

Today's October 18, 1990. I'm Evelyn Fielding. And I'm an interviewer of the Holocaust Oral History Project. Today, I'm interviewing Helen Collins in San Francisco. We are at the Holocaust Center of Northern California. With me is Helen Krombos, also interviewing, and Barry Joyce as well. Good morning, Helen, how are you?

Good morning, and I'm fine.

Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood, where you were born, and when you were born?

I was born in July 1912 in Mannheim, Germany. And my mother moved to Stuttgart when I was two years old, and my brother was a half a year old because of World War I. And my father was drafted. And he was an officer in the German Army. And he didn't return from the war until after 1918. And so we lived at first with my grandmother in Stuttgart. And then we had our own place.

Were you only a child, did you have a brother and a sister?

No, only one brother.

Only just one brother.

And he's 1 and 1/2-- he was 1 and 1/2 years younger.

And what did your father do?

My father was a lawyer.

And your mother didn't work?

No, my mother didn't work. But she was one of the first women to go to the university. She went to the University of Tübingen in Heidelberg. But then she met my father. And when she was married, it wasn't customary for women, at that time, to work if she didn't finish college either.

What did she study?

Mathematics. Yeah.

What was your schooling like?

I first went to a public school for five years, called Realschule. And then I went to a private girls' gymnasium, called Konigin Charlotte Gymnasium. And I went to that school for seven years, from the sixth grade through the 12th.

Were there a lot of other Jewish girls?

No. In my class, I was the only Jewish girl. And in my parallel class, there were, later on, two Jewish girls, who one of them now lives in New York, and the other one in Israel.

How was your religious upbringing?

I was sent to the Jewish religion. You see, in Germany, it was compulsory. So I was assigned to the Jewish religion. I went to the Jewish religion for all the 12 years. But my parents were not observant Jews. The only time they did go to the-- they were members of the synagogue. But they did not go, except on the High Holidays.

Did you have a lot of Jewish friends?

I have a lot of Jewish friends, yes. But in Germany, I also had a lot of non-Jewish friends.

So when Hitler came to power in '33, how did it manifest itself in your household?

Well, first, it didn't manifest itself as much as two years later. My father did lose his position. He was a lawyer with a German bank. And I was at university at that time. But then I couldn't continue.

And then from then on, it became very apparent that things were different in there. However, nobody believed that anything like that would ever happen. And my parents were not interested, at that time, to leave Germany. They did send my father to study in Switzerland. And he left. And he did not return.

When did he leave?

In '34, he went to Zurich. And then he went to the University of Geneva. And the only time we met was in Basel. There was a special room where you could come in from Germany, and the other side, you could come in from Switzerland.

But you had to go back to the German side. That's how we met him from time to time. So my parents didn't-- I just saw him during this time. And from there, he went to the United States.

When did you first think of leaving Germany?

Well, I was first thinking early. And I tried various countries. And then it seemed that the only possibility for me was either to go to Israel or to the United States. And since my father was going to go to the United States, and I preferred to go to the United States myself, so I did.

The relatives who sent me an affidavit-- and however, I did have a very high number. I registered with the American consulate in Stuttgart, that was in Stuttgart. And you were given a number. And it was a high number.

Would they call it quota?

A quota number, yeah. But there were lots of people ahead of me, thousands of people. So the chances weren't very good. And my parents had visas too. But they had even a higher quota number.

So I lived in Berlin for a couple of years. I learned massage and physiotherapy there. And I returned to Stuttgart. And I'd worked some.

And then in 1939-- first of all, there was the Kristallnacht in 1938. And of course, that changed the situation completely. And we were moved from where we lived into a special part of the city of Stuttgart.

Who moved you?

Well, it's the government, yeah, did force us to move. And they assigned us an apartment. And it was said, all the Jews of Stuttgart who still were there had to live there. And there was restrictions of when you could go out. And you couldn't go out at night after certain hours. And you couldn't travel. And life became very miserable.

It was a sort of ghetto, right?

It was a kind of ghetto life, yeah. Really, it was ghetto life. And from then on, also, the non-Jewish friends really couldn't visit you anymore. I mean, it was dangerous for them. It was dangerous for them. And you were cut off completely.

What happened to your parents' possessions which were in the old apartment?

Well, some of the furniture, they took with them. Some of the furniture, the other one, I guess it was sold. But I still

remember that most of the furniture was taken to that place. The other was maybe taken away. I think so, it was taken away.

You, at that time, lived with them?

I still lived there, yeah. I still remember it very clear, I must say. And of course, my parents' possessions were taken away from them. So we lived. We built a house in 1928 up in the hills of Stuttgart.

And in 1935, my parents had to sell it, because they couldn't keep it up anymore. And it was sold before Hitler took it away. So we never got anything back. But then we moved into another part of Stuttgart. And from there, we were moved to the ghetto part.

Can you describe the day they came and moved you? Was it the brown shirts, the SA, or the SS, or who actually came to your apartment?

Well, I think it was the SA-- SSA. And they had some movers, you know, to take the furniture over there. They didn't give you a choice. I mean, I think we were informed a week before that this would happen.

And of course, people-- lots of Jews of Stuttgart had already left, I would say, at least 50-60% had left Germany. There were about-- there was a group of-- Stuttgart only had 5,000 Jews. And there were probably 2,000 Jews left.

And what was the population of Stuttgart?

It was, at that time, around 400,000. It was a large city. But it never had a large Jewish population. Most of the Jews in Germany lived in Frankfurt, Berlin, Coln, and other cities. And the Jews were quite integrated into the German life, there's no question. Actually, I never met an Orthodox Jew until I came to the United States. It was very, very different. There were some Orthodox Jews living in Stuttgart, but I never met them.

How many synagogues were there? There were two synagogues, one the large one. And actually, it was a Reformed synagogue, but the women were sitting upstairs. So in a way, it was conservative. And then there was an Orthodox, small Orthodox shul. Yeah. And most of the people who belonged there came from the East, from Poland or Russia.

I was surprised when you said that your parents' quota was different from yours. Did you parents register separately?

Later. Later.

After you did?

Yes.

Oh, I see.

Because they didn't get-- what do you call it-- sponsorship there until 1 and 1/2 to two years later than I. So their number was quite a bit higher.

So you did it all on your own, your registering it?

Yeah. I did. I had an uncle who was in New York. And we had relatives, who by chance had the same maiden name, the same name as my father. And they were not related to me. But my uncle told them that he would take complete responsibility. So they did send me an affidavit.

But the condition was that my brother had to be in the United States. And so my brother, who was just in the middle of finishing his PhD, just had to leave Switzerland. And he came here. And he had to go back to get his PhD in the United States. The time was lost. Yeah.

Do you remember what happened during Kristallnacht and where you were at the time?

Yeah, I know where I was, yeah. And I know that my father was taken away. And he was taken to Dachau.

From your apartment?

From the apartment. They came to the apartment.

Would you describe how it was?

Well, the SS came. And they asked for him. And they just said, take what you have, I mean. And they didn't give him more than 10 minutes. And then they took him. And they had a car downstairs, an official government car.

And he did get back from that four weeks later. I still remember that I went to the SS in Stuttgart and talked with him. And he was a war veteran. And he wasn't well. And he did return. And of course, this was a terrible time. My uncle was also taken. And he was a physician in a small city nearby. And he did not return.

Were you warned by your friends before your father was picked up at all?

No. This was a very sudden occurrence. You know, there was an-- I think a Jewish man killed somebody in France. I don't remember anymore all the circumstances. And that led to the Kristallnacht, supposedly. But of course, I think it was planned before.

And they destroyed the stores. You went to the stores in town. In Stuttgart, there were several large department stores with Jewish owners. And also, in the Marktplatz, there were two, there was a Jewish store, very prominent store owners. And that was all destroyed.

I mean, they just went, and looted it, and the windows were broken. I mean, that was the end. And somebody else took it over. An Aryan businessmen took it over. Only later on, they were compensated for it to a certain degree, after World War II, not before in the 1950s.

Did you actually go on the street when it happens? Or did you--

No.

--stay?

I sure stayed in the house. Yeah. Everybody tried to hide in his home. But somehow, they knew. They knew where the Jewish people lived. I mean, this was no question. And there's a different registration method in Germany. If you move, you have to register. You have to let the police know. It's not like here. So they knew where you lived. There was very little chance to escape.

What happened to your mother?

Well, then when my father and I were in the United States, we tried to get them out. They had visas to America. And the money was sent for the trip. But Hitler wouldn't let them out anymore.

So then we tried the Cuba visas. And that didn't work either. We sent all that money. Was lost. We sent the money to Cuba. And we thought that might be a way of getting them out. But it wasn't. And we didn't hear anything for years, until 1945, after World War II. And then what happened was, actually, that the Stuttgart Jews were sent to Laupheim.

Where is that?

That is maybe-- it's still in the same, in WÄ¼rttemberg. But it is maybe, I would say, 1 and 1/2 to two hours away. It used to be a city, I would say, of 40-50,000. And they had a large Jewish population. And they sent the Jewish refugees, I should say, the Jewish nationals, the Jewish Germans, German Jews to-- and they went to Laupheim.

And I only this year found out, only this year, that they lived there for about three or four months. And my father died there. He had heart disease. And he apparently had a heart attack. And he's buried in Laupheim.

And my mother was taken to Auschwitz. And from what our lawyer in Germany found out later, she died in, I think, January of '42. And they were taken, I think in '41. So she was a year. It was a year from the time she left Stuttgart.

And the reason I did find that out this year is that my German non-Jewish friends, they went with me to Laupheim. And there's a Jewish cemetery. And there was a gentleman in charge of the cemetery who was there when we came in. And he had all the documents.

And I knew that my father died still in Germany. But I did not know it was in Laupheim. And I mean, he has a grave, and a stone, and his name's on it. And then my father had my mother's name added.

And it is being taken care of, partially by the Jewish community in Stuttgart. And my brother lived in England during the-- he returned to England. And he lived in England. And he took care of it. He came to Germany quite often.

So when I saw it this June, it was in, I think, a good condition. And the street is called the Judenberg. The Judenberg.

Oh, the Jewish licenses.

Yeah, in Laupheim. And at the entrance, there was a plaque. And it gives the name of all the Jewish people who were sent to concentration camps. But only those who had lived in Laupheim, so my father's and mother's name was not on it. But they were in that book listed as-- it was listed that my father died there. And it was listed that my mother was sent on to Auschwitz.

Why were the Jews taken to Laupheim? What was in Laupheim?

I don't know. They had some kind of a camp there. And I-- really, nobody knows why this city was chosen. It just happened to be, probably, close by, you know. And it wasn't on the way to Auschwitz, really. But there were other people there, too, from other cities, though, in WÄ¼rttemberg, not just from Stuttgart.

Did you meet--

Were they--

Oh, I'm sorry. Go on.

Yeah.

Did you meet anybody who was in Laupheim with your parents at the time?

No.

Tell about life there, what it was like.

No, I couldn't find anybody. And I was told there were just, I think, a few Jews returned. But they were-- I didn't even know their names or where they lived. And I didn't really made an effort, either, to meet them. It was that my friends drove there. And they drove back. Yeah. They are very unusual people. He helped me, my friend's husband. He handled most of the conversation.

Going back a little bit to your father, when he was sent to Dachau at the time.

Yeah.

And he came back after four weeks.

Right.

What did he talk about at that time? What did he tell you about Dachau.

Well, he told me that people were mistreated and beaten. And there was scarcely any food. And they were in barracks. And he really didn't talk too much about it. He told us about it. But he did not repeat it. It was something he didn't really want to talk too much about.

But from that moment on, we really knew that everybody's life was in danger. Before that, you really didn't. I must say that a friend, classmate of mine, who also lived in Berlin in the year 1935, she said to me, leave. And said I give you good advice, leave.

And it was very difficult to find a country to go to, number one. Number two, I didn't quite believe what would happen. People thought, well, that will pass. But it was unbelievable, really. I mean, it was very unbelievable.

How come your father was released from Dachau?

Because he was a World War veteran and because he was ill. So for some reason, he came back. I don't think the reasons are very logical, because my uncle, he was a physician. And he didn't come back. And he was, I think, murdered. Yeah.

Was he taken at the same time? He was taken the same day. But he didn't live in Stuttgart. He lived in Ludwigsburg, about a half-hour, an hour away. It was a smaller city. And he was really one of the doctors there. And he was very beloved and well-known. So didn't help.

How large of an extensive family did you have-- uncles, and aunts, and cousins?

My mother had two brothers and a sister. And the sister was married to the physician in Ludwigsburg. And my uncles owned a little bottling plant, that they made aperitifs and wine. And they owned a beer company. They were fairly well-off. Actually, they were well-off.

And they got out. They had a plant in Switzerland. And they did leave in 1935-- '34 or '35. They did leave. And they went to South America first. But they had money. And they were able to leave.

So it took money to even get out?

Well I think they had the through their Swiss friends, which I think they were able to leave. And at that time, you still could take money along. In the beginning, you could still take your money out, what you had available. And some non-Jewish businessmen took over their company. I mean, there was a factory. It was quite a big business.

They lived in Argentina first, but then my uncle moved to New York, one of my uncles. The other one stayed in Buenos Aires. And then, of course, after the war, they were compensated for, I mean, their property, and their factory, and their business.

And one of my uncles continued to work in New York and established some similar company, but more in wholesale. You know, he was a very competent businessman. So I grew up.

And the family, it was close-knit. There were cousins. And then we had family in Mannheim. And we had a lot of

family. My grandmother was one of seven.

And my grandmother did get out in '36. She lived in Switzerland and died there at the age of 85. And I never saw her again. And one of my uncles was an regent of the university.

It was, I think, a financially secure life I had until Hitler came. We did a lot of traveling. And my future looked entirely different as it turned out to be. Strange enough, my father always said, you have to learn something, because you never know. And I'm really grateful that my parents sent me to a very good school.

Then I then came to New York and I worked as a masseuse in one of these beauty salons for women on Fifth Avenue. And I worked there for two years. And I had to pass an examination to qualify. But that wasn't that difficult. But it was very strenuous.

And so my brother, who was in Berkeley, he said, come out here for a vacation and see whether you would want to stay here. And I think you can't stay in the same field. You will have to think of something else to do or learn. So I came out to Berkeley. That was the day before Pearl Harbor. And then I stayed here.

And then, of course, we didn't hear about my parents until, I think, '46 or '47. And a friend of my father's who is a lawyer in Stuttgart who went to school with him, he handled our restitution claim.

And he found out all these details and events. I mean, we didn't even know that my mother had been in Auschwitz. It was really shocking. And actually, my brother knew much more about it. But he didn't tell me.

To spare you?

To kind of spare me. Then later on, there's a book, The Jews of Stuttgart. It was published. It's a very thick book. I have it. And I found it, actually, in the library of my non-Jewish friends. And I read it. And there was quite a bit in it about what happened.

For instance?

Well, it really said the date when my mother died in Auschwitz and how long she was there. And it described the life of every Jewish citizen who stayed in Germany and was taken to concentration camps.

And you lived in Germany in-- let's see, you left in '39, right?

Yeah.

In '38, after Kristallnacht, did you hear anything about extermination camps and Auschwitz?

No, we didn't. No. there was no-- actually, I think they began to exist then. But the Jews still lived in the cities of Germany. It was, I think, not until 1941 that the real extermination began. Yeah. They were taken to concentration camps.

But from the Kristallnacht until I left for the United States, it was terrible. I mean, there was definite restriction where you could go, and what times. And it was no life.

And it was-- I was very fortunate to get out. Because the only reason I did get out was that in the beginning of 1939, Hitler decided that you couldn't pay the trip, the ocean trip anymore. The only thing could pay for was your trip to the border. And my uncle in New York did send the money to the HIAS in Rotterdam. And they informed the American consulate that my passage had been paid. And so I was.

My number came up before other people, because they didn't have some money, or nobody would send them the money for the passage. So I was called. I was called. And I came out earlier than I would have otherwise. And that saved my

life.

And when we arrived in Rotterdam, HIAS came to the train. And they provided me with lodging for the night, because the boat wasn't leaving before the next day. And there was a terrible atmosphere in Holland.

It was really depressing. And people thought that Germany would invade. And they did very soon afterwards. And there are a lot of other people there. And then the next morning we went on the Holland America Line. And it went to first to England and then the Americans.

Then in the middle of the ocean, the middle of the trip, we were stopped by an American-- no, I don't know. Well, was-- no, it wasn't American, but a British ship. And they've tried to find out who was on the boat. It took about-- what did it take-- two or three weeks to get here, from Rotterdam to New York.

Now, who stopped you?

They were, I think, the British. And they stopped to see. They were in-- there was war going on with them. There was a war with England.

Where, of course, you left Germany after war had been declared.

Oh, yes, after the war had been declared. So the war was on. And of course, all the people on that boat were refugees. And most of them had 10 marks with them. That's what we were given, 10 marks. But my brother was in New York. And he came to Ellis Island and met me there.

So you debarked in Ellis Island?

Yeah. And then some relatives of mine took me in for three weeks. And in three weeks, I had a job in the household. And then from then on, I had several jobs in various families, which weren't very good.

And then I did pass that massage examination. And I did get immediately a job in a reducing salon on Fifth Avenue. And I was lucky, because I always got tips. And so I earned, I think, more money than many of the refugees, beyond just \$16.50. And I was paid \$16.50 a week. But I made about \$16 in tips.

And so I just existed there. But I have lived in it with a family. And then I lived with some relatives till I came over to Berkeley. And then I lived with my brother. He had an apartment in Berkeley.

When you came to America, could you speak English?

Oh, I had English in school, four years of English. And I could read Shakespeare, but I couldn't speak English. But I could read the newspaper. But it took me some time. But I had the background.

So it wasn't as difficult as for other people. Yeah. And oh, no, I have to say, I was in England. I was in England for one year. After I left school, my parents sent me to the university in England. And I was in England a year, so I knew some English. But I couldn't speak it fluently at that time. That was six years later.

So when, actually, did you go to England, in what year?

In the year 1932, after I graduated from the high school. That was good luck. Yeah.

Also, wasn't it compulsory in Germany to have to learn language or even two languages?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we had. French was, however, the major language at that time. That started in the fifth grade, you started with French. But the school I went to started with Latin in the sixth, seventh grade, and with English, only the last four years-- from the ninth grade on-- 9, 10, 11, 12th grade, yeah.

So what did you study in England?

Just language and history. Yeah. After my parents, at that time, that was before Hitler, thought it would be good for me to be a year abroad. And was three-quarters of a year. Yeah. And I lived in London. And then I was at the University of Essex, Sussex, what was it? Devonshire in Essex, yeah. That was the university.

How many members of your family, would you say, were deported during the Nazi time?

Do you mean to concentration camps? Yeah. And it's really hard to know, because of my close family in Stuttgart, only my parents were. But of the larger family, there were quite a few. I would say 10 to 15. But most of them did get out and left.

And my husband's family, that was a different story. Because his three sisters took-- yeah, three sisters. He was the youngest. And he had three sisters. All were in concentrations camps.

And only one of his sisters survived. And the husbands didn't survive either. But one of the sisters did survive. And she came to the United States. She died a few years ago. But in his family, there were many more people who were deported from Hamburg.

Did you ever go to Hamburg?

No, I didn't. I haven't yet. I may.

Where did you meet your husband? Where did you meet your husband?

I met him in Berkeley. Yeah.

And when did you get married?

I got married in 1952. And I understand you have one child?

One son, yes. Yeah.

Have you talked to your son about your past? I have. But I have to admit that it is something he finds difficult to listen to. And I try to let him know what all happened. But I think that it's not part of his life.

And my friends in Germany, whom I see practically every year, they said-- last year, they said, they would like my son to come. And they invited him, because they think he should know something of my background. And maybe he will one day. But so far, he hasn't.

He was born here. And when he was nine years old, I took him back to Europe. I went to England. My brother returned to England 30 years ago to live there. And I took him to Germany and Switzerland. But he has never wanted to go back.

Do you know why?

It's very hard. He won't explain it, really. But he said that he didn't want to return. Two years ago, I was-- the city of Stuttgart invited me, you know, as a former German citizen. And they paid the trip. And they had 80 people there. 80 people were there from all over the world.

And I could have taken him as a companion. But he didn't want to. And I hear that from other families, too, they have similar experiences. And I think it's painful for him and, I think, maybe frightening that something like that could have happened.

Do you have any family photos you showed him of your father and you--

I have some family photos. And most of the photos are, really, my brother has and he had. He, my brother, unfortunately died this year. But his family has them. And he knows what my parents look like. He knows what I looked like as a child. I have photos from then. Yeah, he does.

Has he asked you questions?

Not very many. I mean, he asked me-- he knows what school I went to. And he knows kind of what happened to me. And he knows what my parents did and what kind of group of people they're associated with. And he knows we did a lot of traveling. I mean, this, all this, he knows.

But it's not really-- I feel it's not integrated into his life. It's a different life. He went to school here. He went to the university here. We tried to provide things for him as best as we could, with nursery school, everything that was needed.

He had a very different life. Sometimes, I say to him, you know, when you went to the university, that was different. When I went to university, I worked at the gas station till I graduated to earn money. But he listens. But he doesn't say much. I don't blame him, either. I think it's a very incomprehensible event.

Can we stop a minute?

I'm sorry, just turn that off.

And Helen, when you were called to the consulate, can you describe a little bit your feelings and what it was like going in?

Well, there were lots of people there. And my name was called. And they were very friendly. They tried to help me. And they asked for information. I had to fill out various forms. But most of it had been, really, taken care of, when I registered.

And they advised me that I could leave within a couple of weeks, which I did it. I think it was two to three weeks after I got my visa that I left Germany. Went very fast. I just packed my things and left. And I left.

And I still remember that the train left at night. And my parents were allowed to take me to the train. And that's the last time I saw them. And I still remember that very much. We did exchange letters for a while. But then after America entered the war, it was dead silence. Yeah.

Were many of your friends you went to school with at the ghetto? And did you see them?

Well, the two Jewish friends of mine, in my parallel class, did get out. One lives in New York. And she came a year earlier than I. And the other friend left already in '34. And she and her mother-- her father had died-- went to Israel. And they were able to take quite a bit of their possessions and money along. And they were able to establish themselves in Jerusalem. She married soon afterwards and I'm still in contact with both of them.

What was your feeling like when you first went back to Germany? And what year was it?

The first, it was in '63. And I had just visited one of my former schoolmates, who used to be a friend of mine. And it was strange for me to be there. I was there just a few days at that time.

And well, she told me about what happened to them, you know. And her two brothers were killed in Russia. And she told me about what Germany was like after World War II, which was really quite bad. And she knew what happened to me. I mean, actually, her mother still visited my parents at the time when it was dangerous. And then I didn't return to Germany for another 10 years.

But these friends with whom I visit practically every year, or they come here, but came to England that year, when I was with my brother and his family. And they had searched for me. And they heard I was going to be in England. And they came, they happened to be there. And they came to visit me there.

But I didn't see them in Germany at that time. But then 10 years later, there was a class reunion. And they wrote to me and said, please come. And I did go. And I mean, all my classmates were very friendly and nice to me.

And this family never were-- they never were Nazis. And they are very unusual people. And it was a childhood friend of mine since my age 11. And it's a very personal and important relationship existing. And in the last years, I have either going to Germany or they have come and visited me. So I have--

You mean, of the German friend?

Yeah, this couple. And actually, they helped me to get to Germany, you know, as a guest of the city. Because at that time, all the older people were given preference. And they arranged for me so that I would be invited. They helped me.

What was that like, that visit?

That visit was a most unusual experience, I must say, and very different from what I expected. It was, I mean, very well organized. The coordinator of this program was a very fine man.

Now, the mayor of Stuttgart, you know, is Dr. Rommel. And Dr. Rommel is a son of the Desert Fox. And he was poisoned, given poison by Hitler. And he told us he was a teenager, I think he was 12 years old then. And he surely was - is not a Nazi. And he was absolutely great.

And we were, I think, entertained royally. And I mean, it was extremely unusual. And there was a group called the Jewish Christian Society. It's a group of people who are working on having good relationships with Jewish people. Some of them had a Jewish grandmother or were half or three-quarter, or one-quarter Jewish. And they were there every single day looking after us.

And they took us to the cemeteries, to one outside Stuttgart, where 50% of the population had been Jewish. Was Freudental. Yeah, 50%. And of course, there's no Jew living there. But the synagogue has been rebuilt and is a community center.

And they took us to the cemetery there. They took us to the cemetery in Stuttgart. And the mayor came and the wreath was dedicated to the memory of the people.

There is a memorial for the Jews of Stuttgart who died in concentration camps. And then we were taken to the Black Forest. And we were invited. And we went to the Schwabische Alb. And there were dinners and lunches.

And we were given spending monies. We were given 350 marks spending money. And we were invited for two weeks. And there was a lot of interaction among the people.

There were 80 people. And they were from-- most of them were from America, the United States. There were people from South America, from Israel, from Turkey, from South Africa, from England, France. Where else? I mean, it was an unusual group of people. Some of them I knew.

And people sat together in the evening in that hotel. In the lobby, we kind of occupied the hotel. And they talked about what happened to them. It was a moving experience. I really must say that I'm grateful I had it.

Some people said, why do you go? Don't go. Don't accept it. But I didn't feel that way. And they had us-- there was articles about us in the newspapers every single day. It was an important event.

And at the evening before we left, there was a big party in one of the best hotels in Stuttgart, with all the government

officials. And I must say, it was most unusual. Not everybody had that experience. But people who went to Stuttgart had it.

I have a friend here, whom I strongly advised to go. And she went. And she told me that she was very grateful that she did go. And she also said, it was a moving and unusual experience. They tried very hard to make us feel that we were welcome, and that they regretted what happened, and that we were former citizens.

And people who searched for their homes, you know, they looked for their old homes. And some of them didn't exist anymore, because Stuttgart was bombed. And the whole inner city, really, was destroyed. But it's rebuilt. And it's-- I must say, it's a very beautiful city and very well-off. It's become more of an international center.

Did you get any restitution from the Germans?

Yes, I did.

Did you get that for your parents or for your family?

I did, for my parents. I got some, but actually, very little. But I did get money for some property. And I did get some other money. And that money, I didn't get it until 1954. Yeah.

And half of it went to my brother, yeah. And of course, it was not-- it was only a part of what my parents had and owned. And the dollar, at that time, was 4.20 marks, you see. So it was-- now, it's 1.60.

So it was decimated, you know, what I got. But it helped. I bought a house with it. And my brother used it, too, to buy a house and to change his occupation. And it's helped us a great deal.

You mentioned you got more for your property than you did for your parents' lives.

Yeah. That was a very limited amount, very limited. Yes. And my father had a life insurance, a Swiss life insurance. And somehow, apparently, it said in the small print that it could be paid out.

That could be paid out in Germany, which at that time, nobody thought was anything wrong with. So the German Reich took the money. Was 100,000 francs. And they took the money. And they only gave me 1/12 of it. That was the formula for restitution for life insurance.

At that time, it was white smoke. And by the time they paid it out, well it was too long for that?

Well, they paid it. The Swiss government paid it to the German government in francs.

In francs.

Yeah. And the German government paid me 1/12 of it. 1/12.

When was that?

That was when I got the restitution money. And that was a formula, apparently, for life insurance, which were paid out to the German Reich. And the German Reich collected a lot of life insurances. But most of them were German life insurances. But this one was a Swiss one.

And would have obviously been very nice to get that money. But we ended up with-- it was very little. But in general, the Germans did try to make some restitution. Yeah. And of course, poverty was less available.

Last year, when I was in Germany-- or this year-- well, it was last year. And one of my classmates says, you want to see the house that you built? And they said, it still exist exactly as it was. So she took me there. And it really-- I mean, this

was exactly as it was, the garden, and the entrance, and everything.

And then she said to me, what do you think that house cost? So I said, well, we built it. And at that time, it was-- in '28, it was 100,000 marks. And I said, well, maybe it's worth half a million marks. She said, 1 and 1/2 million.

That really hit me. I was a little disturbed about that. But that's-- that we never got anything for that, because we-- my parents sold it before. Hitler took the money away. And you didn't get that back. Only what was taken away was given back to.

What is your feeling about Germany now?

Well, I feel that it's a different generation and that many, many people in Germany were not Nazis. And they were forced to be Nazis. And it's part of the German character, really, to obey.

And surely, when you look at it, maybe more objectively than, I guess, a Jewish refugee can do, after the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was in very, very terrible straits, all during the '20s.

And there was an inflation that was unbelievable that nobody who hasn't lived through it knows what it is. If your people were paid in the morning and they did not buy things that afternoon, the next day it was worth half or less. And well, really, people suffered. And there was a lot of unemployment.

And I think that helped Hitler. He promised the Germans that he would make a wonderful country out of them, and that they were wonderful people, and they had been treated wrong, and they could be a strong nation. They believed it.

And what he did, really, I don't know whether people expected that. They-- many people deny that they knew anything about it. Well, these friends of mine, these German friends of mine's son-in-law, one day, he said, could you talk to me about what happened? And I said, surely, you can.

And he said to me, did you read Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, you know? And I said, yes, I did. And he said, did you believe it? And I said no. I couldn't believe that.

He said, well, that's where you made a mistake, he said. You see, he intended to do that. And he carried it out. Except we couldn't believe that. And I mean, it's an unbelievable thing what he did.

How old a man was he when he talked to you?

This was a man in his 30s.

A young man.

Yeah, young. He didn't-- I mean, he was born afterwards. He was one of the people who are social democrats and surely wasn't for Nazi Germany. But the way it occurred, it happened-- once Hitler was in power, there was nothing anybody could do. That's my opinion.

Once he was in power, if he could have been prevented from being so powerful, and taking on the role he did, whether that was possible, I don't know. But once he was in power, that was it. And we didn't see it.

Did you encounter any antisemitism in the United States?

Not very much. No. I grew up with non-Jews, mostly, in terms of schooling and friends. And as I do get along well with non-Jews. And I have close friends. And a real antisemitism, I haven't met that I could think of. But it exists. I know it does exist. Yeah.

Do you have any questions before I pause?

Well, let's see. I'd like to ask-- you mentioned the extended family that you had.

Yeah.

And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what has happened to the people who were left. And where do they live? Do they live mainly in two or three countries or all over the World

Well, actually, I would say all over the world. I had relatives going to South Africa, a first cousin of mine who was married to a non-Jew went to Tanganyika-- Tanzania. And another cousin, first cousin, went to Buenos Aires. And some of the further of the relatives went to South America-- Colombia and Peru. I never heard or saw them again.

You don't know whether they still live in that part of the world? I have not the slightest idea. I think most of them are probably not alive anymore. But my first cousins-- I have two first cousins who live one in Buenos Aires and one in Sao Paulo.

And I have a cousin in Zurich, also first cousin-- Zurich, Switzerland. But people are-- from my husband's family, he has relatives-- nephews in Australia, in Israel, in England, and in South America. So people are really somewhere else, not close by. And one cousin in Buenos Aires, I haven't seen since 1935, first cousin.

Do you keep up with some of these people?

Well, once in a while, I hear from her. She visits my cousin in Zurich. And I see my cousin in Zurich each time I go to Europe and stay with her. And then she reports to me and tells me what happened to them. So I know about them. And they know about me. But I haven't seen them anymore.

Now, did they-- did their families originally come from the same part of Germany that you came from?

Yeah. Yes.

And then they moved to all these different places?

All these different places, yeah.

And probably still live in--

Probably their children and grandchildren still live there, yeah. Well, several of my-- the cousin who now lives in Zurich, they first went to Buenos Aires. And her daughter, whom I only know as a small child, lives in Buenos Aires. And I have never-- we correspond. But we haven't seen each other for, I don't know, 45 years. But we do write to each other.

Another question I had was your uncle, I believe you said he was a physician? Is that--

My uncle, yeah, my mother's sister's--

Let's go way back to what you were saying much earlier.

Yeah.

You said he went to Dachau. Yeah, he was sent to-- Kristallnacht, he was taken to Dachau.

And did he have children himself?

Well, yes, that's the daughter who now lives in Zurich.

Oh, I see.

Yeah. And do they have any knowledge of how long he was there for?

Oh, yeah. He-- they were informed that he died there.

And you know--

He died within three weeks.

Oh, I see.

Yeah.

Very shortly afterward.

Very shortly afterwards. And nobody really knows what actually happened. But I think he was murdered. Yeah.

Now, as far as your own brother was concerned-- you have just the one sibling?

One brother, yeah.

And you said he went to Switzerland to School Yes, to the university. And then was he not allowed by the German government to return? Or did he decided it was wise not to do?

Well, he probably could have returned. But you don't know what would have happened. I mean, my father wouldn't allow him to come back again, because it was too dangerous.

It was not wise for him to return.

Yes.

I see.

yeah

And so he stayed in Switzerland two or three years?

No, four years. Yeah.

And then?

Then he went to the United States.

Then he came to the US.

Yeah.

And he had to start his graduate work again?

Yeah. He had to start and started going again. And he was-- he came here to Berkeley. And he had very little money. But the Quakers helped him. And they helped him to find a-- they got him a job at International House. And he lived there and had free board and room. And then after a year, he became a teaching assistant.

What year was that?

That was in-- well, when was I? That was right after I came. It was at beginning of 1940. He was in New York. He was in New York till the beginning of 1940. Then he went to Berkeley. He tried to go to other universities, but he apparently decided this was the best place for him. He was studying economics, was an economist.

And after he got his-- passed his oral examinations-- it was still during the war-- he got a position with the War Labor Board as an economist. And then later on, he returned and got to enroll to thesis. And he was rejected by the army because of his eyesight. He wasn't drafted. He wasn't drafted. But he was that age. But he was rejected.

But he might have had to go into the service had he--

Yes, he would have had to go into service. And he wanted to. But--

About how long was he here before he was not accepted for the draft?

He was-- when the war started in '40-- when was it?

'41.

'41. Yeah.

Very short time, really, before he came.

Yeah, it was-- well, he was at university maybe a year and a half. And when he was-- I mean, he was called in. And he-- he received a notice to report. But they didn't accept him.

And he tried, really, wanted to go to be an ambulance driver in Europe with the Red Cross but they wouldn't take him because he was not a citizen. And you only became a citizen by being drafted into the army. Then you became immediately an American citizen. So then he went on with his studies.

Because he was not drafted, did that mean that he could not become a citizen at the time?

No, no, no. It just meant that he had to wait the five years, you see, until he could become a citizen. But the refugees who were drafted, even if they were here 1, 2, 3 years, immediately became citizens. They were giving the American citizenship.

Right away.

Right away, because they were sent overseas too. So he was disappointed. But it was good for me that he wasn't drafted, because I was pretty alone.

Did your husband's family ever come over here too? He had quite a few sisters, you said.

Yeah, well, the one sister came. The others didn't survive.

They didn't.

Yeah. But the nephew-- the children of all of them survived. They were-- two of them were at the children's transport to England. And one of them was sent to Australia. The British government sent the men to Australia, because they wondered. They were afraid they might be spies or whatever.

So one lives in Australia. One stayed in England. The other nephew lives in America. He immigrated to Israel. But he

married an American. He lives in America. And his sister, my husband's and my niece, lives in Israel, in Tel Aviv.

So the children survived. But the parents didn't. And the two children to the niece and nephew, they were-- the one sister married a Dutchman. And they lived in Amsterdam. So they were-- these children, the two of them, were hidden by Dutch peasants all during World War II. And they survived. But the parents didn't.

They were hidden?

They were hidden, yeah.

In their family home?

They were hid-- no, no. Some farmers or peasants, Dutch non-Jewish people, took them in and pretended they were their children.

In their own home?

In their own ranch home. They still are in contact with these people. And they saved their lives. There were quite a few Dutch people who did that. And of course, the Germans didn't know who that was, you see.

In Germany, they knew all the people. And they were registered. But this way, they survived. I mean, Anne Frank didn't. But they did. And after World War II, they did sell their parents' home. They got that back.

And they both went to the university. And they both went to Israel. But this one nephew returned, then, to the United States. And he lives in Philadelphia. And I'm in correspondence with them. And I see them too. But it's-- everybody is somewhere else.

I know, it's all over, many places.

Yeah. You know, as I get older, I kind of think about it more than I did before. And I think that it is kind of a disadvantage to me that I don't have, really, a very close family, except I have my son. And I have a second cousin in Berkeley. But real family structure, I don't have.

Do you have citizens of the world in your family.

Yeah, something like that. And luckily, I've been able to see some of them.

OK. Bill, any questions?

No.

OK. What about you?

Yeah, I've got a couple of questions. And forgive me if I lap over things you've already touched on.

Well, that's all right.

Can you tell me what your earliest memory is of an antisemitic experience?

I remember. And that was in Germany. And that was when I went to the public schools. One day, I remember that very clearly, one day, I walked to the school with some other schoolmates.

And they began to tell me that since I didn't believe in Christ, you know, I was condemned to, I don't know, hell or something like that. I still remember. And I was also told that the Jews killed Christ, at that time. That I remember very

much. It was very scary. And that was in Germany. And I was only nine years old, about that age.

Were these kids who were your friends?

No. I mean, they weren't children I saw or came to my home. But they were classmates with whom I was on good terms, you know.

And can you tell me how you handled that? What happened? To a nine-year-old child, that must be a mystifying experience. What did you do? Did you--

I didn't do anything.

--talk to your parents?

Yes, I did talk to my parents about it. Yeah.

And what transpired in the conversation with your family?

Well, they said that wasn't so, you know. And they said it wasn't true. And they tried to talk to me about it. But I still remember this.

Did they talk to you about the phenomenon of antisemitism at that time?

I don't think so, but they talked to me about-- it may not-- they didn't call it antisemitism. But they did tell me that people believed that about-- there are some people who believe that about Jews.

And there was an unquestionable-- there was antisemitism in Germany that existed. Was underground, but it did exist. For instance, in-- only in Bavaria, Jews could become high officers, officers, except, I mean, the very lowest rank.

Officers of what?

Officers of the army. And there weren't very many Jews in the military. The Jewish population, really, was mostly professional and business. And I think there was a great deal, also, of jealousy existed. There are lots of Jewish lawyers, and doctors, and businessmen. And they belonged to the middle-upper, middle class.

Did that experience when you were nine years old changed your perception of the school environment at all? Or let me ask you, before that, what was the next experience that you had in which you experienced antisemitism?

I really wasn't-- that was the only one I remember until Hitler came to power, or before Hitler. Yeah. I had a unique experience in so far that my mother's very close friend, with whom she studied, was married to a minister. And he taught theology at the school I went to.

And since I was the only Jewish pupil in my class, I had religious instruction with the class above me. And I had gymnastics also with the other class. So when my class had religion, I had free time. I had a free hour.

So he did ask my-- the last two years I went to that school, he asked my mother whether she would allow me to audit his class. So she said, it was OK. So I did. She did-- he asked me. And he asked me to audit his class in theology.

And so I went for the last two years to the class. So I learned a great deal about Christianity, actually. And I must say that my classmates accepted me. And I did not meet open antisemitism during those seven years I went to that school. I didn't. But I'm not denying that it may have existed. But it wasn't expressed towards me.

Did you feel more German or more Jewish? What would you consider, you would call yourself? First a Jew or first a German? How would you put that?

I must admit, at that time, I did first feel I was German. I really did. And there was considerable intermarriage in my family.

Also, you said yours was not very religious upbringing.

No. No. It wasn't. And might be a shortcoming, but it was a fact of life. Yeah. Yeah.

But you did go to synagogue?

I did go on the holidays. And I did go to the Jewish religion. I mean, the rabbi came to the school. And I learned some Hebrew. And I mean, definitely the Torah study. No, I was-- I knew I was Jewish. And I knew. I wanted to go to the Jewish religion. There was no question about that.

How do you think your Holocaust experience changed your life on two levels? One, on the physical, external level of the way you would have lived your life and what you would have done. And two, sort of on the psychological and emotional level of creating your character and your personality.

Well, of course, it changed my life considerably. And it had some positive aspects, too, that I came to America. And I had to be on my own feet. And I had to make my own way. And that, I think, did help me in my development. Also, if I had stayed in Germany, I would have had completely different opportunities. It would have been much easier.

What do you think your life would have been like if you'd stayed in Germany and there had been no Holocaust?

Well, I would have married in Germany. And I wanted to study medicine. And I probably would have finished that. I started but I couldn't finish. And I guess it would have been-- my family would have been around me. It would have been entirely different.

What about on a level of your character and personality?

Well, I mean it surely developed my character differently, insofar as I really was on my own. And I had to decide, what do I do with my life now? And I decided, I'm not going to-- I'm going to learn something under all circumstances so I have a different future. I was determined about that.

And my brother did help me. And he supported that. And he suggested it. And he, in some way, made it financially possible, because I shared an apartment with him, which was under rent control-- \$35. And I worked. And I could live on very little money, very limited funds.

And I got help from him, too, in terms of if I had some problem with my classes, he helped me and was very supportive. And so I did. It took me, actually, only three terms to get a BA, because the University of California gave me over two years' credit for my German abitur. And they gave me another 18 units' credit for having studied two terms. So I made it in three terms.

The abitur is a high school certificate, right?

Yeah, it's a high school certificate. But it is on a very different level.

Much more so.

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I had chemistry, and physics, and higher maths. But it's here taught at the university the first two years. So I was fortunate in that respect.

And then I did get foundation money to go to graduate school. And at that point, my brother had worked for the Royal Labor Board. And he lent me some money too.

You were close to him?

Yeah. Right.

What was the age difference between you?

1 and 1/2 years. He was younger.

He was younger?

Yeah. And he had a group of friends in Berkeley. And he had a group of-- so that wasn't a real problem for me. That was a big help. I mean, I think. I don't know whether I could have succeeded without him.

You mentioned graduate school.

Yeah.

You went ahead then?

I went ahead and I got my master's in psychiatric social work. And during that two years, I did get foundation money from two foundations. It wasn't entirely enough, but then my brother lent me money at that point.

Do you think your decision of career in that area was in any way influenced by your earlier experiences?

Well, it was a field I was interested in. I decided, since I didn't have the money, and I couldn't go to medical school and work the years ahead, as I think I felt it was too much for me. And what I actually did, I worked a year as a masseuse in Oakland. And then I was a resident of California, because the fee at university was too high for me to pay as a non-resident.

And my brother referred me to somebody in San Francisco, at the employment service, who was dealing with refugees. And I went to see her. And she said, well, I want you to be seen by the vocational specialist at the Jewish Family Service Agency in San Francisco.

And she called him. And he saw me in the Oakland Jewish Family Service Agency. And he talked to me. And he asked me about my background. And I told him. And then he said, you send all your papers to the University of California and see what your credits you can get. And then please, come back. And we talk it over.

I must have first thought, maybe, to become a physiotherapist, because I had the background. But I would have had to go to Stanford. That was the only place you could get training here. And I couldn't afford that. And I couldn't move there. So that was out. So it seemed that social work seemed to be a field I was interested in and that I had a chance to achieve.

And when I graduated, you know, it was the end of World War II. I mean, I could get as many jobs as I wanted, because they were looking desperately for people, actually. I didn't have to look around. They called me. So I took the first job. I worked with the Red Cross at Lederman Hospital in the psychiatric ward.

And then my supervisor went to the VA Mental Hygiene Clinic. And she recommended me. And I got a job there. And from there, I was promoted in a couple of years.

And I had an interesting, very interesting time. I mean, I enjoyed that work very much. I supervised students for the university. And I supervised some workers. And I stayed there for 11 years. So I was kind of fortunate.

And in this field, there were quite a few Jewish people. And not just in the field of psychiatry, there are quite a few

Jewish physicians. The director of the clinic was Jewish, of the VA Mental Hygiene Clinic in San Francisco. And so I really, that's why I probably didn't meet much antisemitism.

Well, nobody has any more questions for now? We thank you very much for sharing your life with us.

Thank you for interviewing me. I think that was quite an experience.

And I wish you really good luck.

Thank you. Yeah. I enjoyed meeting you, all of you.

Thank you.