wood, to put in a little tiny

metal stove, which was put on top of a pot-belly, a kind of Franklin stove. And we warmed the stuff we got from the central kitchen and warmed some water, to have something warm to drink. And in the evening, I went across to the other side of the canal, there were friends of the tailor's who had the black market. And they had a huge fire going and I was able to fill seven warm water bottles, which actually were bottles of bolls - they were from very thick material. I don't know if you know - it's the schnapps they have and it's in earthenware bottles that kept warm. And I could fill of that…

Q: SO YOU COULD USE IT AS A HEATER, HUH?

A: We used it in our beds, because we had three or four things of clothing on top of each other to get warm.

Q: THAT WAS A VERY COLD WINTER?

A; It was a horrible winter, and people dropped dead, right and left, on the street, the Dutch people, from undernourishment and from not having enough warmth and clothes. And they had this awful ['hongertogten'?], where the people went with their sleighs, to go to the farmers, and to barter - they bought all their jewelry, all their linens, to get a little more to eat. But in the end, the farmers had to keep what they had too. So there was nothing left. There's quite a lot of that written up in Dutch literature, after the war, because it was so hard for the people to stay alive. The south was already liberated; no trains came through anymore. The German occupation got hold of all the food that was in the big cities. And the people starved. And that, the only thing that made it easier, of course, for me, was that the whole population of Amsterdam was suffering. I was not the only one. The only bad thing was, that my so to speak, landlord, protector, had that open TB. And when I came later to this country, they found that I must have had TB there. They didn't discover it, thank goodness, before I came to America.

Q: DID YOU HAVE TO HAVE TREATMENT FOR IT?

A: I got twice TB here, and then I got treatment.

Q: DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE WAR, DURING THIS TIME?

A: Very little. We did have a radio in the beginning. But then, of course, we didn't have electricity anymore, we didn't know what was going on. Somebody told about D-day and they were all ready to tell everybody who I was. And I begged them not to do it, because we would be unsure, really, if everything was safe already. It wasn't - of course. That were the hardest times, I think, I went through in my life, was that cold - the cold winter months in Amsterdam. And we had fleas all over the place. The few little mice that were left were eating all the paper they could get, and were running all over the place. It was very bad, that you couldn't clean up right. And I had to wash the sheets of the TB sick man, in a salt solution, with the result that all my knuckles were infected and my nails were all black, when I got through the war, and weighed ninety pounds, and just made it. So…

Q: AND THE WIFE OF THE TAILOR DIDN'T HELP?

A: She helped a little, but not as much, because her children were pretty small. So, she wanted to take care of the children. And it was bad.

Q: NOW YOU TALK ABOUT BEING AWAKENED AT NIGHT BY THE UNDERGROUND, TO TEST YOU, ABOUT WHAT LANGUAGE YOU WOULD TALK. WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

A: No, I was tested by the people - the Dutch doctor's family. She woke me up before I went underground, to see how I would react. And I was so Dutch already in the short time I was there. I felt very Dutch, and it took me about a half a year to get my own identification - my own papers back, because I burnt my birth certificate. The doctor's wife told me I had to do that.

Q: IT TOOK YOU SIX MONTHS AFTER THE WAR, TO GET YOUR PAPERS BACK. [nods] YEAH. COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE LIBERATION?

A: Yeah, I could. It was very sudden for us. And when it came, I mean, everybody was up in arms, except of course, my family with the very sick man. And people were dancing in the street, and I remembered, I was going out, and I didn't know if I should go and join them. So I just watched. I remember, I didn't feel quite part of it. I was still feeling I'm underground, under a false name, and I didn't know what I really belonged to at that very moment. But, the relief you had, was unbelievable. And the most wonderful things were the food packages that came, from Sweden, immediately. And, could you stop a moment? [has drink of water]

First thing I did, was look for a room - a furnished room. I had, of course, no money, because they hadn't paid me any. And I had very little savings, because I didn't make much at the doctor's family before, either. And I found a very nice furnished room, also on the same, Keiserstraat. And I made friends there with a pharmacy student, and I started to paint a little, and got work in an arts and crafts shop to paint little trays and glassware. And made my money and then I helped partly out in the doctor's office again, because I had worked there for so long. I still was very good friends with them and I loved the children. And I kept in contact with the children, for many years, and with the doctor's family. And I found my cousin, who had been cooped up in one room all the time, because he couldn't go in the street.

Q: WAS HE LIVING WITH A FAMILY?

A: He was living with a family.

Q: IN AMSTERDAM?

A; In Amsterdam. And then, we found out about his parents and about our other family, who had perished in the camps.

Q: HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?

A: He found out, of course, through Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen and his mother on the train, and people who had been with them. And I found out through my uncle in Berlin, about my

grandmother. And I found out from another family member who had been at Goest in the Pyrenees, and who could get away from there, that my aunt was deported. So…

Q: WHEN DID YOU REESTABLISH CONTACT WITH YOUR SISTER?

A: Very fast, because they had little planes, going over to England, taking mail. And I sent a letter to a cousin of mother's who stayed in the same - at the same address, and they knew where my sister was. So we found each other and she was sure that I was alive. I mean, we never were very close, but I'm very happy that we have each other.

Q: DURING THE TIME YOU WERE UNDERGROUND, DID YOU EVER GET CONTACTED BY ANY PEOPLE FROM THE UNDERGROUND?

A; No, I mean, you got - you mean the ones that were hiding me?

Q: YES.

A; No. We only had to get in contact with them if we needed something, very desperately.

Q: AND YOU DIDN'T?

A: Well, I thought I was in the same boat as everybody else.

Q: SO YOU DIDN'T ASK FOR ANYTHING?

A: So I didn't ask for anything.

Q: DID YOU EVER MEET ANY OF THEM AFTER?

A: I met one person afterwards, who was very nice. And funny enough, his sister was wearing some of my clothes. Never gave them back to me, because, of course, I couldn't take that much with me. And they made ?? needed them later. And she needed stuff, so they had given it to her. And I was, kind of glad because she was so good to me. And you always knew if you needed something - somebody would come through. But we were warned, not to put anything in writing ever. And I couldn't understand how

Anne Frank had a whole diary going, while she was underground. They said it was the most dangerous thing to do - to put things on paper. Never to do it, and I never did. So my memories are not complete.

Q: BUT, OF COURSE, IN ANNE FRANK'S CASE, THEY DIDN'T GET PLACED THERE BY ANYONE. THEY DID IT THEMSELVES, SO THEY PROBABLY DIDN'T HAVE THE KIND OF EXPERIENCE THAT WOULD HAVE HAD SOMEONE WARN THEM ABOUT PUTTING THINGS ON PAPER.

A: You have a point. Ja, but still…

Q: SO YOU AVOIDED THAT - PUTTING THINGS ON PAPER?

A; Yeah, never did. But I was reading a lot. I was reading a lot of Dostoyevsky, and I thought if he could be in Siberia, and his memoirs from that house, then I could come through this too, because he was some inspiration to me. And in the beginning, I even had a library card, 'cause I could go on the streets. So, I got a lot of books from the library, but in the last winter, everything closed down, because there was nothing that was…

Q: PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BURNED THE BOOKS.

A; I doubt that.

Q: WHAT I MEAN IS THEY WERE SO STARVED FOR FUEL.

A: We never burnt books, never. People did get lots of wood from, especially the Jewish part of town, where some of the houses were deserted. And they got wood, wooden things out of the houses. And we had some kitchen chairs we used and some old wood in that old house, that we could use. You needed very little to burn the stoves. And I read, 'By the Light of Man's Brilliantine' which came from barber shops and was sold on the black market. And with a wig, you had it floating on the water. And I could read on my bed. It stank to high heaven.

Q: LIKE ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

A: I thought of him - that's brilliantine.

Q: DID YOU EVER FIND OUT ANYTHING ABOUT THE PERSON WHOSE IDENTITY YOU HAD?

A: Never.

Q: WAS IT A REAL PERSON?

A; Apparently, it was a real person. And they said they got it probably in a swimming pool. So if people left their stuff lying around - in the beginning, they were not that careful. People reported their identification cards stolen, very often, too, if they were with a group of underground people. The groups were mostly not more that fifteen to twenty people, who took care of a few people in that group. And I know that one person was once shipped from one address to another, in a coffin, which, apparently, was done quite often.

Q: ACTUALLY IF YOU HAD BEEN CAUGHT YOU WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO IMPLICATE MANY PEOPLE.

A: No, definitely not.

Q: YOU DIDN'T KNOW THEM?

A: No.

Q: THEY HAD A GOOD SYSTEM GOING.

A: They had a very good system going. And I'm sure I wouldn't have said anything, anyway, you know.

Q: HOW LONG DID YOU STAY IN HOLLAND AFTER THE WAR?

A: I stayed till 1947, when I got my papers to come to the U.S. My cousin, who was the son of father's sister, was a doctor in a small town in Illinois. He had an Illinois license - which was not far from St. Louis. So I came to St. Louis, and worked in a doctor's office there, for five years. And first, stayed in a little apartment and then, lived also with the doctor's family. He was my boss and he was the chief surgeon at the Jewish hospital, and also had two children. And I loved kids. I didn't get married, but the kids always came to me. And they called me the Pied Piper of Hamlin, because the entire neighborhood where we lived

in very nice house, came with me, to the park. And one of the girls whom I am still in contact with said she remembered me before she remembered her mother. Her first memories are of me going to the library and reading books with them and painting with them. I was always very lucky to have children I took care of, also, my friend's kids, quite a bit.

Q: AND IF YOU WERE WORKING IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WHAT? ADMINISTRATIVE WORK?

A: Not too much, I mean, a little bit. You mean in St. Louis?

Q: YEAH.

A: No, they taught me a lot - I did EKG's, and I did BMR's; I took some blood; I helped with small surgery which was done in the office, at that time, which they wouldn't do anymore, because now they would sue them all. And the other doctor was an internis…

Q; SO YOU REALLY WERE LIKE A NURSE.

A: Not quite - I never made it to be a nurse. See, my one thing that I'm very unhappy about is that I didn't get a decent education. But, I went back to school here. One of my not Jews, very American girlfriends - learned that I went to UC extension a lot, and she said: "You have to get it for credit." I did it without, and I had twenty-four upper limit credits, all A's and B's, and went to City College, and lied, and said I had the ?? which of course, I didn't have at all - that all my papers were burned and that I… They gave me tests, and I got in right away. And after two years, I went to State College, and I finished there within four and a half years, in sociology.

Q: SAN FRANCISCO STATE?

A: Yeah. And I worked full time, while I did it. And those were the happiest years of my life - to go back to school.

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK WERE YOU DOING AT THE TIME?

A: I was a receptionist and secretary at St. Luke's lab, and I stayed there for thirty-three years, which is a little too long, but I was afraid that I might not get a decent job, and might not have the security of a little pension. So I stayed. I tried, after I had finished San Francisco State to get into some social work, but nobody would take me - I was too old already. I was fifty-six. And I had no experience.

Q: THAT'S TOO BAD, BECAUSE YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY GOOD.

A: The only experience I had was I worked four years for suicide prevention. And that I liked. Before they got the big offices they were on 12th Avenue; they were very understaffed. Sometimes, I was all by myself and you had to really pick up fast and see who was only wanting to talk to you, and who was in danger. And I met some very nice people there. There's one of them - I'm still very good friends. But that is because of my father - my father's fate. But I couldn't do it anymore. I'm not fast anymore - fast enough anymore. I couldn't pick up what I did then - hearing what people were saying, or not saying.

Q: YEAH, THOSE ARE SPLIT SECOND DECISIONS.

A; And I did take some grief counseling, at one time, too. So I could help some people who had lost family members.

Q: HOW DID YOU DO THAT - WHERE WOULD YOU MEET THEM?

A: I did that on my own, because I wasn't selected - it was a course given in Salmo, under the auspicious of suicide prevention. They had a branch for grief counseling. And I enjoyed that and learned quite a bit doing it.

Q: I WORK FOR PATRIOTS - I DO GRIEF COUNSELING.

A: You do?

Q: YES.

A: I think it's very good for people who need it - to have somebody on whose shoulder they can cry.

Q: HOW DID YOU GET FROM ST. LOUIS TO HERE?

A; I always wanted to come to San Francisco. In Berlin, I had seen the film already, with Clark Gable and Jeannette McDonald, and I thought: "Oh, how wonderful that city must be." And I had heard from other people who had been here, how great it is. And in St. Louis you never would get accepted, because it was a very German town. It was a town of ?? and ?? people and ?? people, who didn't accept Jews, and at that time, in '47, many things were forbidden for Jews. You couldn't go to swimming pool. No Jews; no colored and no dogs. It was very bad, and I hated it. And, though, the people I stayed with were very nice and my cousin was not too far away. I had to take the bus to go to his place. I didn't want to stay there. The winters were cold; the summers were terribly hot. There was no air-conditioning yet. And though I like my work, and the people and the children in the doctor's house - I was glad when I came here. And I felt wonderful, the moment I came to… because here everybody comes from some place else. First of all, my friend Stephanie was here, with whom I stayed with in the beginning. It was a room and a kind of boarding house effort, where everybody had a room and shared the kitchen. And from there, I got, still, some friends. And the whole atmosphere was so much different than in St. Louis. I mean it was undescribable, what a free, wonderful city it was. And St. Louis at that time, no black person could go to a restaurant - not even at the airport, not even at the station. It made me feel absolutely awful. And my poor cousin, who was a country doctor and went to the farmer's a lot - never had a meal, complete, because he was called out; worked terribly hard; played cello in the Bellville Symphony. He had to move from that little town, because a new priest came in, and told them in the Catholic church, they couldn't go to a Jew doctor. That was in 1949.

Q: UNBELIEVABLE.

A: Unbelievable. So the Middle West was still terrible here.

Q: SO WHAT DID HE DO? DID HE MOVE TO ANOTHER TOWN?

A: He moved to another town where they had a nursing home, but, also lots of farmers around there. And He worked himself to death. He died at the age of fifty-seven. He was a wonderful man. He gave me the papers to come here, and my sister, too. And he got the papers from a Henius, who was room master - and his daughter to Carridene, to the actor. And they lived in San Mateo, and I got very friendly with them. And he actually was from the Danish branch of the family. We have a family tree from the Henius' that goes back to 1724 - two brothers went by foot, to Denmark, with the recipe for aqua vita. And I have a picture here, which appeared a few months ago in a German gourmet magazine saying that either the Henius' would be very proud of the hundred years that aqua vita is now in existence because of him. And these two brothers have a very big family now. They started it there. They came from Posen. My mother and my father, actually are third cousins. So, I'm a Henius from both sides. And my grandmother told me already, about the two brothers going on foot and the people in Denmark, whom I met, my family, reinforced it. It was a true story. And the Danish people - some of them came back to America. And one chemist uncle of ours, originated a Danish/American state park, which apparently, is going very strong on the 4th of July. All the Danish-American's go there. They have a ?? cabin and all kinds of American things there. So the Danish and the German and some Swedish Henius members try to keep in contact. I very often get a telephone calls from somebody. "Are you related - do you know where so-and-so Henius is?" And the family of my mother's side - Landsberger - are trying to get a family tree going from the sixteenth century. They're working on it in Israel now, and they are pretty far with it. So I think it's very interesting. I myself, am not feeling very Jewish, but having all these bonds with people, and many of them intermarried, so… the Jewish part comes out of it, ever so often

but not always. And I always think, maybe, if I wouldn't have had the Hitler time, I would have accomplished a little more with my life. I do some painting, and a little bit of writing, but that's about it.

Q: HELGA, DESCRIBE WHEN YOU FIRST WENT BACK TO GERMANY.

A: The first time I went to see my uncle and aunt, the one I told you about who had, all our money, so to speak, and see if we could claim something. And I was, that was in the late '50's already. And I was very apprehensive, at that time, but saw how nice people were, and how friendly people were.

Q: YOU WERE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT GOING TO GERMANY?

A: About going to Germany, and who would be a Nazi, and who did something to people I knew; who was instrumental of sending them to the camps. And I went to the cemetery…

Q: WHERE YOUR PARENTS ARE BURIED?

A; Where my parents are… it's the Park ?? - beautiful, kind of wooded cemetery, with a big stone where the names are engraved of my grandparents, my parents and also, the brother who died in the First World War - my mother's brother. And, funny enough, the graves of my neighbors, are very close by, the ones that I… their parent's graves. And so, we sometimes go there together when I am in Berlin. My sister isn't that sentimental. She never went back to the cemetery, but she was stationed in the occupation army, as a letter censor, right after the war. Any letter that came through Berlin had to be censored by the American army personnel. And she got letters that I wrote to my uncle into her hand, which was very funny. And she helped our neighbors with some food and some clothing, at that time, because she was stationed right close where we lived, with the American army. So, it's very interesting how the fates of people get interwoven.

Q: SO ON YOUR FIRST VISIT YOU WENT TO THE CEMETERY AND YOU WENT TO SEE YOU AUNT AND UNCLE.

A: Yeah.

Q: DID YOU GO ANY OTHER PLACES?

A: I saw my neighbors. And then…

Q: THE NEIGHBORS WHO…

A; With whom I was friendly all my life. That was wonderful - to see them again. And interestingly, enough…

Q: THEY HAD SURVIVED THE WAR?

A: Yes. He had been in the army, but since he could speak English perfectly, he was an interpreter, later on, for the American army. And he got through; his wife was raped by the Russians, when they came into Berlin. They have two sons, which took over the business and he was extremely friendly and we talk to each other on the phone now, twice a month, and got very close again. And, we came to the conclusion that friendships made when you are children can be very strong.

Q: THEY CAN LAST A LIFETIME, HUH?

A: Right. And when I came here, two of my other friends, from Hilsberg, also from close to where we were in the German boarding school, they moved here, with their family. I'm going to have thanksgiving with one of them. So I know them since I'm thirteen, fourteen, which makes it very nice, if you have all these old friends around.

Q: THE APPREHENSION THAT YOU FELT THE FIRST TIME THAT YOU WENT BACK, DID THAT LAST DURING THE WHOLE TRIP?

A; That lasted during the whole trip, yes.

Q: YOU FELT UNEASY?

A; I felt uneasy, yes.

Q: DID YOU FEEL THIS IS MY - THIS WAS MY HOME?

A: No, I felt, at that time, I felt I'm glad I don't have to live here anymore. Things were

not that good yet - you know, in the late fifties. Part of the city was terribly destroyed, still. And I was glad to get out - I went with a friend to Italy afterwards. And that was very good. And when I went the second time, I felt much more secure…

Q: WHEN WAS THE SECOND TIME?

A; The second was in '64. Are you watching my time?

Q: I JUST WANTED TO - THE TAPE RUNS OUT AFTER TWO HOURS.

A: How long are we?

Q: I DON'T KNOW. [about an hour and 43 minutes]

A; Now we should make it short and to the point then.

Q: NO, WE HAVE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU WANT.

A: I'm interested in what else you want to ask me about, because you know…

Q: SO THE SECOND TIME YOU WENT BACK, WAS THAT BY THE INVITATION OF THE…

A: The second time was by invitation, yes.

Q: AND HOW DID THEY GET YOUR NAME - DO YOU KNOW?

A: You write them and you tell them that you were born there. In the meantime, I had gotten a copy of my birth certificate, which, funnily enough, was still in existence. You are surprised how much stuff is in existence in Berlin, when the city was bombed so much. When I saw those two big volumes of people who had perished and who were listed in them, I wondered, who had kept all the archives going - what was hidden and where was it hidden. And I was…

Q; PROBABLY LIKE THE ROSENTHAL CHINA.

A: Exactly. And I was very lucky that, when I got out from the underground, that one of my girlfriends really had saved my photographs and

some of my books and my jewelry. While another girlfriend was very much afraid, and had put it some place, where the mice got some of my letters and some photographs. But surprisingly enough, I got some of the books back. My father had one - it's a numbered book, which I loved - a Rembrandt, and some art books which my mother had. So, that came all through which - some people never got anything back.

Q: HOW WAS THAT SECOND VISIT TO BERLIN?

A: The second visit was with a group of, pretty Jewish people. And we were placed - we were wined and dined and taken - some people wanted to go to the Jewish cemetery, which I didn't want to go. Some people, were invited, by Germans, who were not Jewish - I was invited by - what was he - a pastor, evangelical, who was very interested in how the Jewish schools, in Berlin had survived. There were two gymnasium ?? in Berlin, under the auspicious of only Jewish teachers, which were excellent. They had reunions now, and all these people really got some good jobs, because they got good training, before they left the country. And this man was very interested, of course, how my life was going, and his family was very friendly. He didn't, they were not very prosperous, but he wanted to do something for the Jewish cause which was interesting.

Q: DID YOU LIKE HIM?

A: I liked him, ja. And then, we went to see a show, which was Gershwin's Porgy and Bess, in English, which I - I mean… You don't go for that to Berlin, but it was just playing at that time and nothing else. And next to me was a German woman, who was extremely nice, and we got very friendly and we corresponded for a while. And she got invited by one of the people in Israel. So there were some contacts with non-Jewish people, whom I didn't know. But…

Q: DID IT FEEL ALIEN, THE CITY?

A: No, that felt better, that time. And the second week I stayed with my German neighbors. They invited me to stay

Q: DID YOU GO BACK TO THE HOUSE?

A; I go back to the house, and at that time, it wasn't sold yet. It was still in the hands of the wife of my neighbor. He had married the girl that had bought our house. And they told me that during the war, they had six families living there.

And the third time, it was wonderful. I came back - it was streaming rain. I was standing in front of the house and there was a big rainbow flag waving in the wind in front of the house. And a man came running at me, and introduced himself. He was the new owner and I said: "Oh, I am so glad, you have a gay flag waving in the wind there." He said: "My bother brought that from San Francisco. I didn't know it's a gay flag. But you know, probably know, I am gay." And we got friends right away. So he invited me to be with him, and we had dinner there together. My cousin, the one that is in the arts, had dinner with him too. They knew each other. And I felt very much at home, the last time I was there. I felt I could be part of something again. But, I never would like to live there - ever, ever again. So I feel very American, in a way.

Q: IS THIS YOUR HOME - AMERICA?

A; This is my home.

Q; IS SAN FRANCISCO YOUR HOME?

A: San Francisco is ?? because it's cheaper. But it's wonderful to be able to go to the opera, to the symphony - it's easy to reach. I have my car. I go swimming every day. So, I shouldn't complain. I'm very lucky that I came through, that I can say, because so many people didn't. And, I tell myself that every day.

Q: YOU FEEL GRATEFUL, HUH?

A I'm very grateful, I cannot thank the good God, because I don't believe in him. Many people in the underground made pact with God - if they were hidden away by some Lutheran, they became Lutheran. If they were hidden by some

Catholics - they became Catholics. And the very religious ones, became even more religious Jews. But I never could believe in anything. And that's the only, probably, thing that many people can't understand - that I can't feel more Jewish, in many ways. In my swimming pool is a cantor - a former cantor, from Berlin, and we often talk about it. And of course, he feels very Jewish. And I have a writing group where there is a man who was in Shanghai, during the war, and he feels very Jewish.

Q: HE WAS WHERE?

A: In Shanghai. You probably interviewed some Shanghai people too, didn't you?

Q: YEAH.

A: That was quite a colony of people too. And they didn't have it very easy, in many respects. But, of course, easier than I had it, I think. Would you like to ask me anything more that I didn't tell you?

Q: I WONDERED IF YOU THOUGHT THAT SOMETHING LIKE THIS COULD HAPPEN AGAIN?

A: I hope not, but when you see all these horrible things that - burning of the synagogue, or, defacing things, and swastikas popping up, you get a little bit anxious. And, but when I go to Israel, and see that the people are not afraid, and how wonderful life there is. We hear all the things about it - the dangers. My girlfriend let her twelve-year-old go to festivals, in Jerusalem, by himself, and a little friend of his own age. You would never let people like that, in this country, let their children go alone at an early age, and she doesn't feel afraid to walk alone on the streets, which I think, not many people do, nowadays here. Which, of course, in the Middle West, it's different I think. But in the big cities, it's a little dangerous.

Q: WOULD YOU EVER GO AND LIVE IN ISRAEL?

A; No. I have families of my mother's - a first cousin went there, in 1921. She was raised Zionistic, and got trained in San Sougi, by

Frederick the Great, of orange growing hothouses. So she knew how to grow oranges, and she started living in tents, had five children and the whole family now, is still there, in a kibbutz. And I visited them but they are not religious either. They feel Jewish, without religion.

Q: WHERE DOES YOUR SISTER LIVE?

A: My sister lives in Washington D.C. She was married to a lawyer; adopted four children; got divorced; didn't remarry, but became a very prosperous business woman.

Q: DOING WHAT?

A; She has an agency for temporary employees, which is very good in Washington D.C. She lives in Bethesda. And the two of us don't see eye to eye on many things. We love each other but she isn't interested in the arts, as much as I am. When we went shopping one day to a store, where they had cheaper clothes, with no labels in it and she recognized right away what it is. I said: "How do you know that's a Dior?" She told me: "My dear, I know what a Dior is - you know what a Cezanne is." And she has the same wit, like my mother. She's very vivacious, very funny and has a lot of energy and has a lot friends. And feels very American, much more than I. Besides, she speaks without any accent, because she had lived in England. And I'm sorry that I still have an accent, but I can't get rid of it. And lately, I met some Dutch people and they were really amazed that I still could speak Dutch without and accent.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY CHANCE TO SPEAK DUTCH THESE DAYS?

A: No, not at all.

Q: BUT IT COMES BACK?

A: But it comes back. Yeah.

Q: DOES YOUR SISTER FEEL JEWISH?

A: No, not either. And, their kids intermarried, also, except for her daughter, who married a Jewish man.

Q: ANNE, DO YOU WANT TO ASK ANYTHING?

ANNE: I WONDERED, A LITTLE MORE, YOU MENTIONED AT ONE POINT, YOU'D STARTED TO PAINT, DID YOU HAVE ANY EDUCATION IN ART…?

A: No, I just - you see, this is my painting behind you. Over there, is my painting. I have a few in the other rooms. And I go to a painting group in Berkeley, which are mostly professor's wife, one is a lawyer. And they all very democratic, very wonderful women, with whom I formed a bond. We have a little exhibit in our group, exhibit in one of the vineyard tasting rooms. And then, I have a writing group, in Pacifica. Two men and four women, and we write a little essay, to working on a book. We criticize each other; we read to each other. And I do that just to keep my little finger in, and not get completely dumb and crazy, because I have a short-term memory loss. Definitely, and sometimes I am looking for words, as you might have noticed, now. Not as fluent as I was, before. But, my life is really, quite pleasant. I don't have a computer. You probably have computers. No?

Q: NOT ME.

A; You have one, of course. [indicates Anne] But, you know, life with a computer is completely different, I think. And I'm still, in many ways, old-fashioned and can get on without it. I do write letters. I have some very nice family in South Africa - where one of my cousins immigrated to. And I write to my German family, in German. And they are very pleased that I can still do that. And I write to my family in Israel, and my friends there.

Q: WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU USE FOR THAT?

A: English.

Q: DO YOU WRITE TO ANYONE IN DUTCH?

A: No.

Q: NO.

A: See, my Dutch was very good, but I never got trained and their writing changed. It's more, it's easier now than it was before. For example, in former times, when I was living there - mensch was written the same way as in the German - M-E-N-S-C-H. Now, they write it M-E-N-S. And they have a completely different spelling now. So, I wouldn't be able to do it, but I get a Dutch book into my hand, ever so often. But then, I'm able to read. But not as fast as in English and in German. I'm very sorry that nobody wants my German books. I tried several of the universities, the libraries, and I found a wonderful, not Jewish, German couple, who lived here before. I met him on a flight from London to here, and he was reading a magazine - where the holocaust was in it. The 'Spiegel'. And we got into a conversation, and we became really good friends. They got some of my German books already, and they said when I die, they want to have more. So at least, some of the books will go to them. But they live in New York now, to my biggest regret. So, that's another link to Germany.

Q: I'M STRUCK OVER AND OVER AGAIN, IN YOUR INTERVIEW HOW YOU KEEP MEETING PEOPLE AND BECOMING VERY GOOD FRIENDS. SO THAT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT YOU AND YOUR CAPACITY TO BE ABLE TO DO THAT, HUH?

A: Well, probably.

Q: IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE VERY SUCCESSFUL AT IT.

A: It seems to be. A funny thing happened to me - my travel agent called me the other day, and said: "I have three German cookbooks here. Would you like to have them? I don't know a nicer person I would like to give them to." I was very pleased. So, I know you only need so many really good friends, I think, really close friends you can number on your fingers. We had a get-together just in July, in near Bordeaux, in an old, former chateau, that is now a hotel. That was my nephew's idea, because he was born in the 14th of July and he wanted to have his

birthday in France. So we had thirty adults and fifteen children congregating there - all family and friends. My sister was there too, and it was lovely. We had such good times together. And the people from England came, some are very close, my friends. And, I mostly, go once a year to London to stay with a friend whom I know since we were one year old.

ANNE: WE NEED TO STOP AT THIS POINT.

END OF TAPE 1 OF 2.

TAPE 2:

Q: HOW YOU FELT ABOUT DOING THIS INTERVIEW TODAY?

A: I felt very good about it, especially as your dear Dr. Ryan is not quite, fully Jewish himself, so I felt much more at ease. Because, my girlfriend was interviewed by somebody here, for the Spielberg… and that interview was not very good. So, I was, kind of, turned off by that. And I always felt that one shouldn't tell everything about oneself. Like, my father's suicide and my mother's drug addiction, but I think it plays a big role in your life and if later, my nephews and nieces really want to know about what happened to us, it is important. Because some of the money that was coming to us, did go into drugs, for my mother. And not leaving Germany probably had to do with her feeling that she would be lost in another country, because she nearly went to Belgium, also to be a leader in a pension. And she would have been able to do that. But, I think she was afraid. The last time I saw her was in Brussels on the station, in 1938, and I knew I wouldn't see her again.

Q: YOU KNEW? [nods]

A: So, that was…

Q: WHEN YOU SAY THAT YOU KNEW - ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT HER ADDICTION?

A: Yeah

Q: THAT IT WAS JUST OVERPOWERING HER?

A: It was, I think so. When she wasn't - when she was in good shape, she was just fantastic. She read a lot, she was very interested in all the arts, except for music - she wasn't very musical. And…

Q: DO YOU THING SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN AFRAID TO GO TO BELGIUM, BECAUSE SHE WOULDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO DRUGS.

A: Yes, I think so. Yeah. Definitely. And then, they were afraid to leave their beautiful things. So many of the German Jews, who really had some good, wonderful, Persian rugs and old furniture - we had some [Biermeier?] stuff, my father was collecting a lot of things. We had an African collection, because he was in Africa as a young man. And she tried, but she didn't want to part with many things. She did sell all the [Caruso?] records we had. We had a whole collection of Caruso records. I think that went into her addictive part.

Q: BUT THEN, SHE DIDN'T LIKE MUSIC THAT MUCH, HEY?

A: It was wonderful, though, to listen to them. My father was very musical, apparently, but we didn't know him, enough about him and he didn't pay enough attention to us, which my sister is very mad about. And you can change the times - that Berlin at the time, was such a free city for people who wanted to enjoy life. You can't describe it. And there was so much available for people who had a little money.

Q: YEAH, PEOPLE TALK FONDLY OF THOSE YEARS. HAD YOU SPOKEN MUCH ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES?

A: No. Many of my friends don't know too much about it. They know I was underground and it was a hard time, but I very seldom do - I think, I always thought it's my own personal thing. And I do get sometimes, a little bit of a nightmare, ever so often.

Q: WHAT KIND OF FORM DO THEY TAKE?

A: You know, if a plane comes low at night, or so, I suddenly wake up and I think that there's some planes coming over to bomb. And I sometimes eat too much, because the fear of having - having to be hungry again is very strong. People who have never been hungry cannot tell, comprehend. When I see all these homeless people here, it makes me so sick that the city of San Francisco doesn't do much more for the homeless - where they have money to put gold on the dome of a city hall - and not build shelters for these people. And have - give them a better life; that makes me very unhappy.

Q: THEY KNOW WHAT HUNGER IS.

A: They know what hunger is.

Q: THE FEW DUTCH PEOPLE THAT WE HAD INTERVIEWED OVER TIME, ALL TALK ABOUT HOW HARD IT WAS IN THAT LAST YEAR.

A: And see, the little bit of stocks in rice and beans and what was in the house of the tailor family I stayed with, had to be given to the little children, and to the TB sick man - who made it through. But I know of other people who didn't, of course. And it was very, very rough.

Q: DID YOU KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THE NEUROLOGIST AND THE TAILOR?

A: Yes. With the neurologist I had correspondence, but he died about ten years ago. The tailor family I only did for about a year and a half and then, I just couldn't think of it anymore and I let that die. But the children of my neurologist people, one, the son died and the daughter was here. And I couldn't get on with her at all anymore. She had the fondest memory of me, and apparently she woke up at night and called my name very often, because her mother wasn't very good to her. And, when she saw me, and I saw her, we couldn't get on together.

Q: WHY - DO YOU KNOW?

A: Well, she was very butch. She plays a big role in the gay community in Holland - gives talks and all that. And her whole life is centered

about that and it turned me off in a way. We couldn't see many things in the same way. Not because of that - but because she was so different than I had imagined.

Q: CLEARLY YOU'D PLAYED A SPECIAL PART IN HER LIFE, THOUGH.

A: I did, and many of the… Steffi's children call me their ?? great mother, because I moved in there quite often when she and her husband went on vacations, or on weekends. And I always was there for children's birthdays and I loved these children. And also, I got to be very good friends with my English professor who has six kids, who are all grown and kids themselves now. And for twenty-five years, I go there for Christmas Day. They are not Jewish. So, children play a big part in my life. But now I miss it, because most of them are in their forties and fifties and their children are small, and they're busy with them. So I envy the people who are grandparents. You probably interviewed quite a few of those. And my sister's kids are very sweet with me, but since they're adopted you can't see yourself in any of their ways. My oldest nephew I'm quite close to - he's writing grants and he's a very intelligent child. He lives in Los Angeles. But that's the thing I really miss in my life, are children, grandchildren.

Q: ARE THERE ANY THINGS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD, BEFORE WE STOP?

A: No, I would like you to ask me a question that I didn't - about something I didn't tell you. I don't know what it could be.

Q: I THINK WE'VE…

A: I think it was a wonderful interview and I thank you both very, very much because you made me feel at ease. And you brought out things that I probably wouldn't have told many other people.

Q: WELL, ON BEHALF OF THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, I WANT TO THANK YOU PROFUSELY FOR BEING SUCH A WARM, HONEST INDIVIDUAL, WHO TOLD US YOUR LIFE AND WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU AND

HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THINGS. AND IT'S JUST BEEN WONDERFUL. AND WE REALLY APPRECIATE IT.

A: Well, thank you.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
[picture of house] WILL YOU EXPLAIN WHAT WE ARE SEEING.

A: This is a wonderful house in Berlin - Listerfelder, ?? where I told you about, where we spent eight wonderful years. And where, my neighbor friends still live. The kitchen is still intact, as my grandmother had it. The staircase and the bedroom of my aunt are still the same as it was when I was a child.

Q: [picture of 4 or 5 story building, with bicycle in the foreground] DO YOU WANT TO TELL US ABOUT THAT?

A: The house in the middle is the house in the Keiserstraat, where I was underground. And I lived on the top floor.

Q: THIS WAS THE TAILOR?

A: That was the tailor; ateljee was on the main floor.

Q: AND THAT WAS IN AMSTERDAM?

A: That was in Amsterdam. And it was three blocks there, from where Anne Frank was underground. And those are all two hundred and three hundred year old houses. Very narrow, with very steep steps. We had to clean the steps by hand, of course - no vacuum. And polish all the brasswork in front of the house; sweep the street like the Dutch do - clean the windows.

Q: AND HOIST THE PIANOS ON THE LOFT.

A: Yeah, everything is hoisted, yeah, in these houses.
[momento picture] This is the fiftieth jubilee of the existence of the bank my great grandfather founded in Glogau in Silicea in Germany - and the fiftieth anniversary was in 1908. My great grandfather is on top; my uncle on the left and my grandfather on the right in

the picture. The bank still existed when we were living in Berlin.

[picture of three people, taken outside] These are my well-to-do grandparents, parents of my mother, on their vacation, in [Abbertseah?], which is now Yugoslavia. My grandfather in the middle, my grandmother on the left; her sister on the right. Her sister died in South Africa.

[picture of couple in the street, with the man in wheelchair] That's how I remember my grandparents, in Berlin - my grandfather, already in a wheelchair and my grandmother next to him. She never left his side - she was wonderful with him, and she didn't let him feel how handicapped he was.

[picture of two women] This is my mother's mother, again. My beloved grandmother on the left, with her sister on the right. When they were older, they were always good together and corresponded as long as they could. And I have the fondest memories of her, because as I told you - she is also a Henius, her grandparents were Henius and lived in Posen, and my mother came to visit them, and met my father this way. And they were married because they fell in love immediately.

[picture of man] This is my mother's only brother who was twenty-one years old when he died in the First World War. He wanted to show them that Jews were, in first place, Germans. At that time, my family was still going to synagogue in Glogau.

[picture of man, in uniform] Father, also in German uniform, but, thank goodness he didn't have to go into the army. He stayed in Berlin and helped them with medical supplies, getting to the front.

[wedding picture of couple] My father and mother, in their wedding picture - they had a big reception in the [Arlen?] hotel, which is now built up, next to the Brandenburg Gate and very much in the news again. I like this picture because they are very fashionably dressed, and I kept these gloves from my father

till I went to Holland - one of the few things I still had from him.

[picture of man] This is my father - he was very interested in the arts. He got bald, apparently, very early, which I can still remember, and he died when he was forty-two. And so did my mother. She was much younger. So when we, my sister and I were forty-two, we both were afraid we would die too.

[picture of woman] My mother, whom I remember as a very charming, very well-dressed woman, always having a lot of jewelry around, and always good humored when she was in good form.

[picture of woman, with a child] My mother and myself, when I was, I think, one and a half years old. She was very sweet with me, and I remember when they told me, when my sister was born, I said: "Are you still loving me now?" Because I only was used to have the full attention, which probably is quite common.

[two group pictures of girls] This was taken at the boarding-school, on the right side is my mother - on the left side, is my beloved aunt. My sister didn't grow very fast, at that time, but I was already taller than my mother, when I was fourteen. And as you can see, she liked to dress us the same way, which we both hated. Little embroidered dresses and other things, we had to mostly wear the same things.

Q: THIS IS THE RIGHT SIDE - THERE YOU GO. AND THIS OTHER PICTURE [left one]

A: My aunt - also visiting in Nietendorf - she was already in France at that time, and came for frequent visits.

[picture of two women] Amsterdam, when my mother came to visit in 1938 - I was eighteen, and I was very tall at that time. Shrunk a lot. She liked to have us dress alike. She got these outfits in Strasbourg when we were on a trip.

[picture of two men, one seated at a desk] This is my cousin, Wolfgang, now calls himself Eric Zeelanziger, who did an interview in New

York, and about whom I talked. He was underground in Holland. And he's sitting there at the Jewish agency - were trying to talk to people who had to get ready for Westerbork, for the camp. You see the sign in German up there - for all the German Jews.

[picture of document] I have left for being underground. These are for the food coupons. Inside, they made crosses, when you got your rations. And they have my name on there, where I was born, and that I am seven years older than my real age. Klara Elizabeth Rheinfern. I tried to imitate the handwriting, of course, on the other identification papers we had.

[picture of man, writing at a desk] This is my cousin, [Peter Feyjans?] - the son of the sister of my father, in his office in southern Illinois, where he was a country doctor, and nobody wanted to buy his practice because it was so far out of the way, and much too much work for people.

Q: I SEE THE CALENDAR SAYS JANUARY 1950.

A: [group picture of six children] Oh, this is my first birthday. I'm sitting on the left, with a wreath on my head. My girlfriend from England, whom I see every year, nest to me, my cousin Rosie, who died two years ago in South Africa, my cousin Eric, whom I talked about.

[picture of woman, with scarf on head] This is my only sister, Irene Stammler, whose living now in Bethesda, and is divorced, but has a very good business, and I'm glad that we get on with each other so well.

[picture of Helga, with another woman] This is my sister and I after the wedding of my oldest nephew, Mark, that's about six years old, and we were together in a big limousine that she insisted on having.

[family group picture, with Helga, center] This was just taken this year, in 1999, in Washington. We are surrounded by my sister's kids and their children. My sister is very vaguely in the background, on the right side. But I'm always glad to see them all

Q: ALRIGHT, AND THAT BRINGS US UP TO DATE.

A: Would you like to have one picture of myself alone, if you don't have one, huh? You don't need one, huh?

Q: THAT WOULD BE FINE, IF YOU HAVE ONE.

A: [picture of Helga - young] This was just before I left for Holland when I was seventeen, and I like to look at it because I have no wrinkles, and no double chin. And I'm still laughing at the world, that was kind of, waiting for me.

Q: A MORE INNOCENT TIME, HUH?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: WELL, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

Statistics:

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