

Interview with ALICE CALDER
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Q: Well, let's begin by telling me a little about where you were born and who was in your family and a little about your childhood.

A: Okay. I was born in Hamburg, Germany. Do you want to know when? In 1920. And I'm an only child -- I was an only child all along -- and -- what did you say?

Q: Tell me about your parents. What did your father do?

A: My father was a merchant and we lived a very ordinary life in Germany until the Hitler period came. I went to a Jewish school from the start, a Jewish girls' school. There was only one, I believe, in Hamburg at the time.

Q: Was that usual for most of the --

A: No, it really wasn't. Most Jewish children did not go to a Jewish school, I would say. By the time 1934 or '5 came along, I would say the children were expelled from German schools, from ordinary schools, and had to come to our school. There was a boys' school also, a Jewish boys' school, in Hamburg, but they were separate, completely separate. And so at that time, after the beginning of the Nazi period, children were not allowed to attend school in German schools and came to our school, which wasn't easy, because there wasn't that much room, really, where a lot of children had to be -- we had to make room for them. But it worked out fine.

Q: What made your parents send you to a Jewish school when most of the Jewish children went to --

A: We were quite religious at home and that was the thing to do. We learned about Judaism, a lot of Hebrew and a lot of Bible studies, and this is what my parents decided they wanted for me.

Q: Now, you say your father was a merchant. Where was he from?

A: Oh, he was from a little town called Bad Segeberg near Hamburg and my mother was born in Hamburg, I believe.

Q: Did you have a big family? Did they have a lot of brothers and sisters?

A: Yes, my father did. My father had a brother and four sisters and his brother lived in Berlin and the four sisters, most of the time lived -- no, three of them lived in Hamburg and the other one lived in Leipzig.

Q: So tell me something about the community life when you were growing up. You obviously were very involved in the Jewish community.

A: Yes, I was.

Q: Whereas other Jewish might not have been, your family was more?

A: Yes. Even though we did not live in a Jewish neighborhood in Hamburg, but the rest of my family did, my aunts and all my school friends did.

I had friends at home where I lived, in the apartment building, Gentile friends. And, you know, we did very nicely. We played together all the time until one day they weren't allowed to play with me anymore after Hitler.

Q: How old were you then?

A: Well, that was in 1933, so I was 12 --

Q: Twelve.

A: -- when it was started, yes.

Q: And a little bit more about your background when you were a child. Did you go to any kind of lessons outside of grammar school? I mean, I'm trying to get a feel for what it was like to grow up at that time.

A: Yes. No -- piano lessons, but that's about it. And I belonged to a Jewish youth group, which was very important to me and was wonderful. That actually already started before Hitler and, of course, continued. At that time, of course, it was wonderful, because we weren't allowed to associate with anyone else, so here were all these Jewish kids, teenagers at the time, and we had a great time, went on outings and met a couple of times a week for fun activities. And it was really very, very nice.

Q: Do you remember some of the things you did?

A: Well, the outings, they were, you know, Sundays we went on these wonderful outings or drives and trips that we took. And there were always about 20 or 30 of us and it was very, very pleasant, very nice.

Q: This was very much a part of the German culture, wasn't it?

A: Yes, it really was.

Q: There were a lot of these youth groups, I guess, for Jews and non-Jews?

A: Yes, there were different Jewish youth groups. There were some that were religious and some that were not religious and some that were very Palestine oriented. At the time it was Palestine, not Israel. Ours was not particularly Palestine oriented at that time, but it was religious insofar as we did not do anything on Shabbat and only had kosher meals and that kind of thing.

Q: So this is the time the youth generally was getting out hiking and in the woods --

A: Yes, yes. Hamburg has beautiful surroundings. The area is just gorgeous. And in those days people didn't have cars. We took the underground or the bus or the train somewhere and hiked and walked around all day in the woods. And it was really beautiful. It was a very lovely area.

Q: Did you feel yourself very separate from the non-Jews as children? You said you had some friends, but did you feel --

A: Well, insofar as I didn't go to school with them, so my main activities were all with Jewish kids. It was only really as a small child that I played with other kids.

Q: So it was a rather segregated life?

A: Yeah, it was for us probably from choice, even, at the time, and even in my younger days, in my childhood days that's the way it was for my family. It wasn't that for everybody. There were many, many Jewish people in Hamburg who barely knew they were Jews.

Q: Yes. Tell me, do you have any of your family -- were they like that?

A: No, my family was not like that, no.

Q: They were very Jewish?

A: Very Jewish, yes.

Q: And what was your feeling about the Jews who weren't so Jewish oriented?

A: Well, we -- I don't know. I didn't have any particular feeling about it. We kind of looked down on them, because they didn't really know where they belonged. And from my point of view, it wasn't a good thing. I was happy that I knew where I belonged and who I was and enjoyed being Jewish.

Q: And your mother, tell me something about her. Was she a religious woman?

A: No, she wasn't a very religious woman. My grandfather was. He lived with us. And my father lived with us only until I was nine years old and my parents were separated at that point. They were never divorced but they were separated and continued to be. And my father moved to Berlin at the time when I was nine.

Q: From?

A: From Hamburg.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: And I never saw him again until I left in 1939.

Q: How many years was that?

A: Well, it was nine years.

Q: So it was a difficult separation for your mother?

A: Yes, for me it was. I don't know about for my mother. We never discussed it.

Q: You never discussed it?

A: No. In those days you didn't discuss those things. Not like now, it's different. But no, we really never did. I was more or less completely left in the dark about that period of my parents' life.

Q: But it affected you very much, the divorce.

A: Yeah, yeah, it did. I think it's much better the way people do it now, that they discuss things with their children and tell them what's going on. But my mother never did, never said one word against my father and just -- "He's a peculiar man," that's all I ever heard.

Q: And he left and you didn't see him for nine years?

A: That's right.

Q: He didn't come back to see you or --

A: No.

Q: -- write a letter?

A: Yes, he wrote letters. Yeah, he wrote to me and I wrote to him and that was all.

Q: And you were left completely in the dark about what had happened.

A: Yes.

Q: How difficult that must have been.

A: Yeah, it is. Believe me, I would never want to do that to my children. No, it's not a very good way of doing it, but I think my husband is sitting there -- I don't think he's ever heard this before. But anyway, I survived and it was fine. My mother and I were very close.

(Q: Uh-huh, I can imagine. And you had your grandfather there.

A: My grandfather lived with us and my uncle lived with us until he got married in 1934, so I had men in my house raising me.

Q: What about your grandfather; he was a religious man?

A: Yes, he was.

Q: Was he from Hamburg?

(A: Yes, he was. He was the youngest of a very large family and since he was the youngest, I never knew any of the other members of his family. And apparently, he was not raised religiously. He was -- he did this on his own. He wanted to be that way and that was not the way he was raised. This is what I understand. But, as I say, I don't know anybody else in that family.

My mother had one brother. That was my uncle who lived with us. And that was all, my mother's family was very small, just the two of them. And we were very, very close with my father's family, also. Very close.

Q: Even after he left?

A: Oh, yes, even more so. Yes, very. My aunts were wonderful. The three of them that lived in Hamburg didn't have children, so I was everybody's child, and they were wonderful to me and to my mother.

Q: Were they married?

(A: No, they were not. Two of them had been married and had lost their husbands in the First World War, and the third

one never was married. But they were all very fond of me and did an awful lot for me.

Q: And your father's mother and father, your grandparents?

A: My father's mother I knew. She died when I was six. My grandfather on my father's side died long before I was born. So she lived in Bad Segeberg, as I said before, and she was the typical little old grandmother with the little thing on her head and, you know, I remember her very well, even though I was only six when she died. She was a wonderful woman. And my grandmother on my mother's side also died long before I was born. I didn't know her.

Q: So here you were, a young girl enjoying a very close family life and feeling very much your identity and having a lot of support, and all of a sudden your father left.

A: Yes.

Q: Of course, that was a real blow.

A: Yeah.

Q: Were you aware at all of things that were going on outside your life here, your family life, in terms of what was happening?

A: Oh, yes. You couldn't help it. Absolutely. From the time Hitler came to power, things changed completely. I think he came to power in January of 1933, if I remember rightly -- I'm not absolutely sure -- and then the first thing that we noticed, the first time we really felt the anti-Semitism at the time, was on April 1st, 1933, which was only a few months later, when there

(was a complete boycott of all Jewish businesses, stores and department stores, and there were Nazis standing outside each store on April 1st. I'm not quite sure how long this lasted; I think it was a week. And people were discouraged from going in in a way that they wouldn't dare go into a store. So, in other words, the shopkeepers felt it very much. They were standing in their shop and nobody was allowed in for a week.

Q: A week.

A: Yeah. And then -- well, after that they did all kinds of things to discourage people from shopping at Jewish stores, Gentile people, I mean. The Jews could go in, but there weren't that many of them. They couldn't live on Jewish customers, is what I'm trying to say, so one by one they, after a while, they had to close up their stores.

Q: What kinds of things did they do to discourage Gentiles?

A: Well, they put -- they smeared in great big letters "Jude" on the windows, and -- I don't really remember what all they did, but they tried to discourage people from going in. They still had their shops for quite a few years, but they did less and less business.

Q: Now, your father was a merchant at this time. He was still there --

A: Yes.

Q: -- was he, '39 --

A: No, he had already left long before that. He left in 1929, I think.

Q: Was there anyone in your family who had a store or was a retailer?

A: I think my grandfather still did at that time. I'm not quite sure. No, it must have been later. No, I think that he was already retired by then.

Q: And did you live on his money? I mean, is that how you were -- who around you was working?

A: That's a good question. I really don't know. My uncle was working, but I really don't know how we lived. See, these were also things that were not discussed. We didn't live very well after that, needless to say, but --

Q: After --

A: After my father left, but we managed.

Q: But your uncle was working. What was he doing?

A: He was a chemist, he had a chemical factory.

Q: He had a factory?

A: Yes, a small factory near Hamburg, on the outskirts of Hamburg, actually.

Q: And was he at all disturbed by what was going on? Did the Nazis interfere with his business as they were interfering with retailers?

A: No, I don't think so. I don't really know. I don't know much about his business, really. He got married in 1934 and had a baby in 1935, and in 1938 he left Germany. He was able to leave. My aunt was the driving force there. She said, "Look, this isn't getting any better" -- I'm skipping around now

from 1933 to 1938. But she said, "I think we have to leave." And it was really -- if it hadn't been for her, I don't think they would have gotten out.

Q: Well, let's go back to '33. In April already Nazis were not allowing people to come into Jewish stores.

A: Yeah, but that was a boycott for a certain --

Q: A week. And this was a very strong message.

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: What was the feeling, do you remember, at that time?

A: Well, first of all, for some reason, anti-Semitism was much worse in the southern part of Germany than it was in Hamburg, in the beginning. And why that was, I really don't know. But we did not feel it as much in the northern part of Germany as they did in the southern part.

What did you ask me?

Q: Well, what was the response to that? What were people talking about at that time?

A: Well, at first, the neighbors -- for instance, our neighbors didn't believe in any of this. They realized that Jews were normal people, were people like they were, and didn't see why there should be problems, why there should be a boycott. But little by little over the years, their minds were poisoned and they -- whether they believed what was going on, whether they really thought Jews were such terrible people or not, you have no way of telling. But their life was at stake. I mean, they really had to follow suit. They had to stay away from Jewish people. They didn't even greet people in the streets

(anymore after awhile, because they would be punished for doing so. So, you know, even though probably they did not think that Jews were such terrible people, they knew that they couldn't associate with them anymore. They were forbidden to do so.

Q: In '33 you were 13.

A: Yeah.

Q: And do you remember what did your grandfather say when this happened? Do you remember --

(A: Well, none of us originally believed -- don't forget, Hitler wrote a book called Mein Kampf, and in it he laid out exactly what he was going to do to the Jews and how he was going to get rid of them. And nobody believe it. I mean, nobody in his right mind could imagine that such atrocities could take place. So -- but little by little, it got worse and worse and worse. And, you know, some people tried to get out in the early years, those that had the good fortune to do so, but it was very, very difficult to get out of Germany unless you had money in another country or you had a business or business connections in another country, it was really pretty difficult. Some people managed to get to the United States. In order to get to the United States you also had to have a sponsor here, so unless you knew somebody or had relatives here, it was impossible to get to the United States. Most other countries, by the time we all realized what was going on and that it really wasn't going to get better and that it was only going to get worse, the whole world was closed to us.

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Q: Yes, I understand. I'm trying to find out when you became aware of this, whether at first nobody believed it.

A: Don't forget, it was a span of six years. It was such a gradual process that it was almost -- it was very, very difficult to realize what was happening. If we had realized what was happening and that it was going to continue and get that much worse, we all would have tried a way to leave. But it was so gradual that people just kept saying, "Oh, it can't get any worse."

I don't remember exactly when things happened chronologically, but I think it was probably in 1935 that we were forbidden to attend -- to go to theaters or go to movies. There were notices outside, "Jews not allowed," and nobody would dare go in if there is such a sign. And then we were -- for instance, there were a lot of Jewish doctors and lawyers and so forth in Germany, and German people were not allowed to go to them for treatment or for advice. So they were really the first ones, I would say, who, the doctors and the lawyers, to leave the country, because they realized that their livelihood was finished in Germany. That happened pretty quickly, if I remember rightly, certainly by 1935, that Gentile people could not go to a Jewish doctor and lawyer and so forth. So they had no way of earning a living and they were the first groups to leave, really, if they were able to.

Q: So after that week's boycott, what was the next thing that happened that affected your life?

A: Well -- can I refer to my notes?

(Q: Well, you say the non-Jewish kids weren't allowed to play with you around this time.

A: Well, no, it wasn't -- nothing happened for a while, after that. That boycott was it, I would say, for 1933 and '34. Then little incidences happened. Jewish people were humiliated in the streets and shouted at and called "Dirty Jews," but this also happened very gradually. And as I say, I don't remember what year it actually began, but there was a gap of a couple of years, I would say, where nothing much happened in Hamburg. Now, I can only talk about Hamburg.

Q: Right. When is the next thing, what happened next that was kind of startling?

(A: Well, the fact that we could not attend any cultural events anywhere except in Jewish places, clubs. They were still allowed to hold meetings. Jews were allowed to get together and have cultural evenings, but we could not go to the theater anywhere else, or the movies and so forth. That was something that affected us, of course, concerts and operas, and all these things.

And then, since it's been over 50 years I don't recall all that clearly, but -- let me see. Can I refer to this a minute? I wrote this all down for my children, so that they would know what went on.

(Yeah. I wrote here that by about 1935 signs appears in all public restaurants, theaters, clubs, movies, "No Jews allowed."

(Q: Now, tell me, when non-Jewish children were not

allowed to play with you, what was your feeling about this as this is happening? How is this affecting you?

A: Well, it really didn't very much, because I had a lot of Jewish friends. We wondered why and what did we do to them and, you know, we were friends before and why can't they talk to us now, but it really didn't bother me a great deal, because I had a lot of friends.

Q: And what about not being able to go to concerts and things, what were you thinking at this time or what was your family talking about? Was there any hysteria or concern or was it "They're just being strange"?

A: No, we knew what Hitler was trying to do, but everytime something happened, some new laws came out against the Jews, we thought this was the end, you know, this would be the last. We could never imagine it getting worse. But every few months a new law came out regarding Jews, either you can't go to this or do that or you must -- for instance, we had maids in those days. We had a maid at home, and it so happens that our maid was an old lady and she'd been with us many years and it didn't really affect her. But most other people who had maids had to give up the maids because if they were under 35, I think it was, they weren't allowed to work for Jews anymore, because of what they called (Rassenschande), if you know what that is. They were afraid that Jewish men would rape them, or something like that. Anyway, they had to leave, even though they didn't want to leave. They had a very good life with Jewish families, most of these people.

(So it didn't affect us, because our maid was older. She had to leave simply because we couldn't afford her anymore in the end, not that they got a lot of money, but they lived -- and we moved to a smaller place and there wasn't room for her. So that was the reason we had to give her up.

Q: When did you move to a smaller place?

A: I think in 1935.

Q: Why did you have to do this?

A: It was a financial thing, really.

Q: When this was happening, did any of you -- was there discussion among your grandfather and your mother and your uncle about whether you were in any danger, about other people leaving, what you should do? Was there any of that sort of talk?

(A: No. Well, older people like my grandfather thought -- he firmly believed there was no way it could get any worse and people leaving and going to a strange country, they're crazy, they don't know the language and they don't have a job and they can't earn a living, and it's a crazy thing to do. And so he never gave it any thought, really, until about 1938 and my uncle left. And even then my grandfather thought this was ridiculous, he's going to Argentina, he doesn't know the language, he's got a little baby, a wife and baby, and what's he doing there? You know, what's he going to do?

(Anyway, it wasn't until 1939, I suppose, beginning of 1939 that a friend of mine wrote to me from England. And she had immigrated to England as a domestic servant, which was the only way you could get into England at the time, or even before

(that. And she wrote to me and said, "If you want to get out of Germany, I'm going to be able to -- I would be able to get you out. Do you want to?" And, of course, by that time, 1939 -- I'm really skipping around in years. By 1939 it was such that we all knew that there was no hope and wanted to get out, no matter what or where we would go. So she did find me a job and I started corresponding with the people and had all my papers ready by June 1939. And by that --

Q: Okay. Let's go back and see what led up to that, what were some of the things that -- in '35 your grandfather is still saying these people are crazy, even in '38. Your mother, what --

(A: Well, for instance, my mother would have never left, because she wouldn't have left my grandfather alone. And there wasn't anywhere for her to go, really. (Crying.) Wait just a minute.

Q: Of course.

A: Give me my purse over there.

Q: (A Voice) Would you like us to turn the camera off?

A: Yeah. (Pause.) You can turn it on again.

(What really led up to it, I suppose, was, first of all, I think it was in early '38 -- I'm not quite sure, maybe '37 -- when a law came out that all Jews had to hand over all their valuables to some designated place. In other words, all jewelry, all silver and gold and heirlooms, any valuables that we had we had to hand over. The only thing we were allowed to keep was a wedding ring -- not an engagement ring, but a wedding ring and one set of silverware for each person. And

(since we were all very afraid not to comply with those orders, we all marched down there, wherever it was. And I remember going with my mother (crying) and -- well, you know, when you look at the whole picture valuables are not very important, but at that time, especially since some of the things had belonged to my grandmother and other members of the family, it was important.

And so once we had done that, I think that was -- I can't remember if that was before my uncle left or afterwards, but it was around that time. And then, of course, the next very bad thing that happened, which was really the beginning of the end, was on November 10th, 1938, which is now known as Kristallnacht. What happened was I was working at the time. At that time we would only be allowed to work for Jews, if there were any left to work for, and I was working for a furrier in a store, stock work or whatever, very unimportant job, and I went to work that morning and -- oh, boy.

On my way to work in the streetcar I noticed that all the department stores which were Jewish owned had their merchandise thrown out the windows and all the windows broken and there was a big mess in the streets and all over. On my way to work I passed a synagogue and realized that it had been burned during the night. It was still burning, as a matter of fact, when I went by. I had no idea what was happening. I mean, we didn't have television in those days and very little radio, and besides, those things would not have been on radio.

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(I had no idea what was going on. And I got to work and found out that our boss, the couple who owned the store, weren't there. And we waited and waited and they didn't come. And we realized then that they had been deported during the night to Poland. They were of Polish origin and apparently -- I found out a little later that day -- this did not only happen to them; this happened to all the Jews who were born in Poland and who had come to Germany at the beginning of the century.

And they and their families -- my cousin, who certainly was born in Germany, but she was married to a Polish Jew, and she also was deported that night. These orders came from high up and it always sort of happened at a certain time. "At midnight, you do this on a certain day."

(So our bosses were gone, we were in the store not knowing what to do, and pretty soon a couple of SS people, Nazis, walked into the store. And we thought this was it. We were trembling, we thought they were going to arrest all of us, but at that time the orders were to only arrest the men. So the men who worked for us were taken away forcibly, not knowing where they were going or why, just because they were Jews, and the rest of us were left, the girls. And so we went home. There was nothing else we could do. We went home, closed up the shop and went home.

(And when I got home I found out that in that same night many, many Jewish men in Germany had been arrested, had been sent to concentration camps, including my father. Since my father lived in Berlin, I did not know right away that he

(was one of them. My uncle was, thank God, already gone, and my grandfather was too old. They didn't take old people at the time. But there were other cousins and cousins of my parents and so forth, who were arrested at the time. And we had no idea where they were going or whether we would ever see them again.

This also happened on November 10th, 1938. And then we, of course, realized that Hitler meant every word that he had written in his book, how he was going to exterminate the Jews and how he was going to get rid of them. But by that time the world was closed to us. There was no place to go, almost no place to go.

(So after November 10th, 1938 we all wanted to get out. So that's when, you know, this girl wrote to me that she could get me a job, I said, "Yes, please do." And she did. And I was, of course, hoping to get my mother over there to England, but I was only there about three months when the war broke out (crying)) and there was no further communication with Germany at all at that time. The only communication we had after war broke out was, strangely enough, the Red Cross was able -- we were able to send brief messages, messages containing not more than 25 words, and the Red Cross would deliver them, after months. You know, it took a long time, but they did get there and an answer came back. I mean, we did this maybe twice before it stopped altogether. I sent a message and my grandfather answered, because nobody else was home anymore. (My mother had been deported by that time and so he told me

(that (crying). He told me in this brief message that my mother was gone and my aunts were gone and there was nobody but him. And that was really the last I heard. And strangely enough, I found out years later that my grandfather died in Hamburg in an old-age home on September 4th --(crying) sorry about this -- 1942, which was, it so happened, the day that we got married, which we didn't know, of course. So that was just the irony of it all. But I don't know any more after that.

So what really led up to my leaving Germany was KIRSTALLNACHT, I would say.

(Q: Tell me, when you were telling your mother to take your silver and precious things, you said you were too afraid not to. What did you think would happen, or what would have happened?

A: Well, we would have -- any time you did not obey orders that came from the government, you would be automatically arrested. I mean, little did we know that this was what happened, and anyway, we didn't know that there was no future for anybody who stayed there, but we would have been too afraid we'd be arrested, we'd be beaten, you know.

Q: Did those people who were arrested come back?

(A: Yeah, I forgot to say that. The people that were arrested that night in 1938, in November 1938, did come back. They were gone for, I don't know, several months, and little by little they came back, one by one, I should say. But they had been terribly treated, like worse than animals, even at

(that time. But they did come back, with their heads shaven and -- but they did come back, for a while, until they -- until after I left. You see, most of what happened afterwards, like when my mother was deported, and my father, too, for the second time, I was no longer there. I left in June 1939 and this didn't happen until about 1941, '40, '41, something like that. And they never came back.

Q: But they were taken to concentration camps already in 1938?

(A: Yes. I don't believe there were as many camps at that time. The camps were being built, I would imagine, the whole time, and some of them were just taken to police stations, too. I don't really know. But they definitely were taken to concentration camps, also, but as I say, they came back. And these are some of the people whose names we gave today, friends of ours, who were at the time young boys, of course, who did come back and then left, were able to leave, the ones that we know here were able to leave Germany. But those who were not able to, and that's the large majority -- you know, there might be an awful lot of people here who are from Germany -- I can only talk about Germany, I don't know anything about Poland -- but most of them didn't.

Q: And when did that happen?

(A: That happened probably when war broke out, I would think. It certainly did not happen when I was still there, no. That's something we heard about just like you did.

(We did already have to change our names, however. This was -- I can't remember when that began, in our passports --

(not only in our passports. Altogether, Jewish girls and women had to either take the middle name -- I'm not sure if it was the middle name -- Sarah, and men had to take the name of Israel, unless they had a Jewish name or changed their name to a Jewish name. In other words, my father's name was Seigfried (Baboch), that was the family name. And, of course, Seigfried was a very German name and certainly not a Jewish name, and he had to actually take on a Jewish name. He was forced to. And in my passport already it says Alice Sarah (Baboch), which was not my name. But that's what we had to call ourselves. And the passport had a great big, red "J" in it for Jew so that, God forbid, there was no mistaking that they knew that we were Jews. I still have that passport lying around somewhere.

(Q: When was that? When did you have to change your name?

A: I don't remember. Somewhere in the summer of 1938, I would say.

Q: In 1938 you were 18 years old. Did you have any boyfriends?

A: Yes, I did. Yes.

Q: And what happened when all the boys were taken away?

(A: My boyfriend was not Jewish. His name was Hans Cohn and his father was a Jew, but his mother was not, and he was not raised Jewish. And, of course, his father also was deported. And he was what they called a half-Jew. And I know they had some difficulties, they couldn't do certain things, but I don't remember what all that was.

(I also had Jewish boyfriends, of course, who were arrested that night that I talked about in November '38, and came back later. This one particular one I'm thinking of was not able to leave Germany and stayed behind. He was there throughout the war and I don't think very much happened to him. Why, I can't remember, especially with the name of Hans Cohn. And it turned out I met another Hans Cohn, who is now my husband. It was very ironic, really. But my boyfriend Hans Cohn at the time, I stayed in touch with him for -- I heard from him after the war still, but he's okay. I mean, he was all right. Nothing very much happened to him, I don't think. I think he was even in the army, the German army.

Q: They took a half-Jew?

(A: Yeah. I don't understand it, either, what that was all about.

Q: You were thinking of another young man who didn't get out.

A: Yeah. He was the boyfriend before this other one. And he just disappeared, just like the rest of them, at one time.

Q: And what about your trip to see your father?

(A: I didn't go to see him; he came to see me. He came to Hamburg -- I wrote to him that if he ever wants to see me again, he should come now, because I'm leaving. And so he did. And there was really nothing particularly to tell about that reunion. It wasn't particularly --

Q: Disappointing.

A: Yeah, it really didn't mean much to me anymore by that time. I think. You know, 50 years later, it's easy to say that, but that's how I thought.

Q: And what happened to your father then? He was taken away on Kristallnacht.

A: Yeah, but he came back and then I saw him after that. And then in -- I believe he was -- I heard -- you know, this is all documented. The towns kept records about everything and you can easily find out now when a person was arrested and so forth. And I think he was arrested in Berlin, of course, in 1940 or '41, around the same time as my mother and most of the others were.

My mother was sent to Riga, which is in Latvia; that much I know. Hamburg had a system where they printed a book about this, with all the names of people who were deported, where they were sent to, their birthdates, and they published that book and they sent us a copy of it. They sent -- well, we were notified long after the war, of course, that -- I don't know. We found out somehow, but I don't remember how, that we were able to write to the senate in Hamburg to be put on a list of survivors to be sent any kind of communication that they had and anything that -- like this book, for instance, where they recorded every single Jewish resident of Hamburg and what happened to them. And we were sent a copy of that. And we're still getting communications from them now about what happened to my school and to a certain synagogue, what happened

(to the chief rabbi of Hamburg, and stories about him, a whole book about this rabbi, whose name was Dr. Josef (Kallebach), who was a very, very well-known man and a very well-known family. He had lots of brothers and they were all rabbis, and he was very dear to me. I loved him dearly and I was glad to get that book about his life story. And there are still books being published now about the Jewish hospital in Hamburg and what happened to that, when that closed. And we're getting communications through all this. There's a calendar every year and they send us magazines. I'm not the least bit interested in that kind of stuff.

Q: Do you know where your father was sent?

(A: Yes, to Auschwitz. And what else can I tell you. I'm trying to think.

Q: And your uncle, what happened -- he left?

A: He left, he went to Argentina.

Q: So he's all right.

(A: Yes, he died in 1975 and I saw him several times before that. At first, you know, we wrote very faithfully to each other for many, many years, every month. And things were very, very bad for him. He had a hard time getting started in Argentina. He didn't know the language, he was over 40 years old when he left Germany, so it wasn't easy for him to learn a new language, and he had a very hard time. He did scrape the money together to visit me (crying) in 1957 for our son's bar mitzvah.. That was the only time he came, but I went to Argentina a couple of times while he was still living,

to visit him, and we were very close.

And my cousin is still alive and lives in Argentina, and we're very close, too. He's the only family I have left.

Q: When you think back about those years in Germany before you left, and your grandfather's attitude and the situation your mother was in, and your uncle, what do you think? Obviously, it was your grandfather who kept you there.

A: No, not really. I don't think I can put the blame on him.

Q: No, I don't mean to blame him; I'm just interested in what he's thinking.

A: I think the older people generally could not foresee that anything like this was going to happen, but neither could any of us, really. I think the older you were the more you thought this can't possibly happen.

Q: It's easier for younger ones.

A: Yeah, it's always easier for younger people to adapt to new things and new ideas. And a lot of the people who did leave were young people and took off to England. And as I say, it was only possible to get to England as a domestic, and they wanted young girls, they didn't want older people.

Q: So tell me about that.

A: Well, the family I went to was not Jewish. I don't think they'd ever seen any Jews in their life. But they were interested in what my friend told them about what was happening in Germany. They lived in a tiny place in Kent and really didn't know what was going on, but my girlfriend told them what

(was happening and could they use somebody who would help them in the house, and they said yes. And they were very fine people, very, very, nice. In those days, you know, in England, as well as in Germany, I think, domestic help ate in the kitchen and wasn't part of the family and this kind of thing. And they, right from the start, treated me as a member of the family. And they had a little girl whom I looked after, and did a little housework. I wasn't too good at it, but I learned and I learned to cook the English way, which is not very gourmet. And really, they were very, very nice people whom I lived with, but I was only with them for about a year, I suppose, when the British -- this is a whole other story.

(The British were very leery of refugees, because there were a lot of spies in England at the time, whom they called fifth columnists. And they were literally afraid. They really didn't know whether we were legitimate Jews or whether we were spies, and so they forbade us to live in coastal areas. In other words, I was living in Kent, which really wasn't a coastal area but it wasn't very far from the coast, and there were certain areas in England which became -- what did they call them? -- aliens restricted area, yes. And so I had to leave, once again. I had to leave this family because they lived in Kent, and I had to go to London.

(And again, we were not allowed to accept regular work. You know, things were pretty bad in England at that time. The war had just ended and economically England wasn't in very good shape. And so they were not allowing us to work other than domestic work. And I went to London in 1940 and took a

(job with a Jewish home for the aged, which I hated. And it wasn't until the following year, when a lot of people went into war work, that they needed people and we were allowed to do anything we wanted to. And I found -- not anything we wanted to; that's exaggerated. But we were able to work in certain jobs and I took a job in a store selling dresses and clothing. And it happened to be a Jewish family, but that was coincidence. And I did that until I met my husband, which wasn't very long after.

Q: How long after was it?

A: Well, we met in 1942, in summer of 1942.

Q: Now, your education in Germany had been through what?

A: Oh, about the equivalent of tenth grade.

(Q: And then you started in to work?

A: Yes.

Q: At this store?

A: At the furrier, no. I had lots of jobs. I originally started as an office apprentice and that was very nice. I learned a lot and I would have stayed there but they closed up. I mean, they were a Jewish firm and they weren't allowed -- they weren't able to continue functioning, so I lost that job. And then I had lots of odd jobs, a few months here and a few weeks there, and nothing very exciting.

Q: When you were in England you were all alone.

A: Yes.

(Q: Except for your girlfriend. She was the only one you knew?

A: I had several friends who came over at that time.

They were all sort of strewn around the area, we weren't really together, but I knew several people, but no relatives, no.

Q: And where did you live in London?

A: Where did I live in London.

Q: I mean, did you have a little apartment or something?

A: No. When I first went to London I lived at the home, Home for the Aged, it was called, in southwest London. And then later on I moved in with a friend and we shared a room, not an apartment -- we couldn't afford an apartment -- a room. And then I met my husband, who later changed his name to Roy Calder.

Well, we actually met at a concert in London. And it was arranged by a Jewish -- what was it? I can't remember. A Jewish group. And I went there with two girlfriends and he was there. He was in the army already at the time, but he was on leave. He was stationed in Scotland and was on leave in London and visited a relative. And --

Q: Was he English?

A: No, he was from Germany. No, he's from Germany. He had come over, yeah. But his story will be told separately, I suppose. He was in Switzerland at the time and came over to England from Switzerland. And after a lot of different happenings he joined the British army. He will tell his own story about what happened in between.

And, as I say, he was stationed in Scotland, near Edinburgh, and we met at that concert and (laughter) we talked during the intermission. We were the only young girls there, mostly older people, actually, and so since he was young at the

(time, too, he came and talked to us. And then he called the next day and said could he meet me somewhere and -- actually, there were three of us and he didn't really know who he was calling, but it happened to be me. And so we met the next day for a date and that's how we got to know each other. And three months later we were married.

Q: When he made that phone call he could have been to any one of the three?

A: Yes. Two of them lived together and the other girl, who actually was the one who got me over to England, lived in a different place, so he knew it wasn't her. But between the two of us --

Q: It could have been either one, but he was lucky enough to get you.

A: Absolutely, you're darned right he was lucky.

Q: So seven days later -- no, three months later you were married.

A: Three months later we were married, yes. But in the meantime he had gone back to Scotland, and so we only saw each other for a few days that leave, and then there was one more leave for a few days, and then we got married. So we literally didn't see each other more than two weeks.

Q: Now, tell me what prompted you to marry in that short time?

A: Well, we loved each other and there was nobody to -- we had nobody. He had no parents, I had no parents, and there was no reason not to. We loved each other and we thought we would like to spend the rest of our life together.

Q: And when did you decide that you loved each other?
After the first date did you know that's the man of my life?

A: More or less.

Q: Really?

A: Yes (laughter).

Q: Even before he came over to talk to you would you
have --

A: No, no.

Q: You didn't see him?

A: No, I didn't; he saw us.

Q: And he came over and you said, "That's him!"

A: Well, not quite like that, but almost. (Laughter.)
And this is 47 and a half years later and we're still married.

Q: You got married in England, in London?

A: Yes, we got married in Scotland. He was stationed
in Scotland and he didn't even get leave at the time when we
got married. We just got married and that was it. And no
honeymoon or anything. We wouldn't have had any money, anyway,
for a honeymoon, absolutely no money the whole time in England.
And -- I'm trying to think.

Q: When did you come to the states?

A: Oh, well, then he was in the army altogether for six
years and was sent over -- our son was born in 1944 and shortly --
no, about a year after our son was born my husband was sent
overseas with the army to West Africa first and then to Burma
for 15 months he was away. So when he came back he no longer
had a baby, he had a two-and-a-half-year-old boy. And it was
different at first when he came back from the army.

(In the meantime the war was ended. Actually, the European war had already ended when he left England, but the far eastern, you know, the Japanese war was still on for another six months, I suppose, yeah. And so he was sent -- right after the end of the European war he was sent overseas. I don't think he encountered very much fighting, but I didn't know then he got pretty sick overseas. And it was awful, to be alone again.

Q: In Scotland you were living?

A: No, I lived in London, partly in London and partly in Shoeburyness, which was on the coast near London. And so -- but he really, as far as our life in England is concerned, he has a much more interesting story to tell.

(Q: Well, all right. So he came back after 15 months and you had a two-and-a-half-year-old son and how long were you in England and when did you get to the states?

A: Well, we were in England -- well, he came back in 1946, I think, yeah, '46, and then our daughter was born in 1950 and we left for -- my husband wasn't really able to earn much of a living in England. He just couldn't find what he really wanted to do and had no connections of any kind, and things were very rough for us in England. And we had friends here in the United States and two years after they came here we left, which was in January 1953, when our daughter was three and our son was nine.

(And we came more or less straight to California, San Francisco, and have never left and never regretted coming here and still don't. We love it.

Q: Did you ever work here or were you working at home?

A: Yes, I worked at home mostly. I had a couple of jobs, but I stayed with the children. I stayed home. My husband had all kinds of jobs, always improving himself a little bit. He has a lot of self-confidence and did very well.

Q: Now, you've got a son who's 46 and your daughter is 40.

A: She just had her 40th birthday, yes.

Q: And, of course, we know there's a lot of talk with survivors of children of survivors, and I'm wondering, have you talked to your children about what it was like for them to be the child of a survivor?

A: No, not very much. We both always had trouble talking about what happened to us and what happened during the war, and this is why I wrote down my memoirs in six pages of what actually did take place, and gave it to them, rather than talking to them in person. This I did in 1984. And our son is the kind of person who thinks that if he doesn't talk about it or doesn't bring it up, it will go away. He doesn't want to open any old wounds; he would rather not hear about anything. He has never encouraged us to talk about it, really.

Our daughter has. She's a different person. She would like us to talk about it. And it is really for her -- well, Michael, too, Jackie and Michael, that I wrote down what experiences we did have, because I find it very difficult to talk about it. And so they appreciated my doing that. And I still don't talk very much about it to them. My daughter keeps reminding me about that fact and wishes we would talk to her

more, but it's very hard.

Q: What is so difficult?

A: Well, as you can see, I can't talk about it without crying (crying), and I don't want to do that.

Q: With your daughter?

A: No. It just -- she got more out of it when I wrote it down than when I talk about it. We do sometimes when she and I are alone, we sometimes talk about it a little bit, but not much.

Q: It's just so painful for you?

A: Yeah. And I am one of ~~amazingly~~ few people who have not gone back to Germany. And even though I will never say never, I have no intention of going back to visit. Now, my husband is for the first time going this year back to Berlin where he was born. He feels that he would like to see Berlin again, and that's fine with me, if that's what he wants to do, as long as I don't have to go along, and I don't.

Q: And what is it that prevents you most from wanting to go back?

A: Too painful. I have nobody there; why should I go back? It's just too painful for me. I would not want to encounter anybody who was around during that time, and you can't help that. How are you going to not encounter people who are my age, or even a little younger, who were --

Q: Who knew you.

A: No, not who knew me, but who were there at that time. And what were they doing? Even when I see people here in Marin County where I live now, who are from Germany and who

are about my age, I think to myself, "What were you doing between 1933 and 1945?" I couldn't face people and so I certainly would not want to go back. And so my husband is going by himself. Our daughter and son-in-law are going with him this year.

That's about the end.

Q: How do you think this experience has affected you as a mother, the way you brought up your children?

A: That's a very good question, because I think both of us, not only myself but my husband, too, were very, very protective of them. We started a whole new family and we were probably a little more protective than you should be, but I think it was probably understandable that we were. There were things that our children weren't allowed to do, that we discouraged them from doing because it might harm them, they might get into some kind of difficulties or anything like that.

Q: Is this in terms of physical activities they wanted to do or --

A: I'm thinking of one particular instance when my son, who was in high school at the time, wanted to go to Mexico. He and -- some of his friends went to the University of Guadalajara, I think it was, and we wouldn't let him go. I don't know, simply because we thought it might be -- yeah. Otherwise, I can't think of any instances, but we were protective, much more so. Generally, I think our generation was more protective of their offspring than they are now. Nowadays people let their children

have more freedom, this new generation does, and let them grow up more independently than we did.

Q: And how do you think your children have been affected by having parents who are both survivors?

A: I'm not sure it has made a great deal of difference to them, really. I don't know. They both have friends who -- well, friends, my son married a girl who was not born Jewish, who converted to Judaism, who is now the best Jew in the family. This is what always happens. A very wonderful person.

My daughter married a non-Jewish person, who is also a wonderful person. She couldn't have had a better husband. And we're very close to both of them.

But what I'm trying to say is neither of my children have only had Jewish friends ~~or~~ even had many Jewish friends, and made out very nicely.

Q: How did you feel about both of them bringing home non-Jews?

A: Oh, it wasn't what we would have chosen. You know, we would have liked them to marry Jews, which, of course, Michael did, because Judy converted to Judaism before they got married, but as I say, it worked out extremely well for us, as well as our children. We very close with our in-law children.

Q: When your daughter first told you that she wanted to marry this man who wasn't Jewish, what was your response?

A: My daughter has never, ever had a Jewish boyfriend. It wasn't a great shock to us.

Q: Did you encourage her to go out with Jewish men?

(A. Yes. Certainly, we would have liked that, but it never worked out that way. When you live in a small place like Marin County, the opportunities aren't there to meet Jewish people. The Jewish kids there were were very limited, and she knew them all for years and years and never dated any of them. So, in other words, I wasn't surprised that this happened, but we are very fond of our son-in-law and his family, for that matter. We are very close to his parents, who live in Denmark, and who we're going to visit this year.

Q: Tell me what it's like for you to be married to a survivor.

(A: I feel that this is something that has -- apart from loving each other, having an identical background has helped us a great deal in our marriage.

Q: Do you think it helps you understand the indiocyncracies of the other or the particular emotional vulnerabilities of the other, that you have experienced the same thing, you understand the other?

A: Yeah, I do. Exactly. And I think it's a good thing I married somebody from the same background.

Q: I mean things that might seem odd for other people might be understandable for you?

A: Yes, I think that's true.

(Q: Can you think of any kind of odd behavior that you might exhibit that your husband understands because of your experience?

(A: I think my emotional behavior has a lot to do with it. I have had in the past, and still do on occasion, have terrible

(nightmares about what went on. And I think it's helped us a great deal that we're more or less in the same boat. And neither one of us ever had in-laws to deal with, you know, to love or our children never had any grandparents, never had any aunts and uncles or cousins. Our children didn't know what it was like to have any relatives other than parents.

Q: Tell me about your nightmares; what are they about?

A: Well, about concentration camps and what we have learned went on there. I mean, we weren't there ourselves, thank God, but what happened to our parents.

Q: When you have the nightmares are they about your mother and concentration camps?

A: Yeah.

(Q: And what it must have been like for her?

A: Yeah, that's right. Of course, some people who have been in concentration camps have come out, so this is not something -- and it's well documented what went on there. I haven't experienced it personally, but we certainly know what went on.

Q: How old was your mother when she was deported?

A: She was under 50 when she died, she was 49. She was 47 or 46 when she was deported.

Q: Tell me, do you see the movies about the holocaust?

(A: Never. No, as soon as there's anything about the holocaust on TV I turn it off. Like (Shoah) I didn't watch. My husband watched part of it, but it's also very painful for him. But he's probably a little more stable emotionally than

I am and is able to watch some of them. But they are not meant for people like me, I can assure you. We knew what went on. These movies and things that are on television are meant for the general public and I hope they watch them.

Q: It's hard enough for those of us who weren't there to watch them.

A: Yeah, I'm sure. Yes. But I hope that the general public watches them, but even if they do I really don't believe that they believe all this happened. I've talked to people and they think it couldn't possibly have happened, how could anything like this happen. I don't think they really believe it, and this is why it's necessary to document it. This is why I have come forward to do this program.

Q: Throughout your life here you have talked to survivors and you have met them. Is there kind of a natural gravity toward other survivors?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you first find each other, through organizations?

A: Well, through our temple. We belong to our local synagogue in San Rafael and have done for over 30 years, and have met other people through that.

Q: And these people have become your friends?

A: Yes, definitely. There is definitely a gravitation, as you call it. Somehow there's something that binds us together and we've all become very close friends.

Q: Have you ever read ()?

A: Oh, I saw it.

Q: You saw that. So it's a story of survivors.

A: Yes. The beginning of it was, of course, a recount of what happened in Germany, but that was only a few minutes and I didn't watch it. I closed my eyes. But, yeah, that was a movie that didn't affect me particularly. It was kind of a crazy thing, but I enjoyed it.

Q: Before we started the interview you said you had turned on television and you saw an interview of someone. And I remember you saying, "I couldn't leave," although you didn't want to watch it.

A: That's right. Well, she told her story just like I'm telling my story today and I have never met the woman. I know most of the Jewish families in Marin. Actually, I don't know whether this necessarily had to be a person who lived in Marin, this person who was interviewed.

Q: No.

A: Oh, I didn't know that.

Q: But you didn't want to watch, you said.

A: No. My husband was out that night and I just happened to flip the TV and came across this program and she had a German accent and I could tell immediately what it was all about, and I kept it on to listen to her. And I didn't know at the time about this project that you're doing and I didn't know that this is something that is on every week. I've never turned it on since.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I simply didn't remember when it was, you know, what day it was on and we hardly ever watch Channel 36.

Q: Would you turn it on again?

A: Yes, oh, yes. I wonder, though, how many people watch Channel 36. Not very many. That's the problem.

Q: There's one more question that interests me in talking to survivors. That is: If you were to tell me, what is the one technique that you have used to be able to survive your experience? I mean, how have you been able to go out in the world and live and laugh and raise a family and participate in this life?

A: Yeah, it hasn't been easy, let me tell you, because the thought of what happened never leaves you, really, for any great length of time. You try and forget about it for a while and you enjoy life and your family and your friends, but it always stays with you somehow, and it hasn't been easy.

Q: But is there some technique you have?

A: No, there really isn't, but sometimes I'm thinking to myself, "I must get this thought out of my mind." You have to be able to block it out, at least for a while. You really have to work at it, I think, to be able to do that, because it reenters your mind all the time.

Q: And is there a particular thought that kind of haunts you?

A: No, not really. The whole thing does, the whole experience does, but I kind of consciously block it out while I do something different. I pick up a book or watch TV or whatever, or get on the telephone and talk to my friends, something like that, just in order to block it out, purposely force myself to think of something else. And it can be done.

Q: Yes, I guess every person has his own technique. The last interview I did a woman was saying that she always tries to see in a situation what the alternatives are, even though there are no alternatives. If she is put in a situation like you were put in in Germany, you don't have any way, you always try to see within that situation an alternative or a choice that she has. That was her way. And your way is to get that thought out of your head.

A: It doesn't stay out for very long, though. That's the trouble. It keeps coming back.

Q: Have you gone to a therapist about that?

A: No, I haven't.

Q: Is that a conscious choice not to?

A: Yes, it is. I'm doing fine. I'm surviving and I'm enjoying life and I'm very happy, and I really don't see the need. I have given it some thought, to go to a therapist, but I really don't have that much confidence in therapists, and my husband has even less.

Q: Thank you very much. Is there anything that you would like to --

A: I really don't think so, no. I really think I've said it all as it affected me personally, and that's really all you're interested in. The rest is documented in many, many books and films, so I think that's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

(Interview concluded.)