

OK, no problem. Go ahead. Go ahead, Judith.

Today's Wednesday, October 30, 1991. I'm Judith Backover with a Holocaust Oral History Project interviewing Martha Hankin at Congregation Beth Shalom in San Francisco. Also with us this evening are Gail Kurtz, Lisa Barnett, and Martha Hankins' husband Harry. Good evening, Martha.

Good evening.

I'd like to ask you to begin by telling us where and when you were born and a little bit about your family life.

Thank you. Well, I was born in a very small town in Germany near the Dutch border. We had about-- it was an Orthodox congregation, Orthodox surrounding. And we had about 200-- we used to count it by souls, not by members but by souls. I have a sister and who lives in Oakland and a brother who is in Israel.

And we went-- my father had five brothers, so it was a very close knit family. It was a very, very close knit Jewish community. We had a parochial school. We had to-- actually until-- in Germany you only had to go to school until you were 14 years old. And we had this as a-- like an elementary school. But I went there for three years. And then from there on I went to a high school in Germany, in this little town where first I had French for six, seven years, and then English after the third year. Later on it was changed and English was the first language.

But after I graduated, I went to a nearby town to business college and graduated from there. And then I went to Hanover where I started to work. However, in the little town where we were, I went to high school. I went to school with the girls. But you know that I was never invited to a birthday party in the Gentile's house. I don't know if this is important but I bring it out anyhow.

They would come to me because, I don't want to brag, but I was a pretty good student and they would like to go and study with me. But they never, never invited me to their house. Maybe it was because we were a very close knit family. But there was my sister or anybody, we just grew up and grew up our private life.

I know at one time I went to a dance and a Gentile boy brought me home and the whole town was talking about it. So I mean, it was just not done, even when we had dancing lessons, which was very-- at that time you had to have when you were 13, 14 years old. You had dancing lessons. And we were mostly Jewish kids. But there were some others and they would dance with us, but that was it.

So I went to the business college. And there-- this was a town maybe 30 miles from us, which was just a little bit more, what shall I say, updated where the Jews and Gentiles mixed a little bit more. And I went to school there, graduated, and then I came to Hanover where I worked in an office. First as a secretary.

Unfortunately, my mother got very sick and I had to come home and take care of her and the household because my brother was seven years younger. He was only 10 years old, 11 years old when I came home. And I kept house. And my mother died in 1933. But at that time already there was difficulty. Hitler was already slowly on the rise.

And 1st April, 1933, the laws came out that no more kashrut where they could not kill the animals. Although there was still a-- how shall I call it? A Black market or kosher market if you want to call it. And we used to get the meat because my mother was a very, very observant person. And although she was very, very sick, she would not eat anything else. But slowly we weren't always very honest about it because we just couldn't get it. Unfortunately she died in July 1933. And I kept house.

It was actually two weeks, three weeks before my brother's bar mitzvah. And well, we had the bah mitzvah as a family. I mean, in those days, you didn't have parties like you have now. But it was just a family affair. And I stayed home. And I was never a small town person. I always like to live in the city. But what else could I do?

But then in 1935, my father married my mother's unmarried sister. And that gave me a good way to get out. And I went

back to Hanover. However, I could not work in an office anymore because I had to go as a domestic. I had some jobs which lasted three months and some lasted two months.

And it wasn't very easy to be a domestic in a Jewish household. Naturally I wasn't used to having to live downstairs in a basement and have my own room and not being a part of a family and so on. But I made it. Then I went to another town only for a very short time. And then I went back to Hanover and worked for a doctor. And he was a chief surgeon from the Jewish hospital in Hanover.

Now Hanover, is a big city. There's a lot of culture, a lot of opportunities. And even under Hitler, there were still opportunities occasionally. But the Jewish community did a lot. We had a lot of-- there was a Jewish restaurant and we could go dancing and so on. It was all of the problems that we had. We still kept on living.

Now in this household I learned a lot. Excuse me. The lady was a very meticulous person. And I helped the doctor in the office because the office was in the house. And when he went to the hospital, then I was in the kitchen. And we could have a cleaning lady. She had to be over 60 years old.

After that, in 1937, the Nuremberg Laws were coming and you could not have anybody-- because it could be a Rassenschande. You know what Rassenschande is? A Jewish person could go with the Gentile girl and vice versa. And I had a wonderful experience. I learned a lot. And I learned in many ways a lot of things that were not so pleasant when people were coming and wanted to see the doctor who had been patients for years and he couldn't treat them because they were Gentiles.

And I remember once when we only had a little peephole there where we could look through and I saw somebody, and I knew it wasn't a Jewish person. And she screamed, I'm bleeding, I'm bleeding. And he could not go and help her because if something would have happened-- something did happen, but if somebody else would have happened, he would have been in trouble. It would have been his fault.

So I stayed there until 19-- well, in 1936 a girlfriend of mine was in England and she got a job for me in England as a domestic. However, the lady didn't want to pay enough so I didn't get the permit. But then in 1937 she got another job and I went to England in 1938 as a domestic.

I arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon in Liverpool. And my girlfriend was not there. I had to wait for her. But I have to say that the English people were very understanding. And even the porter-- I had to call her and I had no idea about. I had a little bit of English money, you know, a coins, and I said to him, I have to call. What do I take? And I stood like this. And he says, never mind and he paid for it. I mean, it was only whatever it was. A dime or equivalent to a dime and so on. But they were very understanding.

I arrived at these people's house about 3:00, 3:30 in the afternoon and at 7 o'clock I was washing dishes because I was a domestic. And they had a little girl. She was 18 months old when I came. And first she wasn't sure, you know? I mean, I spoke English enough to make myself understood because I learned it in Germany at school and later on lessons. But it was-- she wasn't quite sure.

But I have to say, the-- I have to say, the gentleman-- the man was Jewish. The woman was not. She used to be his secretary. He was a very, very intelligent man, and I have a lot to thank for him about my English. He let me listen to the radio, you know? You did not have any-- did not have any television. And then I had to repeat to him what I heard.

And then he made me read books. I wanted to take some lessons. Is that OK? Do you to hear all this? He made me buy magazines, you know, romances. And I would read those. And I remember once the first thing was divorce. I didn't know what divorce was. I had to take my dictionary and read-- and see what divorce was. But I learned an awful lot because those were everyday stories, you see? So these people were, I must say, very good. They had very nice friends who really treated me extremely well.

And after about two months after I was there, I had a girlfriend in Liverpool and I was in Birkenhead, which was-- I had to go with the bus and subway to Liverpool. And every time I said, well, I'm going today to see Katie, the little girl said,

let Mummy go. You stay with me. So I had really gotten my ground.

And the people in this-- this was a suburb of Liverpool, of Birkenhead. The people-- I was the first refugee there. And they were very nice. Whenever I got on the bus, I never paid on my day off. I mean, hardly ever. I mean, sometimes there was nobody on the bus that knew me. But anybody in this little village that knew me would pay for me. I never paid the afternoon, you know? They were very understanding.

And I stayed with them for a year and a half for '38. Yeah. Then in '39 I tried to get-- my father and mother-- my stepmother were still in Germany and I tried to get them out. Well, I could get a job for my mother, but my father was a little bit too old. And I made applications. I had the equivalent to affidavits. But nobody ever-- it was always his name was Wolff, and there were so many Wolffs-- who knew when they were in-- it was the Woburn House in London who took care of these things.

Anyhow, I got a job for my mother. And we thought together we could get my father over. So my mother came over and I told a lie. No, I didn't tell a lie. I always thought that my mother was 10 years younger than my regular-- my stepmother was 10 years younger. And when I completed the application I told them that she was born in 1894. That made her just not quite 45 years old when she came to England.

So when we went to the police to register her, she filled it in and she said 1893. And I said, Mother, you were born in '94. And she said, well, I should know when I was born. And so the policeman said, never mind, she is here now. And they could have sent her back at that time.

Unfortunately, my father did not come. If I would have lied the same way-- I didn't lie really, but if I would have said the same way for my father, made him a year younger, I could have been. He was in-- he died in Auschwitz. He was, yes, in Auschwitz. He moved in to aunt further inland, and then together they came to Theresienstadt. And he was at the last transport from Theresienstadt.

But then my mother got a job. And a little bit later, we had to-- we were called enemy aliens and we were very restricted that we could only go 5 miles here, and 5 miles there. So my mother said, why don't you come? And she worked in the house where they were very fancy mansion where she was a cook and somebody else was the maid.

And they had a child that was a cripple and they needed a nurse. And the nurse was leaving for Ireland because I don't know if she had a boyfriend or so on. And so they asked me to come. The worst thing I ever did. But I did it because I wanted to be together with my mother. And the other lady who was with her was a distant relative. Oh, my husband just noticed my button's open.

So this was-- so I stayed there. It wasn't the most pleasant surroundings because I was so well-received at the other job. I was part of the family. I mean, even if I wanted to write a letter and would go in the kitchen or in my room, they would come and say, it's time for tea. And you have to go. At 9:30 they have their biscuits and tea, you know? And so I wasn't too happy.

And then they had to go and get into smaller surroundings. And I went to-- got some other jobs for some people that I knew. And I stayed there until May 1940 when, because we were Liverpool, that was near the coast and they were afraid of the invasion. And they were afraid of the fifth columnists.

And so we had to go into Manchester. So we had to leave everything in Liverpool at first, everything we had. And we went to Manchester. And we got to Manchester the day the Germans invaded Holland. No, Holland-- Belgium. Invaded Belgium. But when I was in Holland-- I was still in Liverpool when they invaded Holland. And so that's when we came to Manchester.

But I have to tell you one little story from Liverpool. On my day off I went to a travel agent who was doing something for an uncle of mine. And he said, I have no time today. I have to go. A whole load of people from Holland came and a whole bunch of children. And I said, well, let me go with you. He said, no. But there was another-- it was a doctor from Hamburg. And he said OK, let her go.

And I got to this old sailor home. Hundreds of people, children, and so on. And I went in there and I had two cousins who had gone with a charter transfer to Holland. And I said, by any chance do you know Ellen and Peter Weinberg? And they screamed. And I tell you, I wore a hat. I was all dressed up for my day off, you know, hat and gloves in those days. And they screamed, Peter, Ellen, and I found my two cousins there in that sailor home.

And everybody said, are you going to take them? Are you going to take them? But where could I take them? I was a domestic. So was my mother. But I went there. And then the next day my mother-- my mother was not with me and they let us go. And we went with them. And they later on stayed in-- were put on Hakhshara and they got an education there. The boy was, I think, only about 11 years old. And she was about 14 or so. But it was quite an experience I think that's worthwhile repeating there, you know?

And anyhow, we came to Manchester. And a lady was supposed to have gotten a room for us from this other friend, but she didn't. She says, I couldn't get a room. So we went to the committee. And there were about 2,200, 2,500 domestic. Girls, women, men who were butlers or the husbands of these people. And we were sitting there. And then there was a young man. And I wasn't too old so I said to him-- I said, how about taking us? I said, look at my mother and this lady. So he took us in.

And they offered us a room for people to work for these people for nothing and they would give us a bed for the three of us. We should sleep the three of us in a bed. Well, I mean, can you believe it what that was? So then they said, well, there is a place, and they told us where to go. And the three of us went off to Cheetham Hill, which is the-- now it's even worse but in those days it was all the factories was and a lot of Jewish people.

And we went to this person's house and a man came. He was from Vienna. And we said, we hear you have room to rent. And he says, yes. He says, where's your bedding? And we said, what do you mean? Your bedding? Why didn't you bring all your stuff with you? Now I want to tell you we just-- we came with a little suitcase like this.

Well, when we got out of that house I wasn't a strong person anymore and I broke down and I cried. And the lady was a little girl who comes and she says, what's the matter? Again she could see we were-- they used to know us by our purses that we came from Germany. We all have purses about the same size and the same colors.

And so we told her and she said to this little girl, you go to Auntie Paula and see if they have room. And she said, you come with us. And this lady was from Vienna. And the little girl came back and she says, yes, there is a room available. That was-- this aunt-- by the way I'm still in contact with them. The lady of the house had a room to rent.

And I slept with this other woman whose name was Hilda on a couch that you pulled out, and my mother slept on a cot in the same room. We had a roof of our house. We could use the kitchen. And that was more than this. The first night we were there the alarm-- the area alarm goes. You have to go in the shelter.

We went in the shelter. No roof on the shelter. The shelter wasn't ready. But we had to go to the shelter. We had to get out of the house. And in the same house lived this family-- a husband, a wife, and a little boy Robert, and three yeshiva boys. And when we talked to them-- you know, I was a young girl, and when we talked these yeshiva boys were human beings and we talked and so on. So one day the lady of the house accused the yeshiva boy because they were having an affair with me. And this was just one of those things there.

So the first few days that we were in Manchester, we had all saved a little bit of money. And the first thing they did was we went to see *Gone With the Wind*. We could sit for four hours and you got a little bit to eat and we didn't-- at least we were relaxed. And then we all started working in defense work making-- and for me that was terrible.

I can't sew but I had to finish uniforms. The buttons, they had to go and put the buttons there and finishing this. I mean, I didn't know from-- I was never very good in sewing. I could do anything else, but don't ask me sewing. So I worked there for a while. And then when the contract was finished, we were told got to go. So here was no job.

So we went from one factory to the other. And I came to a factory where they made garments, raincoats, and ground

sheets for the army. And I was there. And I had no idea what it meant. And I had to stand there. And they gave us some material and some glue that you had to go. You called it schmear on it. And then you had to fold it over.

And I sit there and suddenly I hear a voice next to me in German. You have to go and fold that there, and there was my husband. Now my husband. That's how we met. And so the man hired me. And we worked there. Wasn't always very easy. I mean, like I say, I can't sew but I can put things together.

The fore lady who didn't like me, she was jealous because there was another young man there whom I knew from Liverpool, and she thought that I had something going on with this guy and she was jealous. She tried anything to get rid of me. But the boss-- his name was-- we called him Stefano but I don't even know-- Mick was his name.

He came one day when she wasn't in-- her day off or she wasn't there. And he says-- and he used to call me Rose. He had a sister who he always thought looked like me or I looked like her. He said, Rose, come here. I show you something. So he showed me some tricks of the trade. Well, the next day when I used the tricks of the trade, the fore lady was fuming. She had what they call a stool pigeon, a young man, who told her everything what the boss had said.

Now these two were not Jewish, but the boss was Jewish and the foreman was Jewish. And they knew that I was probably [? live here. ?] He would always come. He says, go like this. Come on. He would do very quick. He was a marvelous man. But anyhow, we got along as well as we could.

And then I started going out with Harry. And Christmas came. Two days or three days before Christmas. I'm not saying that I didn't have any other boyfriends but, I mean, I went there. And we were all sitting- no, I have one boyfriend came from London I must say. A soldier. And I spent an evening with him. And to make up my mind who I wanted to marry. And Harry went with my mother. It was on a Saturday.

And we had the worst-- the next night the worst air raid on Manchester. The whole city of Manchester inside was bombed. It was on fire. And the next day was a Sunday. And we were at the place to the boarding house where we lived, my mother and I. And we had some-- people always came over because we were more like the home for these people. And suddenly the alarm-- air raid came.

And we were on the first floor. And suddenly the house went like this but it came back. And thank god. And there was a direct hit about a block away on an air raid shelter. We didn't even have time to go out. And the owner of the house, she had lived in Germany but she was British. But she had one room where we couldn't go because there was a radio and she wasn't in there. So we all went into a room just in the corner huddled together. I have [INAUDIBLE] stomach. Could I go to the bathroom?

Sure. OK.

Where was I?

You were at the bombing of Manchester.

Oh, Manchester.

You were in one little room.

One little room, yeah. So the next day we got engaged. And on Monday morning we went to the factory. We both worked in the same factory. And everything was-- the roofs and everything-- they had glass roofs and and so on. And all the material was underwater. It wasn't completely on fire and so on.

So I went to my boss Mr. Mick and I said, what can we do? Can we help here? And he said, yeah, you can [NON-ENGLISH]. You know, sighing with me and so on. So that way we had to look for another job. So I went back to-- I went over to another company that made the same things. But my husband got a job in his field, which was engineering.

And so we got married in January. And I kept on working a little bit but I got pregnant right away. And our oldest son was born in 1942 and another one in '43. So we were in England with the children, but we lived in Manchester. And I just took care of them and I had-- well, we had a job.

First I had a job when he was born for a doctor. In England you had the doctor, and they had to have somebody living in the place. So I took care of the office and got the people in and cleaned his office and cleaned the instruments and made certain medication. And my mother did the cleaning in the house and so on. And when people had to have violet [INAUDIBLE] treatments and so on, I helped them. So that way I was always with the children, with the boy.

And the second one, then I got a job in the factory where he worked also at the office. They had an office and they had an apartment there. So we moved in there. That was a little bit bigger than the one from the doctor. And the other one was born there. And so we had two there. And we lived there until 1940-- 1943, and then we moved-- he got another job in Southern England in Aylesbury, which is just 30 miles outside London.

But I have to tell you here that the people-- the Jewish people in Manchester really did not welcome us too well because I couldn't speak Yiddish. And they didn't think that I was Jewish because in Germany-- and I have to say this-- my background is completely German. I mean, there's no Eastern European blood in it, at least as long as we know. And so Yiddish was not spoken. I never heard it until I came to England. And some people would try to speak German, but they spoke Yiddish. But in Manchester, it was really bad.

And also in Manchester I had never seen so many men that were drunk from Jewish people. And the poverty of the Jewish people in Manchester was unbelievable. And where we worked and where we lived, you had to go through a street and there were all the pubs. I never believed that Jewish men would go to the pub.

But on Friday afternoon we got paid and we always got paid in money-- loose money in a little bag. And the women would stand down outside and take the little envelopes away or they would wait outside the pubs to get the money away because they had-- otherwise they would have never gotten.

And while we were working in the factory, they had a-- we all used to be what they called piecework, you know? We used to get a bundle of things to put together. And Wednesday was the cutoff date. So some of these people on Wednesday, even if they had another bundle lying there, they would go and get three bundles so that they would get a good paycheck on Friday. But some of them were three, four, or five weeks behind.

And they always used to say-- this other man who worked with me, this friend who worked with me, we would never do that. We worked together but we would never do that because we said, what's the use of it? Then I have so much money this week and the next two weeks I got nothing. And they didn't like that either because we were too German in their brain.

They used to call us-- I don't know if you have heard that expression. They used to call us Yekkes. You know the expression Yekkes? Although the other fellow, Henry, was not a Yekke really, but he had a lot of, shall I say, Yekke customs because he lived there. But they were not very nice to us really.

They never, never accepted us. I mean, I'm talking about me because being a German Jew and any of those of us who came from Germany who didn't speak Yiddish. There were a lot of-- my husband didn't speak Yiddish. And so although-- you know, his background was different but we didn't. We had some Jewish expressions but we never-- it just wasn't spoken, you know? Anyhow, I just wanted to put that in. You can take out whatever you want to if you don't think that is pertinent to that.

So then we moved from Manchester to Aylesbury. And in Aylesbury, it was a small town. It didn't have a temple or anything, a synagogue or so. But for the holidays there was every Monday-- no, every Saturday and Wednesday there was a market. It was a very small town. And the Jewish people from London came. And then they were evacuated during the war.

And so for the holidays-- for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur-- we had-- one of the churches gave us a room, and a

traveling rabbi would come. And we would have services there. But otherwise there was no Jewish life. It was just on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And we stayed in England until 1947 when we came here to America.

I forgot something to tell you. When I was in Liverpool when I first got there, before I was married and I was still a domestic, there was a refugee committee. And they contacted us if we could help them. And when we knew of somebody who wanted to come out-- this was 1938-- we would go there.

And being a club woman, club or organization person, I don't know if they smelled it, but anyhow, I got there right away. And so every Wednesday afternoon before I went on my dates or on my meeting with the girls and so on, I went there and translated letters for them to get jobs.

And I took care a little bit of some of the people that came over to England. When they came in the household, a lot of them were not used to it, especially those people from Austria and so on. I mean, we from Germany. A lot of us had already worked in the households in Germany. But they were not.

And they couldn't believe all these things. And they did a lot of things which were contradictory, let me say this. They would go on Friday night when the Shabbos candles were burning and do their nails. And you know, on all these complaints actually only the bad things would come to the committee. And then they would come to us-- we were about two or three women and girls there-- and they would ask, can you talk to them?

So then I would talk to them. And I was always the bad girl because I was ganging up with the other people like this. But I mean, those things we wouldn't do. But I don't know what background these people have. But coming from a religious background like we have or like I had, I mean, it would never have occurred to us to do anything on Friday night, never mind doing the nails when the Shabbos candles were burning.

So then when we came here we went first to New York and stayed with my in-laws for three months. If you think with two small boys, four and five years old in a one bedroom apartment on the fifth floor after having living in a country where the boys could go back and forth and so on, it wasn't easy.

And I wanted to work. I did get a job at Gimbels in New York. And believe it or not, at that time I was jealous of people. I'm not a jealous person. I work for Gimbels. And I was used to cleaning up everything that everything looks nice and so on. And I made-- even if I was not on commission, I made good money.

And some of these older ladies that were sales girls there, she said, look at her, look at the greenhorn, how much money she took in today. And I thought, why should I give you all the commission? I'm going to go over to those two men. There were two men in the apartment next door. And believe it or not, one of them was my first boss in Germany.

Wow.

And somebody said this is [? this and that. ?] And I looked at him and I said, you know, remember my uncle in Hanover? And he says Martha? And it was my first boss. So that was really something, you know, like this. So you have really experiences that you may miss all these things.

So then we came here to America-- to Oakland where my sister was here. And she had been here since 1939. And they were in business. And they got a-- they were supposed to have an apartment for us. My mother had come earlier here. And the apartment was-- then they put us up in a converted garage where the toilet and the bathroom was in the room where the boys were.

And we slept on a couch which had been in the backyard of one of the neighbors. And if we wanted to take a bath, we had to go next door to my uncle who had a little cottage there where there was a bathtub. And I had to take our boys to there to have a bath. Winter and summer.

Until-- well, even when we moved into the other apartment we still didn't have a bathroom. That was a converted dental office and the toilet was out of the room. And there were about three or four other people working. Because in 1947

nobody would rent you an apartment or a house with two small children. And boys on top of it. Nobody would do it.

So my mother's business didn't go too well. And I looked for a job. And I went to the local employment agency. And they let me take a typing test. And I didn't want to type because I've typed but I'm not a typist. Anyhow, they put me in a little cubicle with a typewriter and some legal paper and with a light on top of it. And they gave me this paper.

And then this lady comes with a stopwatch and she said, start. In the excitement I put my hands on one over, and you should have seen what came out of that typing test. So when I came out-- when I came out, the interviewer said, well, I don't think, Mrs. Hankin, that we can get you a typing job. I said, I don't want a typing job. I'm an accountant. You know, I'm an accountant. I don't want to type. Well, you'll hear from us. So then the girl who heard it she said, you will never hear from them.

So I came home and there was an ad in the paper of selling floor polish from house to house. Well, I want to take everything so I went there. It was Columbus Day 1947. We met in Oakland. We brought over with the bus to San Francisco here in the fancy district. And we said, which side do you want to take? One took this side, the other one took this side. I took this side. Nobody was home. What did I know about Columbus Day? I sold one can of floor polish. Somebody sold 8 and 10. I probably-- everybody says, no I didn't sell another thing.

So then I had it-- and then I got a job. There was a department store. And that was just after Columbus Day and that thing. And I went there. And on the Thursday-- I went on Wednesday for training on a Thursday, and it was a good day. And at 5 o'clock they said, thank you very much. You did a very nice job. And if we need you again, we'll call you. And you know, I thought I had a job.

Nobody ever said-- and I wasn't the only one. When we walked out, about half a dozen of us said, what a nerve. I got on the street car, cried my heart out because I couldn't believe it that somebody would hire us and then say you did a wonderful job, we'll call you back. They did call me back at least half a dozen times.

My sister had a store. I came to the store and she said, you have to go to the employment agency tomorrow. They have a job for you. So I went. And they had a job with insurance agency addressing envelopes. I could have cared less what I got. So I went there, interviewed, filled out my application. Where were you born? Germany. Where? What religion? Jewish. How old are you? I wasn't quite 35. I could say still 34. Just a minute.

The girl who interviewed me was a Jewish girl. I could tell she was [INAUDIBLE]. Then I had the interview with a gentleman. Gray hair, nice man. He looks at my application and he says, was it very bad in England? And I said, well, pretty bad, you know? How are your children? Are they healthy? I said, yes.

He said, when would you like to start? Would you like to start addressing envelopes or would you like to start in the filing-- no, in the mail department or in the filing department? And I said, well, filing. I knew you had a better chance to go from filing out there. He said, OK, you can start on Monday.

I went on Monday. I didn't even know who I was working for. I came back and I said, I have a job. I went on Monday. It rained. I took the street car on a Monday. And I had to go and do some filing. And so at lunchtime I thought I'd go around. And then when I came back I said, gee, this is Blue Cross isn't it? And they said, yes.

And I came home and I came to my sister and I said, you know I'm working for Blue-- well she said, who are you working for? I said, for Blue Cross. And she screamed. She screamed to her husband, Bert, can you imagine we are here 10 years nearly and have been trying to get into Blue Cross and Martha didn't even know where she was working? So I worked there. And I went up quite a bit. I finished off as an administrative assistant and worked there for 32 years.

Wow.

So I had my ups and downs too. I was a supervisor for 20 years, which at times wasn't that easy. But the last 10 years was much better when I was not a supervisor anymore. I think sometimes it was a little bit the age difference and my upbringing because I expected people to work.



And it was OK until 1966 when the Social Security came in and we had-- the man who interviewed, let me say this, was a Mormon. Very nice man. He never made any difference. He hired anybody. Age, it was nothing. And if something was wrong, we could go to him and so on. But he would have never married-- he would have never hired a Black person. You know, the Mormon thing.

But then when that was all-- integration came. He was gone. He was retired by then. Things were not that easy. I was the first one in the organization that hired a Black person. And any of the Black person that I hired but one gave me the best recommendations you want to know because I used to say, I don't care what color you are-- red, green, blue, purple-- as long as you work.

But then the younger people came and they would sit like this. And I would say, hey, if you haven't got anything to do-- we had no union, I must say. If you're through with that, you better do this. And they didn't like that. So thank god after that I had strong support from the management and somebody else got my job and I became an administrative assistant, which was much better and worked with all the computer programmers and so on.

So that's my story, let me say. It's not a horror story like some you have heard, but it's from a completely different point of view. But if you like, I like to go back and say a little bit about my background about where I actually come from so you can understand too. My attitude.

Now, the congregation-- and we went back to-- this is all in German but I want to show you some of the pictures there too. I mean, you can [? insert it. ?] But on the cemetery that I was in our town, there is a stone from a great, great, great grandfather from 1615 when he died. And the stone is still there. I want you to know that the cemetery in this little town is in better shape than some of ours here in America. The people there are taking care of it. I mean, they're really interested. This group of people is interested in doing it.

Now, the congregation was, I would say, quite a wealthy congregation. We had one family that was poor. But you see, in Germany, you didn't pay membership in a congregation. 1% of your income tax was automatically given to all religious institutions. So everybody pays their dues.

If you made \$100 a year or if you made a million dollars a year, you paid 1% of that money. So the congregations were not poor. Now, our congregation, we had a building. We had a very nice synagogue. I showed you the inside-- no, this is not the inside. This is the inside of the synagogue. I don't know if you can later on--

Hold it up for me so I can see.

That was the inside of a synagogue. And the photographer in our town had a plate from 1926. He still had that and he gave it to us. Can you see it?

Mm-hmm. Thank you.

I thought that was very interesting. So we had the synagogue. Then we had to-- I brought it all with me so you can see what it is. And then you had-- this was the house of the shammash. And this was the place where the hearse was. We had our own hearse. We would not take the hearse from the Gentiles. You see, we never had like we have here the homes where the body would stay in the house and would go from there. The taharah was done in the house and it would be getting from there. But we had our own things there.

Now, this is part of-- this was a house from one of the teachers. Now, when my mother went to school, there were two teachers because in those days it wasn't that fashionable to send the girls to high school. The boys went to the high school gymnasium but the girls didn't. So they had two teachers. And this was a house of one of the teachers. And I especially brought this because it was really well done in this book. And this was a house of the other teacher. There was a store on the first floor and the teacher lived up there. Can you see it?

And then we had two school rooms. They had two school rooms. And we went to school there. And so you see, in

Germany, you had to have religious instructions. There was no separation of church and state. In our report cards from the high schools, the first subject was religion.

We used to go every Wednesday from 2:00 to 4:00 and every Sunday from 8:00 to 1:00 for religious school where we learned Hebrew and history and so on. I personally went even in the afternoon. Although we had a Orthodox and we were sitting separately, but I used to go on Saturday afternoons with the boys and learned-- I mean, the haftorah and the Torah reading and so on.

I think the teacher liked us. We were two girls and about a 1/2 a dozen boys that grew up together. And so we came and we learned. Now, I can read any haftorah. And since we are now-- when the conservative allowed women to say the haftorah, I started saying the haftorah. Now we are reformed and we can do it.

But we really had a terrific background. But the congregation itself was a very wealthy congregation. And unfortunately, you know, some of these houses have been-- other people living there now after the synagogue was burned down. But the synagogue itself has-- now here's a picture-- maybe you want to go and see it-- from the cemetery. At the entrance of the cemetery, there are gravestones flat, and they are from [INAUDIBLE] that came there. And they are trying to-- they have had so many scholars there to translate it, but it's been very difficult.

But here's a picture from 1926 from the member of the board. And that too, this plate this photographer still had, why he ever kept it we do not know. But he did and this camera We all when we came to Norden for this meeting, we all got a big picture of this.

And then this is the book that all the pictures that they gave. But this is-- let me say this. This is the monument that they erected there. The city paid for the-- the city paid for getting it all straightened out, and the private business paid for our stay for five days.

Now, I have translated what it says on there. And do you want me to read this? It says, in memory of the synagogue of the Jewish community in Norden which was intentionally destroyed on November the 9th, 1938 and our Jewish fellow citizens who had to die a violent death or were expelled. In remembrance and a warning. And then it says, from Psalm 74 they have set thy sanctuary on fire. They have profaned the dwelling of thy name even to the ground. And that is on here. And this is where they unveil it.

There was a rabbi from Hanover who was like a district rabbi and goes to all the cities like this. And the mayor of the city. And it was an amazing thing that in this town, which was really antisemitic all their lives came to the [INAUDIBLE], came to the unveiling. And there was probably about 300 people they said.

The schoolchildren were wonderful. They came and people were there who never was expected. They had a lot of protection. There was a Red Cross. There were nurses. There was policemen. But there was no disturbances whatsoever. They were almost-- really very good. I mean, I'm not a, what shall I say, very pro-German person.

And when I was there, only two of my prior schoolmates came forward. But about six months later, I got a letter that they invited me to a 60th reunion. And the girl who wrote to me, I was very close when I went to business college. She married a young man who was an SS man way back. But she did not come from that kind of background. And she wrote the letter and told me about herself and some of the people. And she wrote in the letter, if you feel you cannot write, I can understand.

Well, I did write her a letter. And then they had that reunion. And a lot of the girls or women [INAUDIBLE] And after I got that letter I'm sorry to say I did not write back. There were people who I knew. One of the girls, her father and brother were the first SS and SA men there. And he says, I'm so sorry you couldn't come. We would have loved to see you. And we hope everything is OK with you. And all these things.

I mean, it just absolutely-- I just saw the picture the other day and I thought it wasn't really fair to the other girl. But I couldn't. I just couldn't write. My heart wasn't in it. And I didn't want to go and write something that I didn't mean. So that is, let me say, in a nutshell my story. If you want to see a few of the other pieces and pictures that we took when we

were there on the cemetery. I don't know if it's any bearing on it.

See we went to the cemetery. But I want to tell you that the lady who did all this, she's a very, very concerned person. She came to the cemetery with a basket and with a towel over it. And we thought, what on earth is she bringing to the cemetery? She had picked up stones so that we could put the stones on the graves. She's a Gentile woman.

Now, her husband said that when he was nine years old, that's when the synagogues were burned down. And he said to his father, why doesn't the fire brigade go and do it? And the father said, be quiet. Don't say anything. We can't say anything. And he said he was nine years old in '38. And then when he went-- in all this time and he went in the war and later and growing up he always said he wanted to go and look, you know, find out what happened and so on.

But he never had-- he could never forget. And so this-- and his wife was one of those girls in the-- not Girl Scouts. In the girls troops and so on. But they both felt very strongly about that. And so they're trying hard. But I must say, they were very nice to us.

But there was a young man who was a doctor. And he was telling us he was 12 years old in 1956 when he found his mother's pin-- she was a nurse-- which says the National Socialistic Nurses I think. And he asked her what is it? And they said, oh, I don't know what. Why do you want to know? And he says, what is it? And then he asked, what is a Jew?

I mean, this small town there was nobody. None was left. There was one who was half Jewish, but I mean, he was never Jewish, let me say this. And they wouldn't tell him. And then finally they got afterwards and he said, and you were part of these people that did all that? He said he could never forgive his parents. He was a doctor. His father was a doctor. He said he could never forgive his parents. But they didn't know, these youngsters.

But one consolation is my brother came from Israel. And he's very close to these people that do all this. And he went to the high schools while we were there and spoke to them. And they have it now in their history books. Now the whole generation from-- I would say from '40 to '60 probably never learned about it in Germany. But now it is in all the history books.

It's the same as here. I have to say that maybe we are forced to. We did not always tell our sons everything. I mean, we would say Grandpa, you know, was killed in Auschwitz or we came from Germany and so on. But it was our grandsons now. I mean, they are now in their 20s too. They came and wanted to know more. When my younger grandson, he was-- he's 21 now. For his bar mitzvah I made a tape for him, and he used it as his-- for one of his projects. So I think it's good that we do these things.

And we can't forget. We never forget. But we have to go on living. We have to live for now. You can't live in the past. You've got to make the best of it. We've been very fortunate. We're here in America. We're very active in all Jewish organizations. I'm three times past president of Hadassah, past president of Sisterhood.

I'm on the regional board of Hadassah. My husband was the president of the temple. So I mean, we're very active and feel very strongly connected with this congregation, with the Jewish community. We know a lot of people and a lot of people know us. Anything else?

I have a lot of questions I'd like to ask you. I'll start with the ones that are basically for the record. Can you give us your birth date?

Oh yeah. July the 28th, 1913.

And let's see. What was your family name before you got married?

Well my name is Wolff. I have a sister Hilda de Lowe who lives in Oakland now who unfortunately lost her house in the fire. She's a widow and she lost her house. And I have a brother in Israel who has three children. And he went to Israel with the Youth Aliyah in 1935. He came here to the States in '56 and stayed until '70 and then went back. And I've been to Israel three times.

What was your family business when you were a child?

My father was a cattle dealer. And you know, mother stayed home. In those days, unless you have a business, they stay at home. We had a very, very close family life. And my mother-- let me say this. My mother-- there were seven children. five boys-- no, eight. Five boys and three girls. And my mother-- the parents died very young.

And my mother was the first one to get married, so I had the attention of all the uncles and the aunts. I lost two uncles in the First World War. My father was wounded in the First World War, but he was wounded in his leg and walked on a cane for quite a while. And we had a very close family life. But our house was the house of parents when my uncles got married and my aunts got married. And whenever they came, they came to us. We were always the center for the Seder and for Rosh Hashanah when the people came to visit. It was always in our house.

You talk about a close family life and a close Jewish community in Norden. You said that you knew several Gentile children but that they didn't closely associate with you. How else did the distance between the Jews and the Christians show itself?

I don't think in any other way. I mean, business wise, people-- I mean, my father always dealt with the farmers and ranchers and things like this. And it wasn't that we only bought in Jewish stores or we only did buy in Gentile stores and things like this. There were a lot of Gentiles that had connections with the Jewish people. We had a few mixed marriages, but very few. And there really wasn't very much connection with them.

Now, they had a bowling group but they were all Jews. Now, the only one I think that was really mixed was the soccer team. The boys that were in the soccer team, they were all Gentile and Jewish people. But otherwise, what I used to be-- they had a shorthand organization where I went to and that was mixed, but it was just because when we were in the classrooms.

They came to the house-- well, when I went to the business college, I had a little bit more contact with Gentiles because I was the only Jewish girl. And there was one young man. We were just talking about it the other day. Two of them, they always came and we studied together. We cheated too a little bit, you know? Because this one guy, he was really nice but he didn't like to study. And he used to come and I went out to see him and went to dances and things like this. And then when I went to Hanover, he visited me a few times in Hanover.

And in 1935-- '34, after my mother died, I got a phone call from him. He was in town. This photographer, by the way, was his uncle. And could I meet him? And I said, you know, I don't think so. He says, why not? I said, well you know, I'm Jewish. He says, I know. I've known that all along.

So finally we decided we meet at the railway station, which was a little bit out of town. And we met there and I said to him-- I said, don't you realize that both of us are in danger? And he says, no. He takes the card out he says, I'm an SS man. I've been an SS man since we went to school together. I could have gone through the ground. I had no-- well, who thought this? Was 1929, 1930. I mean, when I went out with him. And when he visited me in Hanover it was already '30-- yeah, it was in '31, '32, '33, you know, like this.

And here he visits me in '34 and we go-- I was like this all the time. But he didn't care. He wrote to me afterwards. And then when I was in Norden now to our thing and I went to the photographer and asked about him he said he was killed in the war. But some of the people, I don't think they realized it.

Another case like this when I worked for the doctor in Hanover they had a huge apartment. This was six apartments. But I mean eight rooms and things like this. And there used to be the cellar or the basement that used to be for the maids. These people used to have two maids usually. But still we had the icebox and things because we don't have icebox. We have this refrigerator-- in the cellar you could keep everything.

So one night the doctors, they went out and I had to go down and get something out of one of the cabinets or something like this. And there was a mailman was living down there and he says, Miss Martha, Miss Martha. And I said, what's the

matter? And I go in there. I used to talk to them. I always felt kind of safe because they were there when I was alone in the apartment. And I walked in there and there sat three SS man or SA man like this.

And I said, oh my god. So I said, can you help us? I said, help you with what? Can you complete these forms for us? They were applications for jobs. And I said to the mailman-- I forgot the name. I mean, this is some 50 off years ago. I said, me? He said yes, why not? And I said, you know. And he says, well, we don't care.

Here I sat with these three men around me completing the forms for them. They made applications for some kind of a job. I didn't dare tell the doctor. They would-- when the phone rang and I answered the phone, you could tell if I answered the phone downstairs or upstairs. And he said, what are you doing in the basement? And I said, well, I was taking some of the food up or down or whatever it is. I lied because if I would have told the doctor, he would have flipped the switch, you know? Because it was just-- they talked as little as possible to them.

And later after they left and later when I saw him he said, you never have to worry about anything. We take care of you. I mean, he didn't have to take care of me because I left early enough. And the doctor came here to America afterwards. He worked at Mount Zion as a nurse's aide because he was too old to learn again, you know? He was a GYN. And so he just died just before we came.

But those were things that we-- I mean, I never-- I was scared stiff. But the funny thing is that so many of the things that happened-- one other thing, if I'm talking too much, tell me. My sister got engaged in 1937 when I was in Hanover. And I lived about-- oh, it was five hours with the train. Now it's about two hours or three hours with a car.

And in Hanover you have asparagus. In Germany you don't have green asparagus. You have white asparagus. And Hanover was a place where you got it and cherries. This was the thing. And she got married in June. And I brought two cases-- I mean, 20 pounds of asparagus, 20 pounds of cherries for the party.

I had to change a train in a little town at night where I had to go from one side up the stairs, across there, and down the stairs and carry all that. I had that like this. And in the compartment with me was a young man. And I was sitting like this, you know, not in uniform. And when he came he says, can I help you?

Now I cannot say-- my hair was jet black and I would have said that he knew I was Jewish. I'm sure he knew. I don't know. But this was 1937. He carried my stuff over, waited till I got into the train, and where we lived in Norden, that was the end station. Maybe we were very conscious about these things that everybody knew we were Jewish. I don't know.

But I'm sure he knew I was Jewish. I don't know. I mean, I talked a little bit. He said what I had. I said, well, my sister's engaged and we're having a party. But those were the only really incidents where I can say, you know, I was kept away from them.

Did you always feel that people would know that you were Jewish? Just know somehow? Do you remember?

Yes, I think we all knew that. We thought we knew.

How was it that you thought you could tell or that you thought--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well you see, where we lived was a very, you would call it here [INAUDIBLE] Everything was Protestant. We had very little Catholics. We were all Protestants, you see? And most of them were Protestant. You know, I mean, I can't-- the only place I think that I ever went was we had rented a place in the back of our house for seeing a Christmas tree, to go to a place where there was a Christmas tree. We never went anywhere where there was a Christmas tree. I mean, sometimes you couldn't help it when you go into a restaurant but not into a private home.

And I was telling you about the report cards too. The Jewish teacher had to send in our reports to the gymnasium and to

the high school because we had to have a grade in Hebrew-- in religion. That was the main thing. Now, the director of our high school-- I go from one thing to the other. But our director from the high school, he was teaching religion. You see, when we went to high school, we did not have every day the same classes. We had usually-- there usually was religion twice a week.

Talk about a religious thing. We were a few Jewish girls. I'm talking about the high school now. And we were a few Catholics. I mean, I think they were not as many Catholics as they were Jews there. Every morning they had assembly. And the Jewish girls and the Catholic girls were not allowed to go there. The only time we went was at the end of the school year or the end of the semester.

Then we used to have a monitor, you know, walking. But we were not allowed to do any homework while they were at the things. We weren't even allowed to open a book. We just had to sit like this. And I mean, we were teenagers and 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 graders. And so the only time we went was, like I said, the end of the school year or the end like Christmas vacation and so on.

And so the Catholic priest and they had to send in the religious things. But our director, he was an antisemite. I mean, definitely. What he did to us Jewish girls. And then he was a German teacher. If he could give us a bad grade, he would do it. Now, I was never very good in making compositions. I was very much, you know, very down to earth and couldn't tell stories.

But I had an uncle who was a brilliant man. And one day he helped me to write a composition which wasn't on the up and up but still. And I mean, he was brilliant. And when I used to say, but that's not true, he would say, but you're telling a story, aren't you? But anyhow, I wrote.

And you know that I got a poor grade on that from that teacher because he did not like us. Where he could-- I mean if he-- usually they had the religion the first thing in the morning. Then we didn't have to go in until 8:30 or 8:45. But if he could have done it with a plan and so on, he would have done it in the middle of the day and we would be sitting there, you know? But it was pretty good that he did it, especially in the higher grades.

But the teachers in general-- you see, we went to school six days. We didn't go five days. Six days to high school, and then until we were 14 we went to religious school on Sunday. But not after 14. And we went to school on Saturday. We never wrote. We did not write on Shabbat.

And some of the teachers tried to give tests but they knew. I mean, most of them were old people, old teachers. But when some of the younger teachers-- new teachers came in, one was there. He tried to give tests when we were. And he knew we were two Jewish girls in the class. And he knew that we didn't write. And we told him. And he says, well, it's too bad.

But then we complained when we had the homeroom teacher-- I guess that's equivalent here. We told her and then he stopped. And he never liked us either. But then we had another one, a young teacher, who would go out of the way to help us. He was very friendly to us Jewish girls. But the other one didn't. So those were little incidences where you can see what is.

But actually when it all came about my brother, he was 13, 14. He went to the gymnasium, and one day he came home and he says, I got to sit by myself because I'm Jewish. When he left he was 14, 15. And the next day he comes and says, yes, somebody else is sitting with me. And we ask who? So he gives us the name of a boy. And he says, he's not Jewish.

The father was a judge in our town who lived in our town for-- well, anybody remembered. They found out that this boy's great, great grandmother was Jewish. Nobody in our town knew it. And I mean, everybody knew everybody's business. I mean, whoever went to bed with whom, I mean, that was-- everybody knew what was going on.

So that poor boy, you know, like this. It was much later that my brother couldn't go to school anymore. And then he went with Youth Aliyah to Israel. But those were the things that happened as it went along. I'm sure you had heard these stories before, but the actual confrontation with Gentiles wasn't like this.

Do you remember when you first had a sense that things were going from not so good to pretty bad? When you first felt like--

Well, actually when-- I got to think about it. 1931. '31 when Hindenburg came in? I think I was in Wiesbaden. And they said, well, that's the end of it. Hitler will come. And then in '33 when he came you could tell by that time they were not afraid to work-- first they were afraid to work in SS uniforms as their uniforms because the youth group from the democratic side would fight them. But in '31, '32, they were already not afraid to walk around.

And then in '33, the 1st of April, that's when it really started. And I remember then that they had taken in-- arrested Jewish men who were having affairs with Gentile girls. And they marched them through our town and were walked around. And I remember that two of the Jewish fellows came. It was 1st or 2nd of April.

And they came in and said we want to say goodbye. I said, why are you leaving? He said, well, we're not going to stay. And they went at night to Holland and then afterwards to Buenos Aires. As a matter of fact, the son of one of them we met. They were older. We met when we came back there.

And that's when it really started. That's when they came and they had people in front of the Jewish stores. Don't buy from Jews. And their restaurants and said, Jews not allowed. You know, you couldn't get into certain stores. You couldn't get into certain restaurants, hotels, and things like this. And there were some that gladly would have taken us, but they were afraid. The people were afraid. But we had a bakery. We didn't get in the front. We got in the back.

Listen, when I was there, it wasn't quite that bad because I left in 1938. But I do know that they used to come until the last minute and gave things to them. But this is when it started, you know, taking the Jews through the street. And we are in Rassenschande, you know? We are disgracing the other race. And there was a concentration camp about an hour away from where I lived already then. Not with gas chambers and so on, but they weren't very well treated there.

What do you remember thinking about the exclusion policies and not being able to work in the business for which you were trained? This sort of thing. What do you remember thinking about?

It was very discouraging because I had a degree. I had worked. And whenever you went to one of these stores or to the bank-- now, we had-- my father did a lot with one bank. And this man was very friendly towards us. And I applied and he said-- I went to school with his daughter so, I mean, we knew. He said can't do it. We cannot employ Jewish people.

And there were that many Jewish stores. I mean, when I came to Hanover, which had larger Jewish population. But the few jobs that were available were taken. I mean, I had a girlfriend who worked at the hospital as a secretarial thing. And there was one big Jewish company in Hanover. But they hired everybody. I mean, this man did a lot of good. He hired as many as he had desks or chairs. But I couldn't. I mean, I was-- I did not live in Hanover so he did not know me that well. But he couldn't have done it anyhow. So there was nothing else left but going into the household.

So I went in different households. And when they started doing all these things, when they started it was a school. And I tried to get out. Unfortunately, I had nobody really until 1936 when my girlfriend went from Germany to England. She got it because she had a friend who was a doctor in Liverpool and he got her a job.

I had a cousin who went to Buenos Aires. And he wanted to go. And then he wrote to me, you want to come? But he had said that he only had one-- he was an only child, although her last name was Wolff, and you know, Argentina was usually corrupt enough. But when he said, you know, renting a place, he couldn't do it.

And I had another cousin of my mother's who was my age who went to South Africa-- who wanted to go to South Africa. And he said, well even if we don't, let's get married. And we both didn't have any money. But his mother was loaded. And she said, no, I'm alone. You're not going. You don't give her the money. So he didn't go. And he's gone. He went to Auschwitz or wherever.

I found out from somebody-- we were in San Diego from somebody who came from the same town, and they told me

that he vanished with his mother. And who knows who has the money because they were loaded. But none of us could prove that we were family because we don't know where they are. And how can we prove? His father was my grandfather's brother. So I mean, who can prove anymore? There's nobody left. So we couldn't even claim anything.

So it was the feeling. You could tell people were looking like this were kind of afraid to say hello to you even if they knew you. But like I say, I didn't have any opportunity. We did not have anybody here in America. And my-- in 1938 when the synagogues were burning, my father was put in a concentration camp. My sister was married. Her husband was in Dachau.

No, they weren't in Dachau. They were in Buchenwald. Buchenwald? You were in Dachau. My husband was in Dachau. And my sister-- I mean, the stories that they tell, you know, all the women were taken to the slaughterhouse in the morning. But they were released then, you know? And then after seven weeks or eight weeks, they came-- they were released.

And my sister and brother-in-law, they went to Holland. He had family in Holland. And he had family in America. And so they came here in '39. More or less were of the last person to go to America. But I had nobody. So that why I went to England and thank god for that. So they have-- I can only say good things about England. I know that Palestinian politics wasn't very favorable. But to us, they were very good. They took in percentage wise more than any country. And they were very good.

When I lived in the small town and everybody knew everybody, but I was the first refugee in this town. And so I was the wonder person. Everybody was nice. Even the mailman knew me. They had a long-- to get into the house there's a big front yard and, you know, to pass there. And when there was a letter from Germany or usually from my father, he drove on his bicycle and he would go like this when he saw that I was-- because I knew approximately when he came.

And when this happened in '38 he came, stopped his bicycle, knocked at the door and he says, did you hear anything from your father, you know, from your family? No. Every day. He would drive on the driveway and he would go like this. And then one day he came and he did like this. He knew by the handwriting. It was in a small town. Everybody knew everybody.

In England, you know, like this and everybody knew Martha Wolff, you know, like this. And he said the letter, open it up, he says. And I had to open it up and read to him what was in there. He wanted to see if he was OK. So those are some highlights, you know, that makes you feel good that people recognize you and helped you along in the very difficult times.

And here I was in England. I couldn't do anything. Nothing but wait for-- you know, there was no television. You only heard above it over the radio. And it's one of those things. So it's a different story, I think, than you have heard most of the people that you're interviewing.

Talk a little bit more about hearing-- learning the fate of your father and some of your other family members who didn't get out in time.

My father went-- after my mother left went to an aunt, sister of my aunt, whose husband was arrested too on the 9th of November. And he was a diabetic. And they marched him, and he died on the way. He just collapsed. I mean, he was [INAUDIBLE] like this.

And this is kind of a sad story too. There was a man with the same name in the next town. And they told the woman in the next town that her husband had died and sent her the coffin. And later on, when the people were released from the concentration camp, it wasn't this man. He came home and they had buried my uncle in the other person's name.

So then my father and my aunt went to-- no, I don't know where my aunt went. But my father went to Theresienstadt. And I still have his last letter that he wrote through the Red Cross. They would send us letters. And he was in Theresienstadt. And he was always-- he was a cattle dealer but he was always, what shall I say, very humanitarian. And he was always-- when somebody was sick. And he was the president of the [NON-ENGLISH] and all these things.



When somebody died, he saw to it that the taharah was done properly and so on.

And he worked in the hospital. And the last-- and there were a couple-- one of the doctors from Hanover was there too. And the last transport to Auschwitz were all the people in the hospital-- the doctors, nurses, aides and so on. And he was one of those. And I have a cousin in Israel who went there with the Youth Aliyah. And he married a girl from Czechoslovakia.

And she came one day to us and we have a picture of my father there. And she looked at it and she said, who is that? And we said, that's our father. He says, you mean Karl Wolff was your father? She was with him in Theresienstadt. You know, these are stories-- they are unreal. You don't wish like this.

And we do know that he was sent away because there was another couple from our hometown. It was a husband and wife and two children. And they were in-- they were sent from Theresienstadt-- from one to the other. And the mother was always sick. She had meningitis. She had everything.

But the two girls always [INAUDIBLE]. They were separated. And they always said when the husband was taken away from them, if we ever see you again-- if we ever get together again, let's meet either in Paris or in Holland. They had emigrated to Holland. And the girls, I mean, what they did for the mother is just amazing.

Anyhow, the mother and the daughters came to Paris. And they met some people there and they said, I think that your husband is in Switzerland. So they got things together and, lo and behold, they met again, all four of them in Paris. Then went back to Holland. I mean, the father, mother gone. They were in their 90s in the mean time. But they met there. And now the one daughter-- the oldest daughter is suffering. I mean, she has bad back and so on. But mentally she has-- all she can talk about it and things like this.

Whereas the younger one, maybe she was-- well, she was not that young-- has a different outlook on life. And she's very positive. Beautiful girl. But the other one is a beautiful girl too, but she's very positive and so on. But the older one has a lot of problems. But they did come back.

And they had their parents for-- oh my god, the mother died, what, last year, two years ago? And he died about maybe four years ago. No, he was gone and we were there in '87. We went to see them. They lived in Hengelo in Holland. We went to see her. And he was gone. Maybe he was gone since '85 or so. But the man was 90 or so. And so I mean, it was not-- he died a natural death after surviving all that.

About my father-- and from them we know that my father was sent to Auschwitz. Now, I had an uncle in Turkey, in Istanbul. And he could write to him. He would always hear from him. My father was there, and he got the word too that he was sent to Auschwitz. But he kept the correspondence up for a long time.

Do you remember some of the things your father talked about in the last letter you got?

No. We were saying goodbye. We say goodbye. That was really probably the letter when he was sent to Theresienstadt. We did not hear from Theresienstadt. This is a letter where I want to say goodbye to you. That's all he said. They couldn't say anything. Everything was censored, you know? But he did get our picture when we got married. I mean, it wasn't a fancy picture of this veil and things like this. But he did get a picture. And he wrote to my uncle, Martha does not look so well.

I think I was already pregnant by the time we had our picture taken, you know, because there wasn't these formalities. I mean, it was even with I wore a hat and suit. We didn't have pictures taken there. By the time these pictures were taken, you know, I guess-- our boy was born exactly a year after we were married. And everybody was doing like this, you know? But they were not lucky enough to do that. They're fine now.

But that's all we know from him but that he was very well respected. I mean, my father was-- and maybe I brag a little bit. Maybe I'm prejudiced. But whenever we meet anybody and say who my father was, you know, he was a very, very well respected man. And he was a good man. And he was respected.

Now, he had a lot to do with Gentile people. We had cattle that were more used for breeding than for [INAUDIBLE]. And he would supply the counts and things like that, especially in Upper Silesia and so on. And they would come to us and visit us, you know, and so on.

And so he had a very good relationship. He had a good relationship with the farmers. And he was very well respected. And we know from when he was there everybody liked him. There was nothing not to like him. He was too good a person anyhow. But it was-- you know? And my own mother was-- she was a deeply religious person but very modern. Much more modern than a lot of other people.

She let us go-- when I went to school, I mean, she let me go. And from a small town they would say, why are you doing that? Why are you doing that? Why'd you let her go? Why don't you insist she's staying here and so on? But she said, no. They have to go out. They have to learn and so on. She was very modern. Very understanding. My friends would come to her and talk to her before they could talk to their own parents or mothers and so on.

So like I said, we had a good-- let me say, my youth itself, until Hitler came, was a good one. To be quite honest, I was spoiled. I probably was more spoiled than a lot of others because, I guess, was the oldest one. Things were easier when I grew up, you know, until my mother died on my 20th birthday.

And things were easier than they were later on in the '30, you know? We still had our house. We didn't have to share it with anybody. In I think now '35, '36, another family moved in. We had to share the house with somebody else. That was one of the things too. It was after I left in '35. So we have to share it with another family because they couldn't keep the store open and they couldn't keep the house.

So the Jews were put together. Later on I heard that they even moved with somebody else again. But that was way after I was gone. When I left, we were in our own home with another family. And we had to sell the house. Or he had to sell the house. And when we were there, I went in but it wasn't anything like it. There wasn't anything like it.

There's a-- matter of fact I think-- I don't know. No, I think it's in the other book. No, it isn't in the picture. No, I don't think it's in here. I thought I had the picture of the house, but that was in somewhere else. I have the house of-- see, I was talking about the stones. Here somebody is putting one of the stones on one of the graves. I come from one thing to the other, huh? OK? I was just wondering if I-- I just want you to see if there is from the house. No, this is all other people there.

You see, this is where the synagogue was and what they did to it. And you see all of us sitting up there. And they do say that every time they have flowers there. But it has happened too that some people took the flowers away. But every year for the 9th of November, the rabbi from Hanover comes and they have services there.

But you know, the Kristallnacht-- they Kristallnacht itself. But they have a Chinese restaurant in our little town. I think that was-- when we saw that we had to take a picture of that because nobody would believe it. I don't think we even knew what a Chinaman was. So we had to go take the picture there. But I just want to see if there is a-- no, we were just walking through some of the streets.

Now, some of the streets they have taken from the town. They have completely taken away some of the old towns where a lot of Jewish people lived in the poor section. They've torn all the houses down and build condominiums. We didn't know we were standing at one spot.

We said, we think that's where the store was, you know, one of the stores. But who knows? And I mean, you can't judge too much because the streets don't exist anymore. But like I say, I went there. I'm not sorry I went. But I wouldn't go again. I saw in everybody my enemy. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't know.

You started to say something about Kristallnacht.

Yeah.

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more?

I was not there at the Kristallnacht. I was already in England. But I do know that suddenly they saw the synagogue in flames. And they said at the time that the teacher that we had put the fire on. And like I say, I could only tell you what I heard. But can you imagine in every town of Germany all the teachers or the rabbis turned to fires, I mean, spontaneously at the same time.

And I think he rescued one Torah or so. But the wife of the shammash who actually-- here was the synagogue and there was the shammash house. She went crazy. Absolutely crazy. I don't know why. Later on they sent them away, but she absolutely went berserk because they had two children and so on.

But altogether, I don't know because I wasn't there. I can only tell, you know, about the stories that they were. They just came and took the men away. And they went on the train and they were sent to Buchenwald, which is near Berlin I think. But they had kind of a, shall I say, true story in a way.

We did not have a rabbi in our little town. We had a district rabbi. And the district rabbi was there. And what out of all things did he take? His tefillin. And in the morning he lay tefillin on the train. And the Nazis came like this. And everybody says, he's crazy, he's crazy, leave him alone, he's crazy, so that he could finish laying his tefillin. And they left him alone because they thought he was nuts. But he survived. When he came out too he went to Israel afterwards.

But those are things-- like I say, they're just stories that I can say because I wasn't there. I heard it in England. And I must say, the people were most supportive. They would stop me in the street. I mean, like I say, this was a one street village. Very residential person, you know? Everybody knew everybody there too. And they were very good.

They had a mansion there too which was used first for the Spanish refugees. And then they had refugees from Czechoslovakia there. And the Labour Party from England had saved these people. And then I was contacted because I was the one who spoke German and could go in there, you know? And we are bored. They used to dance. They had music and things like this.

So we must say one thing about the English people. Even in the worst time of trouble, their sense of humor and their sense of we'll win the war, we will do it, don't worry about it, and they survived only because of that. And I think both of us have learned a lot from it. When things are happening I think we can face a lot of things better because of the influence of the English people I think.

And they're so positive. And they just a sense of humor, sense of security. And my god, we were not secure. I tell you we were not secure in England, you know, when all that bombing came. Like I say, air raid without a roof on it. But in Liverpool we used to go to a international club from the University of Liverpool.

And one Saturday we were there. This was before I was married. And we were always discussion groups. And you know, the English people at that time they had a lot of South African, let's say, Black people. Can I use that expression? They used to call them something else but I don't want to say that. And they were sons of doctors. They were going to the university. Wonderful people. Beautiful people. And smart.

And so we used to have discussion groups there. The air raid sirens go off. Got to go in the basement, in the air raid shelter. So the whole-- we all went. And some of us, the German girls, we were sitting huddled together scared to death. This was in the middle of Manchester-- of Liverpool. They started the jukebox. They had a jukebox in the shelter and they wanted to dance. And my god, we were scared.

But they said then the all clear came in and said, all right, let's stand in a line. We all stand in line and sang Auld Lang Syne. Went upstairs, kept on discussing. I mean, it's wonderful to have that attitude because life goes on. You can't just-- what could you do? What could we do really? What else could we do? But those are little things.

Can you talk a little bit more about being a Jew in England at that time? You mentioned that in Manchester the Yiddish

speaking Jewish community didn't like the newer Jews who came in and didn't speak Yiddish.

Well, I tell you, I always knew I was Jewish. And I admit I was not a Zionist in Germany because all our people have lived in Germany. What, in 1600. I mean, just like ask any American young Jewish person now. They wouldn't say I'm a Jewish American. I'm an American Jew. And so we were German Jews. And we felt very secure.

But when I came to England, to Liverpool first in the job, and my girlfriend was got sick, and I had to take care of the old lady. And my girlfriend got-- when I was there six months-- I don't know if I told you this-- got scarlet fever. So I had to go over. And so the people sent me over to the old people's house.

And one day I was-- I didn't know anybody. I only knew this one girl. And so I was at the hairdresser. And the hairdresser said, oh, don't you know Dolly? And I said, who's Dolly? Well, she's about your age. I'm sure the hairdresser said, wait a minute her mother's the next cubicle. So he said, this is mother and she works there and there. And she asked me to come and meet her daughter.

Well, I wasn't quite sure that I wanted to do it. But the daughter came and asked me. And they had a girls school. I still think it's like Junior Hadassah was here. This was they called Ziona. And there were only just girls. We got together and we were just in our 20s and discussing and things like this and had parties. And that's how I really got into the Jewish community in England.

And I went there to the synagogue. And it was quite an experience because I thought Jews all over the world had the same melodies. I had brought my machzor with me from Germany. We always went-- after we left, when we graduated so-called from religious school we got a set of machzor. And that's one thing I brought with me. And I took that when the first Rosh Hashanah-- the first Rosh Hashanah was there. These girls asked me-- one of the girls asked me to come.

And I went to services. And I took my book out and couldn't follow. I mean, it was OK. The translation was in German, but I thought the Hebrew would be the same. So they gave me another Hebrew-- of the machzor. And I knew enough Hebrew that I could follow. And you know, these girls never had any Hebrew lessons. We had to. We had no choice if we wanted or not.

And they couldn't get over it. Martha can follow? I could follow the service without hesitation. And actually then they started to believe that I was Jewish. I think it took all this time to prove to them that I was Jewish because I did not know Yiddish. And that's how I got into the Jewish group and all that, the women school-- girls school or whatever it is.

And I went to services. Nobody went out of their way to welcome me besides these girls when I came to services. Nobody. Nobody contacted any of us who went. Especially there were a lot of us in mixed Jewish-- in mixed marriage homes. Never did anybody ever come and say, would you like to come to services?

Most of them knew there were Jewish girls. Maybe not many wanted to. I went by myself. I did not need anybody because my Jewish upbringing, my Jewish feeling was enough that I could do it myself. But they did not go out of their way to help us. I mean, I'm not saying the refugee committee helped to find jobs and things like this. But once you had a job, well, that was it. Unless there was like me who was interested to help.

And for me, there's nothing else. I am Jewish and that's it. I've never held back. I've never in any way, shape or form denied it. You know, when I worked and I wanted to take off for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I went there and said, I take off. But at first we were very fortunate with my mum and boss we were paid. We took usually one day of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

And then came a time where some people had to make a sacrifice in coming-- they usually went because I was the oldest of them and the other girl had left. And I said, well, if we take off that day for Rosh Hashanah, how about coming the day before? Which was admission day in those days. We were closed.

And when I came the next day to work she said, how come these girls came to work? They didn't want to make up for it. So the following year they said, well, you can either have Rosh Hashanah paid or Yom Kippur paid. And I said, I don't

care. I take off. And that's it.

So then one year they always had-- after you've been there five years they had a service club dinner. We get the invitation for Friday night. It was always Friday night. It was Rosh Hashanah. I called the secretary and I said, I'm not coming. And most of the other Jewish girls. I said, I don't think they're coming. It's Rosh Hashanah.

So a few days later, the boss-- the president comes and walks around me and around me. And he says, Martha, can I talk to you? I said, yes. I had worked there probably about 10, 12 years. He says, I feel very bad. I said, what happened? He says, well, because you can't come to the dinner. He said, can't you just manage? And so I said, no, Rosh Hashanah is first. And after the services everybody comes to my house.

It must have been the boys were already married I think. And so no, I can't do it. And he said, how about the others? And we said, no. We were very good in that respect. Most of us. And they said, no, they weren't coming. Martha, how can you do that? I said, well-- Now, he says, there's one thing I want you to tell. In April-- every April you call my secretary and you tell us when your holidays are-- Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur-- so that we don't do this again.

The following day the vice president comes. He says, Martha, you sure embarrassed me. I said, what did I do? He says on the calendar it says Rosh Hashanah on Saturday. Why can't you come on Friday? Now, this is an educated man. He did not know that our holiday started this.

But I felt very good that we Jewish people-- Jewish girls, women were that respected that they really felt like-- they never did it again. Well, I would call in April and say, look, Lillian, our holidays is then and then, but they would never do it again. She said-- and the boss said-- the president said, I really couldn't change it. That is the only Friday night. I said, look, I hope I can come next year and next year and next year, you know, like this. But we won't come.

And they have been, in that respect very, very good. And they have hired a lot of Jewish people. We have never had any problems. I did have a problem with a Jewish woman because on Good Friday they used to go to church or went shopping, but they were supposed to go to church. And I used to take my early lunch so that I could man the phones-- telephones.

There was a Jewish girl. And I said to her, I said, why don't you take an early-- a woman- an early lunch and then come back so that we can take care of the telephones. But you see, the others had three hours off. And we only have 45 minutes. After everybody came back, I got called in the office. Why I asked-- and her name happened to be Martha too-- why I had asked her to come back to work.

I felt they give us Rosh Hashanah off and pay for it. I felt it was our obligation. I had to let that woman go home so that she just three hours like the other people. Now you see, I would never have done it. And none of our other Jewish girls. We always made it a point to be there. We took instead of going from 12:00 to 12:45, we used to go from 11:00 to 11:45 so that the people that wanted to go to church or they went to the show- I mean, I don't care where they went, but they supposedly went to church. I would never have said no.

You see, that's how I showed my Jewishness there. And I was respected for it. And we all were. When there was anything, they would call, Martha, what about it? So I think I proved my Jewishness. And so did my children. I mean, my children went-- at that time, there was no Jewish Community Center in Oakland that had everything. So they used to go to the YMCA in Christmas vacation, Easter vacation because I was working. They took matzah to the YMCA camp. They used to say, give us more. Everybody wants to have the matzah.

And they gave the-- every Christmas came, they came. But they went there. And that's how we brought them up too. When we first came here, they went to child care and they came home and says, Mother, we have to have a blue crepe rope with a white collar and the little bow tie for a Christmas carol.

It was the first year we were here. And I went in the morning and I said to the ladies, Mrs. Solomon, the boys came home that they were having a Christmas party, but you know we are Jewish. And she says, you know, Mrs. Hankin, here in America this is not the holiday like we have. This is a holiday of love. What could I say? I was a greenhorn. So they

went there. They sang the songs whatever they had learned. And Friday night there was a Hanukkah party at the temple and we took them to the temple.

When they went to grammar school, my oldest one supposedly had a little bit better voice and was supposed to sing with three other boys O Holy Night. And he says, don't worry, Mother. Every time it says "When Christ is born," I take a deep breath. So they were brought up enough never to do it.

My youngest boy was pretty tall. One day he was a father and had to put the star on the Christmas tree. It didn't help hurt them because they were strong enough. They went the next night for Hanukkah and we had a Hanukkah play, you know? And I think we transferred all our Jewishness like this to our children too.

And I had it in England. And I showed it here. I never-- and they never did. As a matter of fact, when our oldest boy graduated from Fremont High, he had Rabbi Gates, God rest his soul, as what they call the baccalaureate, as a speaker because they felt that he deserved it. And he they stood up for it, their Jewishness and so on because I think we proved it to them. I mean, I do not have a kosher household, but I am a very traditional person.