

OK. It's the history of the Holocaust. I always get it-- it's the Holocaust--

Oral History Project.

OK.

And today is August 28, right?

Correct.

28th, yeah.

Yeah. A lot's happened in the last week.

[LAUGHTER]

All right.

OK, we're rolling. Anytime.

OK. We're here with the Holocaust Oral History Project of Northern California. Today is August 28, 1991, and we are interviewing Margaret Bendahan, and the interviewer is Emily Silverman.

OK, Margaret, why don't you tell us where you were born and a little bit about your family life and childhood?

I was born in Chemnitz, Saxony, in Germany. And I had a very happy childhood. I was the second born.

And what type of schooling did you have, and a little bit about was your family observant Jews, secular, or--

I went to a private girls school in Chemnitz until my 16th-- 17th year. And then I was sent to Switzerland to a household school in Lausanne [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Where I learned French, and chores about the household.

What type of profession was your father in? My father was a-- let's see what it is in English-- [SPEAKING GERMAN].

You want to explain a little what that was?

Fabricate in stockings, gloves, and he had a lot of expert business with France, Switzerland, Italy.

How about you? Did you have any other siblings besides-- you mentioned that you were the second born.

Pardon?

Did you have any other brothers or sisters? I have a brother, who was one year older, and I have a sister. She's about six years younger than I am.

What type of Jewish life did your family have? Were-- did they observe the holidays or--

Yeah, just observed the holidays. That's all.

Like which holidays?

Both holidays. My late father was not Jewish. My mother was Jewish.

OK.

So we observed both holidays-- the Jewish holidays, and we observed the Christian holidays both.

Can you describe what that was like? Like, would you put up a Christmas tree, and would you light Hanukkah candles? Or maybe describe how you celebrated.

We were used to that from childhood on, so there was no special excitement.

Were you given both a Jewish and a Christian education? What type of religious education?

Mostly Christian education--

Were you sent to--

--because Father was head of the household. Father was a Christian.

Were you Lutheran? Was he Lutheran or Evangelical or Catholic? What was your--

My father was Protestant, Evangelical Lutheran religion.

And were you sent to Lutheran Sunday school?

Well, once in a while, but not too often as I recall.

Were you ever taken to synagogue?

Very seldom. Later on, in the later years. Not in childhood days. Yeah.

How did you identify yourself? Did you consider yours-- how did you consider yourself-- Jewish, Christian?

There was no speech about, in those days, when I grew up, what are you? What is your religion? Nobody asked anything. That's why it was shocking when Hitler came, and we were told we were just a Mischling, not full German or whatever.

Can you expand as to-- do you remember when Hitler came to power and how that affected you and your family personally, like what went on?

It did affect us very much. Father lost business because-- on account of Hitler's regime. Then, in those days, they did not buy the merchandise from Germany-- the French and the Swiss and the Italians. So Father had to declare bankruptcy. And it was very hard on all of us.

Then, I recall we had the Gestapo coming to the house and saying, this is [SPEAKING GERMAN], your father and your mother. I said, I can't understand. This is Father and Mother. How can there be [SPEAKING GERMAN]? Father was an older man. I don't know how old Father was, but he has had a stroke from all the trouble in those years. And he was hardly able to talk, to speak. It seemed the stroke affected his speech to whole body.

So Mother was ordered by a postcard to come to the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. I forgot the street where it was, but I went with my mother. And she had to bring her birth certificate. And they were talking in a very-- gee, how should I call it-- very upsetting way, very arrogant, arrogantly. And they mentioned that Mother-- you will hear from us.

So of course, my mother was afraid that something would happen. She has heard lately that one of her relatives, which was an uncle, I think, Louis Joseph, has been killed in a concentration camp. I forgot which camp that was. And his wife, Caroline, got a postcard to pick up the body. That I remember. But I don't know what year that was. That must

have been in the '30, beginning of '30. Yeah.

Mother visited several of her friends, and I went with Mother until we saw-- Ben Joseph was his name. And Mr. And Mrs. Jaffe, which was a second cousin for my mother, but I don't remember the street name. They lived in Berlin.

And through the help from my late father's sister, who happened to know one of the Nazis-- I don't know who it was. I think his name was Frank, one of the big shot Nazis then. And we wrote to my late father's sister about the [SPEAKING GERMAN] that they were going to arrest Father and Mother and put them in a camp-- that maybe she could be of any help in that case, which she probably did.

Then, later on, they left us alone. But I got a card-- I have to report with my passport to the police station. So I asked my sister. She's a little more-- how should I say-- peppy, or clever maybe, than I am. She says, I'll go with you. And in the meantime, somebody told me about that job with the German Lufthansa.

There would be a good job for you, they told me, and-- because you know languages. You speak French. You know a little English from school, and you speak German, and you have been traveling. So why don't you apply for that job, which I did?

And I got the answer right away. I had to report and introduce myself. And in those days, it was in the '30s sometime-- '32, '33 maybe-- nobody asked, who are you, what are you, or anything-- what is your religion? So I liked that very much. But when I was told to come with my passport to the police station, oh, no, I had to hand in my passport. Excuse me. That was it.

I went to the police without my sister. I had to hand in my passport. And I says, why? Why do you take my passport away? Well, orders. Don't ask any question. Orders. So the passport was gone. And then in the meantime, I got that job with the German Lufthansa.

And the instructor said, well, we're going to fly over to Copenhagen or Stockholm to get you acquainted with the flying and with the other stewardesses in different countries. You all have a passport, I think. And they all said yes, and I thought, oh, my god, I don't have a passport.

So that was then. My sister says, come on, I'll go with you to the police station. And if they ask any question, we'll say, yes, we're Irish. That was the word-- Aryans. So we went over there, and there was a policeman. And he said, well, I don't have to ask any questions. You both look blonde with the blue eyes. I'll never forget that. And my sister said, yes. And you're the real Germans. You work for the Lufthansa. No, this is my sister there.

So with that, I got my passport. That was a trick, which I always kept to myself. I couldn't tell anybody later on. Put the J in or something. I was looking for that passport yesterday until late at night. I couldn't find it.

So what happened [SPEAKING GERMAN]? So they put down in that passport, they said, what work do you do? I says, Angestellte Deutsche Lufthansa. So he put that in that passport. And when I wanted to leave the country, the guy said, no, we cannot give you an Ausreise, a visa to leave the country. And I said, why not? Because, you see this here? It says, Angestellte Deutsche Lufthansa. Well, I says, I'm not there anymore.

Oh? He says, no? I says, no, I am working for Electrola which was a music company in Berlin. And I worked for them years before-- Electrola on Kurfürstendamm So when they heard or when the boss from Electrola heard that I was thrown out from the Lufthansa on account of not being Aryan, he took me right away back in the store. And I was happy about it.

He said, that doesn't make any difference with us who you are, what your religion is, or if you are Aryan or not. I says, fine. So-- but I wanted to leave the country. That was too much for me to be thrown out because you are partly Jewish. You are-- what they said-- a Mischling. I mean, to some people, it didn't bother, but it bothered me.

So I wanted to leave the country, and I went to the American embassy in Berlin and stood in a long, long line, waiting

line to get in to be heard. And when it was finally my turn, they said, no, you cannot get a visa. I says, well, I have a grandmother in New York, and from my late father's-- from my father's side is a cousin in New York, a Dr. Jager, a famous chiroc, I heard. I never met him.

And my father had a lady friend in New York because he has been in America many, many years ago, before learning the language. So was my late father's father also in America, the United States, on business. He was in the same trade-- stockings and gloves, fabrication.

So anyhow, that lady-- and my father sent a photo to his lady friend he knew from years ago. "I have a daughter. She would like to go to America. Could you help her?"

I don't know if he explained why and what. I don't think he did-- the reasons. So she showed the photo to her son, and her son was so thrilled about the photo that he says, I want to marry that girl.

[LAUGHS]

It's like an old [SPEAKING GERMAN], like a [SPEAKING GERMAN], like a book kind of. And my English wasn't good enough to write to him, so he more or less corresponded with my father, who spoke fluently English then. Anyhow, he sent a paper that he and a photo that he wants to marry me, signed by a notary-- this promise.

So my mother says, you know what? We're going to the Jewish committee. And I heard from friends of mine that they arranged things so you can make it to the United States or to any other country. That was in Berlin, 1937, '38, it must have been.

So we went to the committee, and they said, well, we can get you a job to go to England as a maid. No, I says. I don't want to go to England as a maid. I want to get married, and they said, well, can't he come over here? I says, no, he can't come over here.

So they said, there is a place we can get you a visa, which is Panama. And he could come from the United States to Panama. That's American soil. And he can get married and bring you back to Connecticut. He was from Connecticut-- the young man.

So I got the visa for Panama in my passport, and I went to the travel office, and they said it has to be paid in dollar. So I wrote-- or my father wrote that I could only leave if it has been paid in dollar. So my late father's lady friend paid the trip. I think it was over \$600 in those days.

And I went to the travel office in Berlin, and I says, well, can I take the boat from Hamburg? And they said, no, we have a war going on, in case you don't know. I said, well, how do I go to Panama then? Well, you have to go the other way through China, Japan. No, I said, I don't want to go that way.

Finally, I says, I had some voice telling me, something goes wrong-- you know? Can happen. What do you call that? Some--

A premonition?

Yeah, premonition. Premonition, yeah. They said, well, this is the only way. And I says, well, so I have to go that way then. Fine. And I had to take the train from Berlin. I don't know what day was it? It was December, could have been the 12th, 12th of December, I think.

But to get the Ausreise visa, that was the hardest part. In those days, it was already the 1940, that I had the visa for Panama. I went to the Ausreise visa. That means that they let you out. I went there with my passport and with the letter from that so-called fiance. Mr. Livingston was his name, Hendrik Livingston. Yeah.

And they said-- they look at the passport, and they must have read, Angestellte Deutsche Lufthansa. You don't get a

visa. And I says, why not? And he took the passport and went to some other guys in that same office. They said, no. So I went home, and I cried.

And Mother says, well, listen, we have to think of something. We have to do something to get you out. We went to the Jewish committee, and they said, well, we have no connection with that certain department where you get your OK to leave the country.

So Mother thought of somebody at Electrola at the music store, wherever. He used to come and buy records, and when he came in, he said, Mein Liebeskind, instead of calling me "Fraulein--" Miss-- Miss-- Liebeskind, he says-- Mein Liebeskind. That means "dear child," no. Do you have any exciting new records? Yeah, I says, I always have some new record.

And that same man, I heard-- he must have come to Electrola. And he said he is now with the-- what was it-- German police, not Nazi police, German police in Berlin, in the office. And my mother thought about this man. Can you imagine? Oh, she was bright, my mother.

So she says, you go there. You go to that main big police station in Berlin. Well, we lived in Berlin then-- Father, Mother, me, Hilda. And you talk to him. You tell him what the deal is, that they threw you out at Lufthansa without giving anything written, and just that you are not what they call an Aryan, that you're a Mischling. And I did that, like she told me.

I went there and says, I'd like to see Mr. So-and-So. I'd better not mention the name, but he might not be around anymore. But that's not important, is it? And I told him the case, and he says, oh, I have a friend there in that office who gives the Ausreise visa to leave the country. I'll talk to him. I says, really? Would you do that for me? Yes, yeah. Yeah, sure, [SPEAKING GERMAN], I'll do that for you. So he must have called up.

You go there right tomorrow morning. At 9 o'clock I think it was, or 10-- you go there, and take your passport, and tell them to change that right away. You are not with the Lufthansa anymore. I talked to him on the phone, and he's going to change it. And it was crossed out and was done, and he wrote down "Bureau Angestellte," worker in an office kind of.

So I got the stamp that I can leave the country, but then I had to go-- I don't think I brought the paper-- to the [SPEAKING GERMAN], to the [SPEAKING GERMAN], or God knows what that was. I had another one-- [SPEAKING GERMAN]. And on each of those places, they asked me why I leave. I says, because I want to get married.

And in the [SPEAKING GERMAN], the man said, what kind of-- oh, I had to write everything down what I plan on taking with me. So I had, of course, several working in the music store. I had several classical records and some light operetta music from Richard Tauber, who was a great singer, Joseph Schmidt, Jan Kiepura, and some classical records from Mendelssohn, the composer, Mendelssohn, and, of course, Beethoven.

And he went through the whole list, and he said, this you cannot take with you, and this you can't, and this and this and this and this. I says, why not? Because they are all Jews. Oh, I said, well, that doesn't matter. That's-- what's the difference? I said, I like those. No! And he crossed it all out.

So certain things I was just not allowed to take with me, just only so many records and not more. Music sheets-- the same thing. I liked to play piano and sing.

So what else can I say? Oh, and then on clothings, I could take two coats and one suit and three pairs of shoes and underwear this, and of course, I had some towels, which was for the-- what you call-- the dowry when you get married, and some tablecloths, little embroidery things-- only so many pieces, and the rest was crossed out. That stays here.

The same with the money. I don't remember. It was very little-- \$10 I think. The mark traded into dollar for that long trip from Berlin to Panama.

So anyhow, I left Berlin. Mother came with me to the train. My friends were afraid to come to the train, to the Bahnhof Zoo, I think it was, but Mother was there. And it was very hard for me to leave Father and Mother behind, especially I didn't know what will happen to them. But Mother said, at least one gets saved from the family.

So I left Berlin in the train, and I had to sleep in compartment then. And the train went through, I think it was-- I don't know. The conductor said, the train is going through Poland, and there were some Nazis also in the train, some in uniform, Nazi uniform. And they said, nobody is opening any curtains. The curtains-- they had kind of sun curtains in those trains in those days. The curtain will be down, and nobody is allowed to look out.

And I couldn't figure out, but I knew the Nazis were already in Poland. I only heard the news from my mother. She used to listen to my radio. I had a nice radio, Blaupunkt. There were no television in those days, and she would sit and listen, you know. Even if somebody would have reported that she was listening to foreign station, they would have sent her to some camp.

But nobody did hear it, and she told me the latest news always. So then, the train went through Poland, and then I don't know. It was hooked up on another train. I guess they have different lines in Russia-- different tracks, I should say. And there was a Russian soldier with a bayonet stood there, and I thought, oh, my god, what's going to happen?

And the one that took care of the sleeping departments, he said to me, aren't you scared going by yourself to Russia? I says, no, why should I be scared? He says, I'm going to introduce you to a young man who is a student from the southern part of Germany. And he is also alone and so that you're not all by yourself. I says, well, I'm not afraid. But it's better you know somebody, and that's was-- but that's not important, is it?

So he introduced me, and that was a student from Stuttgart or someplace down south. And the trip continued. He was in the same-- well, the train was hooked up to a Russian train. There were different-- there was no sleeper. There was a bed here and a bed above, and on the other side in the same compartment, two beds too. And I said I wanted to have my own place. They said, that's impossible. We don't do that here. [LAUGHS] Funny how you remember certain things.

So the young man says, you want to sleep upstairs, Fraulein Liebeskind, or downstairs. I says, I'd rather be down. So he says, then I go up there first, and next, in the same compartment was a married couple from Berlin, I think. Yeah. A Jewish couple-- very nice people. I forgot the name. I think Mr. And Mrs. Jacobi, if I'm not mistaken.

But they went to the United States directly, they told me. Or to Shanghai-- I don't remember really. After all, it's 45 years ago, you know. And so many different things happened again in the meantime.

So I arrived in Moscow, and I was told at the travel office, you have to wait three days for the South Siberian Express, which comes only on certain days. And the hotel was included. I think it was Hotel Metropol. And I even went to the theater. There was a theater-- opera tickets included in the whole deal. And I saw Eugene Onegin, Eugene Onegin. Of course, it was all in Russian, but the music was beautiful. So was the ballet.

And then daytime, we were taken by a tourist lady in a car, and she showed us several places in Moscow. And after three days, the trip continued through Russia. And it was bitter cold. In Moscow, it was bitter cold too. People were standing in long line, I heard, waiting for food.

Then the train stopped someplace. I don't know where it was in Russia. And you couldn't get out of the car because it was bitter cold. I tried to go out, and I caught a bad cold then. And then we came to Manchukuo, to the frontier.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], I think, was the place. Into Manchukuo, Korea, and then across the-- I think it was Japan Sea up to Yokohama, Kobe Yokohama. Yokohama was the destination because the ship was supposed to leave Yokohama on the end of the year, 1940-- the 30th or 31st.

So when I arrived in Yokohama-- and the deal was with Grand Hotel, Yokohama. I had a room booked there. That was booked through the travel agency. So the next day, I went over to the NYK, which was the Japanese shipping line. It was booked from Berlin by a Japanese-- Japanese shipping line.

And the ship was Rakuyo Maru. I had my-- what is it? It's not the ship's ticket. It's the-- what do you call that? The order, so-called, that you are allowed to leave the ship, not by the name of Rakuyo Maru on the 30th or 31st of December, 1940. And it was all paid for too in that travel office deal.

And I go there, and they said, nope. They said something in Japanese. I said, I don't understand Japanese. My English was fairly not fluently, but fairly-- I could make myself understanding and listen what they said to understand what they meant. To make it short, they said, no, you can't take that ship. And I said, why not? Ah, the visa something. And I said, I have a visa. It's a visa, and here, it's all paid. No.

So what should I do? There were several immigrants in the same hotel. And they saw me crying. I was very upset, and I told them so and so, and I wanted to go to Panama to get married. And they said, why don't you go to the American Express? They speak German there, and they speak French, and they speak English, besides Japanese.

So I went there. There was a young man, and he said-- I talked French to him, with him. And he said, I don't understand. You have a visa, and you have the passage order, the passage orders for the ship. Well, I says, maybe you could come with me and talk to those people. Yeah, he did, so no-- they said, no, the visa is no good.

So he says, you know what you could do? Go to the Panama Council here, which is the minister from Panama, and talk to him. So I asked him if he would be kind enough and go with me. He speaks better English than I do. And he did. So the minister said, I don't understand what's wrong. I says, I don't understand it either.

And he said, I can give you another visa in your passport, so he put another visa in, and I had to pay the last money I had. I think it was \$15. Yeah, \$15. And he said, I'll tell you what. You go to the hotel and tell them to take all your luggage on the ship, and I'm holding the papers back. You see, the ship goes to Panama. I'm holding the whole board book back until you are on that ship. They have to take you.

So I did. I had all my luggage shipped over. I didn't have so much. I had a trunk, ships cover, suitcase, and a little suitcase, and another little one. And I was on the ship, and it seems some guy came over. And he said he wanted to see my papers, so I showed him the papers.

And he said, no, you can't come. We don't take you. I says, oh, yes, I went to the Panama minister, and he said they have to take me because this is Panamanian-- a Japanese ship, and it's landing in Panama. No, they said no. And if you're not leaving right away, I'll have you arrested by the harbor police.

So I got scared kind of, and I says, all right. I didn't want any trouble with-- in a foreign country with the police or what. So I had my luggage shipped off the ship, and there I stood. And the ship left. That board book was delivered in the meantime, you know, and they left. And there I was.

So what to do? And they said, well, go to the Jewish committee that's in Tokyo. And I said, I don't even have the money to go to Tokyo. So they said, there's another thing you can do. You have no J in your passport. I said, no. Well, then you're not Jewish. Well, I said, you can call me whatever you want. I'm half Jewish. My mother is Jewish.

Well, so they were very doubtful, but they referred me to see that Mr-- what was the name-- Mr. Bowles, I think-- he is a Quaker. Well, everybody in Berlin knew what the Quakers-- you know, they helped a lot. And I said, yeah, but I don't know my way around nothing, and I have no money or nothing.

So there was a young man from Frankfurt, and he says, I'll go with you and see the Quaker. He was Jewish too, but I forgot his name. And the Quaker said, well, did you go to the German consulate? You are German, and you have a German passport, and you are not Jewish, so you wouldn't have any trouble here in Japan.

I says, well, I was wondering, could you help me to go over to Panama to meet my fiance? And they said, well, there is nothing we can do. We can't help you with money. The way your situation is, you have to stay here now until your fiance does something from over there. I says, all right, fine. So we can help you and put an ad in the paper for you.

So they did. And they said, the best thing is you take the job with the German man. Yeah. And his name was Ervin Morgan. And he came over to Japan. I don't know what his job was, but he worked for some German company probably.

I never asked him, what do you do or what is your job? He came with his little girl, and he says he would like to have a governess for his daughter. His wife went to America, and he's alone with the daughter. And I says, gladly, I have done this kind of work before as governess.

So I stayed with that family. How long did I stay? I don't know-- a year and-- a year and a half probably. And more or less, I met a lot of very nice people. There was no war with America yet, so there were still quite a few Americans there.

And also, I met quite a few people from Germany. They were detained in Japan. They all hoped-- Jewish people-- they hoped to go either South America or North America or Central America someplace. So I got a postcard from Tokyo. I should come to Tokyo for an interview. I don't address what it was. It was some Nazi-- some kind of an office.

And when I came there, they said, what do you do here? So I told them my story. I'm engaged to be married, and I had trouble with the visa. I got another visa, and so I just wait that my fiance can arrange something. Well, we have heard that you have been seen downtown with a lot of Jewish people.

Oh, yes, I said. Why shouldn't I meet them? I'm strange in this country, and they're very nice people. I know some. They traveled with me by train, and some are here and wait for their visa to continue their trip.

And who are they? What is their names? I says, sometimes I don't even know their names. And they asked me questions. Well, on what do you live? I says, well, I have the job with the German family and taking care of the little girl. And they asked thousands of questions. So I didn't mention anything that I'm not a full Aryan. I thought, why should I? It's nobody's business but mine.

I met a family, Mr. And Mrs. Berg. Mr. Berg was-- they spoke German, and she spoke German. Mrs. Berg was Jewish, and Mr. Berg was-- what you call it-- Aryan. He was-- what is it-- newspaper reporter for a German paper-- I think the Frankfurter Zeitung. Later on, he ended up in prison too.

And from that young man at the American Express, his name was Lude Frank. He took me to his family. He had a brother and wife in Yokohama, and knowing that I was all by my little self, he took me-- introduced me to his family. There was Hugo Frank and Alice Frank, and their little daughter, Barbara Frank.

During the conversation, they told me-- Lude and Hugo Frank were brothers. His-- their father was Jewish, and the mother was English. And the same was with Mrs. Berg. Mrs. Berg was Jewish, full Jewish, and Mr. Berg was an Aryan, the newspaperman.

And they had two daughters-- Irene Frank and Malise Frank. I became a good friend with Malise Frank and a good friend with Hugo Frank's wife. Her name is Alice Frank. She lives here in America now with her daughter. She's still alive, yeah.

So all this-- they didn't like that office in Tokyo that-- [SPEAKING GERMAN] office. I had to tell them with whom I'm friend and all that. And I thought, it's nobody's business than my own.

And some of the immigrants were lucky enough they could leave Japan, and they-- some even went on American ships over to the United States, and some maybe to Mexico or South America. I don't know.

Before I took that job at this German family with the little girl, I went to the German consulate. Somebody told me, you should go and see the German consul and ask him to help you with the continuation of my trip to Panama.

So I went over, and he said, you have a passport? Yes, I said. And he was sitting there with Mr. Seilheim Dr. Seilheim

was that man's name, the consul, general consul from Yokohama, from Germany.

And I said, I would like you-- he says, well, we can't do anything for you. We can't help you with money or something. I said, well, I didn't come here to ask you for that. I asked you if there is a chance that you, being the consul, could talk to the Japanese shipping line so that I can continue my trip.

And he says, where is your fiance? Why didn't you married to him in Berlin? I says, because he's in America. He's in America? He's a German? No, I says. He's American citizen.

Well, he says, then, in that case, we have nothing to do with you. And that was the answer, yeah. I forgot to mention that before. So that was it.

So I had that job, but I-- for some reason or other, I wasn't happy there. The little girl was all right, but the man, he was kind of strange. So I was lucky enough. I met, through a friend, somebody who said he is the consul for Mexico. And he says, what do you do here? I says, I came from Berlin, and I have trouble with my visa to continue my trip to Panama to get married.

And I told him that I'm partly Jewish. So he said, well, a young lady like you-- I wasn't so young anyhow, but I was not old yet either. Sometimes I try to figure out how old was I then. I must have been in my 30s when I was in Japan. Six years of my life I had to spend there.

So this young man-- he wasn't young either. He wasn't old either-- that Mexican consul, he says, I came here with my mother. My mother is an elderly lady. She's in her 60s, and I would like to ask you to be her, if you would like to do that kind of job, ladies companion.

And I said, yes. I never had this kind of job yet. She said-- he said, you could accompany her for walks, and she has to see the doctor every so often. I says, wonderful, yes. You would have to live with her. You get your own room and all that. I said, fine.

So I quit that job with the German man, and I went to the lady. Her name was Madame-- Senora Gutierrez Macias Rodriguez. There were three names-- Rodriguez Gutierrez Macias, I think, yeah-- very nice lady. She says, Margarita, [SPEAKING SPANISH]. That means, I don't understand, and you don't understand.

[LAUGHTER]

She spoke only Spanish, just a very few words in English. And my English was very poor then either, also, because all I learned in school then, I was mostly together with people who spoke German in Japan with a lot of immigrants and some who were in the same boat like I was. What you call-- half-- mixed.

So the years went by. I had no trouble whatsoever. And all of a sudden-- that was 1941, wasn't it? Yeah. So I wasn't with that German too long, that German family. I just remembered because I was with the Mexican lady in Yokohama, and we met her son. And he said the war broke out December the 6th, 1941, with America.

So we were all upset, very upset. What to do now? But I was asked to stay with them, with the Senora. So the Mexicans had to go to Tokyo, and the Senora said, no, Margarita comes with us. She's going to take Margarita with her to Mexico. Fine. That was just another dream.

We had to stay in Tokyo in the Mexican ligation, and we were not allowed to leave that property. There was a Japanese policeman stationed right in the ligation. The radios were taken away, so they had no contact with the outside world. Of course, the Mexican minister talked to-- I think the Swedish were in charge of those exchanges with American diplomats and Mexican diplomats and whatever there was.

And everybody was very much afraid what's going to happen. Even they were very Catholic, but they had a very little belief in those days, I noticed.

So we were interned, and the Swedish minister or one of the Swedish workers came and said, whom do you have here with you-- a German? What is she doing here? And Consul said, well, she is with my mother. She's a lady's companion. My mother's an elderly lady, and she needs somebody to be with her at all times. And that's how I was there with them.

There was the Mexican minister and his wife, and there was the Mexican-- what was he-- military attache with his wife and daughter, and the secretary from the consul, and the secretary from the minister, and Margarita. So they were going to take me over to Mexico with them, but it was impossible.

The Swedish minister said she had to leave right now before you go-- before there is any exchange shipping the Japanese to their country and the American and Mexican to their country. So I had to leave, and I didn't know where to go. People who lived in Yokohama, they had to leave the city when the war turned kind of critical, I guess. The foreigners had to get out of the cities like Tokyo or Yokohama.

So I found a place to stay in Yokohama, but I forgot the name. I think Leonard. I heard the lady is American, and her husband is Japanese. They had a chicken business, selling chicken or selling eggs. Anyhow, they gave me a place to stay, a room.

So that was 1941. Yeah. The Mexicans left me some food, so I have enough to eat for some time. And they left me a bicycle, so I can go around on the bicycle to give lessons in French or Japanese, took lessons in German, and some took English, beginner English. And the nuns gave me a job for tutoring, tutoring the piano and tutoring French in their convent.

So I could make my living barely and pay my rent and my food. I was on my own until 1944. I went to see a friend, a lady. She was a German. Her husband worked in-- I don't know what-- in some German place. And I was supposed to meet her downtown in Yokohama, in the shopping center, and I said, I'm leaving now, and I'll meet you downtown.

She said, yeah. So I come out of the house, and the car stopped, and two Japanese came towards me. And they said, Liebeskind. I said, so that's-- as if that's me. And they said something, and I said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. I said, I don't understand. And again, they said something. And I says, I don't know what you're talking about. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. And they took a sign out and showed me the police sign.

Well, I said, police. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], huh? And they pushed me right in that taxi or in their car and sit on the floor. I had to sit on the floor. And I thought, that's funny. What's going on? And they took me to some building. I didn't know what it was. And they took me out, put me in a room, and told me, wait. Wait. And I sat down on a big table. And I waited, waited I don't know how long. It was kind of getting dark. I still sat there.

They said if I want something to eat. No. And they pretended they don't speak-- they don't speak English at all. And I told them I don't know what-- I knew very little Japanese because I had no Japanese friends, you know. I can't talk to them, and they didn't want to speak English in those days.

So anyhow, I sat there, and then in the evening, somebody-- two officers came in in their uniform, and they spoke Japanese. And I didn't know what. And then they said I have to come with them, and they took me down to the jail.

It was kind of down like in a cellar. And I had to take my ring off and my watch, and they put me in a cell. And that's then where the horrible thing started, the torturing-- not the same day-- the next day, right away.

I was locked up in that cell. They had no steel bar. It was all wood, and they had a little hole there where they would put the food in. So then I was interrogated every day and every day, one day after another. I have it written down. Maybe it's easier to read it to you, the torturing.

Whatever you want. You feel comfortable reading it?

Yeah.

Thank you.

Be right back.

Shall I continue?

Go ahead.

Somebody typed that for me to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Tokyo. "Subject, claim against the Japanese government." And different names are there mentioned. I was thrown in the Kenpeitai Prison, which was the headquarters, Japanese police headquarters, Kenpeitai called. And I got the names from different-- who mistreated me.

Yamani was a public prosecutor. Yesushi Saiguza was the ex warrant officer. Emito, ex sergeant, Kenpeitai headquarters. Minoru Mitsuhashi, ex warrant officer from Kenpeitai. Kikuji Hinuma was the so-called interpreter.

And according to one of those fellows, Saiguza, he interpreted through Hinuma, through that interpreter, that I was arrested by the Kenpeitai on orders from the Gestapo, which was a Lieutenant Hammer and the Bloodhound from Warsaw was called Mr. Meisinger.

The above named persons are in connection with maltreatment during the time of the arrest from August 30, 1944, to December 12, 1944, at the Kenpeitai headquarters in Yokohama. Then, she was transferred to Gumyoji prison on the 12th of December, 1944, and she came out of prison September 3, 1945.

As stated here after, damage of health, heart and lung troubles-- see Captain Furbach's statement-- warm, displaced and pain on account of cannibalistic torture, much loss of blood, and stop of menstruation for one year. Operation necessary. See statement of chief medical service.

Tooth troubles, intestine troubles, dysentery, dirty jail conditions caused by bug bites after infection, stomach troubles, painful while eating her meals, eyes infected, broken thumb, other finger bone smashed, visible and pain still now.

In order to make me confess and sign a false statement in prison, I was maltreated during the detention at the Japanese military police headquarters and at Gumyoji Prison, Yokohama. I was hit over the head with a Japanese bamboo sword by Saiguzo Mito, Mitsuhashi, and also Hinuma. I was beaten terribly with hands and fists by Mitsuhashi.

I was kicked with riding boots by Mitsuhashi, Saiguzo, and Mito. I was beaten with leather belts by Saiguzo and Saito. I was beaten with bamboo sword by four men on my nude body, including Saiguzo Mumito in presence of Hinuma. Hinuma was the interpreter.

I was beaten with a table's leg on the body, on the head, and in my face. Morati and Mito were present. I was beaten with thick ropes, mostly when naked, all naked. They ripped everything off my body. Water pass was Mito and Saiguzo handcuffed me and pushed me into dirty stinking water, head kept under water until I fainted, then beaten until I came to.

Body, hands, and feet were firmly tied together, and water was poured into my mouth and nostrils. Mito was sitting on my breasts and on my swollen belly. Tied whole body, hands, and feet together and burned the hair between my legs with a candle, a lit candle, made me kneel for several hours on two clips and on the top of the cover of a wooden barrel, put burning matches on my arms and knees, which were tied. Also put out burning cigarettes on my body until I fainted.

Marks of these tortures are still visible and will not disappear. A reference is made to attached reports by the regimental surgeon, American surgeon, Captain Furbach. He was the chief of the medical office, Captain Gaipis, and St. Luke's Hospital in Tokyo.

Saiguzo pulled me by my hair through the interrogation room. He tortured with the end of a bamboo stick up and down

my spine. He tied my hands on the back into a push window, up and down, which was pushed up and down. I don't know. Saiguzo and Mitsuhashi beat fingers, which left marks, the thumb hit so hard-- that's this finger-- that the bone sprang apart of it. The bone sprang into two.

Marks will not disappear. Still notice pain now occasionally. They made me kneel on a barrel top with pointed planks, and Mito was sitting and riding on my back so that I could not walk for several weeks, owing to swollen feet and legs. During all those inhuman repeated beatings and torturing, especially beatings over my head, I cannot remember the facts as well as before. I cannot recognize people as quickly as I used to.

From the 3rd of September, '45, until February, '46, I had to recover from the tortures. And little by little, I could walk again. It was not before February, '46, that I could start working again. And even then, I was under treatment by the 161 Station Hospital at Fujisawa.

My recovery was aided greatly by the kind assistance of CIC officers and United States medical examiners. When I was confined in Gumyoji Prison in a small solitary cell-- I think it was 10 by 3 or something-- by myself again, I had to kneel on the tatami, which is a Japanese mat, from 7:00 AM in the morning until 7:00 PM, with my legs bent in the Japanese style, which I, being a foreigner, called torture.

I also experienced several heart attacks, suffered from lung troubles and serious dysentery. During to the severe tortures and from fear of further maltreatment, I attempted to commit suicide, first in October, '44, and again during the following weeks. I took a pocket knife, which the Kenpeitai officer left on the table in the interrogation room, and I tried to cut my wrists on the main vein. I didn't realize it wasn't sharp enough.

The malnutrition was I lost at least 50 pounds of weight. Lunch consisted of a bowl of barley mixed with soya beans. For breakfast and supper, I was given, in addition, some watery soup with vegetable leftovers in it. Through Mr. Pestalozzi, a Swiss delegate of the International Red Cross, and Miss Rue Stern, a friend of mine, she paid totally 400 yen for special food to be sent to me.

And the donation would have lasted for at least five months, but I received special meals only for about 45 days. And I was always so hungry that I thought I would eventually die, all the more as I suffered very badly from dysentery for several weeks.

Condition of the jail-- Kenpeitai, almost for the duration I was in solitary confinement, the cell was 10 by 5 feet. The toilet-- Japanese style-- just on the ground, like a big basin. It was in the same cell, and it was overflowing with stool and stinking with worms all over the place. Furthermore were lice, bedbugs, fleas everywhere. There was very poor light in the small cell, which affected my eyesight.

Then, the other prison, Gumyoji Prison-- there was a big prison compound-- I was also in prison there in solitary confinement. It was a two-mat cell-- you know, Japanese floor-- 6 by 6 feet. This place was not as dirty as the Kenpeitai room, but there was no heating in wintertime.

And summertime, eventually, was very poor ventilation. Food was absolutely insufficient. I was taken for a walk about twice a week for five minutes. I had a bath once a month in a Japanese bathtub, after 15 Japanese women prisoners who had had their baths in the same water.

So that's it. And after my release from prison, I found almost all of my personal belongings missing from my home, total amounting-- all this ascended to the German restitution place. Some things I found from that lady that used to live with me in the house, but a lot of things were just gone.

But how I survived, I don't know. It was a miracle. I prayed a lot. But it's hard to describe what I had to go through. I think my belief in God helped me a lot.

But there were also times when I asked myself, why doesn't God help me? Why doesn't the Lord help me in a way? What have I done to be here? There was no answer. Even now, after so many years, I can't forget. But I tried.

The only thing was I was tortured to sign a confession that I have done spy work. And I said, I have not done any spy work. How can I sign? They wrote down, in their Japanese writing all the time, while one or the other tortured me.

And after-- I think it was three months in that military Kenpeitai cell-- that interpreter said, you'd better sign. I said, how can I sign? I haven't done any spy work. What can I sign-- that I'm a spy? You'd better sign, he said. He talked me into signing-- too much torturing. You will be sent to another prison. And then I will be tortured again. Just sign. Sign the paper. A book this thick-- I don't know what they wrote in Japanese.

So I finally said, all right, I'll sign. I signed because he said, you will be sent out to another place, to a better place, he said. So then I was sent to another place. He put a hat on my face and just seems to be their style prison or should be seen or what-- I don't know-- and transferred me to another prison, big prison compound, yeah.

But like it says here, I had to sit the Japanese way of sitting. You know what that is? The woman sit that way. I can't do it anymore. You sit like this. Ooh, that's painful. From morning 'til night, and then you move on this side or you move on that side, and somebody looks through the little window or what.

And they say, [SPEAKING JAPANESE]. That means, don't do that. Sit the way you're told to, which I think is also torturing. But they didn't hit me over the head, or they didn't beat me with bamboo sticks or cigarettes and all that.

So anyhow-- and then I finally came out. I couldn't see anyone. I heard the American planes. I heard planes, and I could figure out they must be Americans. But they were way up-- I had a window in my cell. I had to sit this way, like I look at you.

And behind me was a window with bars, you know. And I was not supposed to get up. There was a toilet seat in that little cell, which was a relief. At least I could get up and sit there for a minute or so.

And I heard the planes, and I started praying and praying. I thought, I hope nothing happens to them. And then once there was a big commotion in the hall. I don't know what was going on. They spoke Japanese. I asked them in that other prison compound-- I says, to guard, woman guard, could you give me some work to do, just doing something, not just to sit there? No, [SPEAKING JAPANESE]. So I says, I would clean the hole or clean something-- the toilet. I was refused to do anything, just had to sit.

And then the delegate from the Red Cross, he came to see me one day. But I was scared to say anything because I still remember that beating, that torturing. And the interpreter said to me, there's one from the International Red Cross, Geneva is coming to visit. You're not allowed to say any word. If he asks you how you are, you say, I'm all right. Don't speak what happened.

So I was afraid to mention anything from the torturing. And-- but I asked him if he could send me some food. I think I saw him just twice or three times during the whole-- not in the military prison but in the other compound there. And then when I saw him the third time, I told him, I says, could you do something for me? They gave me a trial, and I was sentenced to six years in prison.

So he said, yeah, he will see what he can do. Anyhow, I sat there until the 3rd of September, when a friend came, a Mr. Gugelmeyer, from a friend of mine's, the husband. I was a friend with his wife. And he came to that Gumyoji Prison. He told me later, he was looking for another friend of his, a Mr. Meyer. His name was Hans Meyer, who was also in prison.

And they said, oh, he is released since May. He's someplace. So then he remembered Fraulein Liebeskind. And the guard said, yeah, she's-- you can't see her. He says, yes, I have to see her, and if you don't let me see her, then I have to call the General MacArthur. He's going to send up some of his soldiers.

So the guy must have gotten scared, and he said, all right. So he got me out of my cell and took me to some visitor room, I guess it was. And there was Mr. Gugelmeyer. He says, what are you doing here, listen? Hitler is dead, and the whole gang is gone. Nobody knows where they are. What do you do here? I says, can you take me out? And the guard

said, no, no, no, no. She has to stay here.

It seems-- I heard later on the war was over in May or June with the Nazis and the Japanese, wasn't it? And they let me sit there all by my little self because I had no relatives there, nobody who could come and claim me. And that was just by chance that he was looking for a friend of his that he remembered that I was also detained.

So he says, oh, I brought some bread. Would you like-- And the guard said, no, no, no, no. He says, well, she might be hungry. I says, I'm very hungry, yeah. And I remember the same evening, some prison guard opened that little door where they shoved the food in every evening.

He threw a bundle of something. So I unwrapped it, and it was some paper, and there was some bread with some whatever was on it, some grease or fat or margarine or-- and he says, I get you out. Tomorrow is Sunday. I will see what I can do. I'll get you out of here.

And to me, I thought, now something is wrong in my head. And I started-- what do you call that-- pinch me to see if I'm alive. I couldn't realize that that was-- that something like that happened, you know. It was like unbelievable for me.

So there came Sunday morning. Sunday evening, nobody came. I thought that maybe it was just a dream, or I'm out of my mind by now. And then came another day, the knock on the cell. Liebeskind out. Put the hat on, took me out there, and there was Mr. Gugelmeyer, that man, and a Mr. Gonzio, and another one. I forgot the name.

And he said, I looked into that that they have to release you. Yesterday was Sunday. I couldn't get to that day. I talked to this and this and this person, so you're out free.

They were holding me one under this arm, one under this arm because my legs were getting real kind of weak from sitting, sitting, sitting. That was the biggest day of my life. Yeah.

Did I tell you all? I think I did.

What were you arrested for? Why did the Gestapo order the Japanese to arrest you?

Being a spy. That's what they said.

That's what the Gestapo thought.

The Gestapo-- I have a very interesting article from Mr. Foerster. Mr. Foerster-- see, I had friends-- I made a lot of friends in that rotten place there in Japan, but a lot of friends too. I met Rue Stern. We became very good friends. She and her brother came from Vienna-- no, from Russia, really. I think I met them at the Jewish committee.

Rue Stern-- she was a friend with Mr. Meiburn. And she invited me over to their place. Their father worked as an engineer for Mr. Foerster. And I didn't inquire who is Mr. Foerster, or what do you do, or what kind of business do they have. I wasn't interested in that. I was just interested in my friends getting together and talking about the days they passed over their country and days I passed in Germany.

So that Mr. Foerster, I heard, was thrown in jail. And I says, Mr. Foerster? But he was the boss from Rue Stern father. And I says to Mr. Stern, I says, what happened to Mr. Foerster? You know what goes around. Yokohama is not a big town. It's a town but not as big-- they know these people, and they know those people.

They said he's a spy. I says, Mr. Foerster? So Mr. Stern had lost his job. Because I heard from Mr. Stern, Mr. Foerster-- he employed all kinds of people, not only Jewish people, like immigrants. He also employed Swiss, or he employed Portuguese.

And he didn't mind who is who, as long as they could do their work, I guess, in his business. But the Germans didn't like him because they told me he was from one of the states, either of the Baltic States, either Estonia or Lithuania or

someplace.

I never met him, but I knew he has a business, and Mr. Stern worked there for years. And there was a time when Japan sent all the people with the J in the passport out of Japan to Shanghai.

So I knew quite a few people. I befriended them in Yokohama, and they said, oh, I wish you would come with us. So I even inquired if I could go to Shanghai, and they said, no, I had to stay in Yokohama. why? I don't know. I guess I was watched by Gestapo or Japanese. I don't know. I never inquired how come.

But I would have gone to Shanghai with them. And then I never heard from them. I wonder where they are. But I still am in a letter-exchanging with Rue Stern. She lives in Chicago. She's married there. And then her brother lives in Israel. He came visiting me about five years ago with his wife, yeah. He's happy in Israel, he told me. I should come over to some time visit him.

In fact, I wanted to go this year with Erna Spero, and she passed on. She made those trips to Israel every year, I heard. So I thought, well, this time, I go with her. And unfortunately, she passed on. She was very sick. You know Erna Spero? She was our director in the Montefiore Senior Center. Yeah, a very nice lady, the wife of Rabbi Spero. Yeah.

What happened after you were released from the prison?

Pardon?

What happened to you after your release from prison? You were hospitalized, and then what happened?

Oh, they were going to send me on the American boat, hospital boat. I forgot the name of it. And the CIC took me there, and they said, this is a case. You have to take care of that lady. And she went through terrible times, and they said, well, what kind of papers does she have? She has her passport, the German passport.

They said, but then she can't be here on our ship. Yeah, but this is a special case, they said, because she went through so much on account of being partly Jewish. Well, the captain said, but we have so many of our American prisoners, who have been mistreated. The boat is full. You should take her down to Tokyo to the St Luke's Hospital.

And there was the same again. I had that German passport without a J, which did not help me at all. So they said, no, we can't do anything I went to the American Red Cross and asked if they could give me any medicine to get me back on my feet.

I was kind of weak too, and I lost so much weight. And the same thing-- what kind of papers do you have? I says, I have my passport. Show us the passport first. So I showed them my passport, and they said, yes, no. You don't come in our rubric that we can hand out medicine to you.

I never forgave them that. You know who brought me medicine? You wouldn't believe it. The Catholics. They had a Catholic school there, which was called Saint Joseph College kind of. And they heard about my case, and they said, I'll bring you some medicine. We'll get that. They get it. But I didn't get it by myself. Maybe I didn't go to the right person. Who knows?

Then I had two girlfriends. They were French. They were partly French and partly Japanese. The mother was Japanese, and the father was Dutch. And I always spoke French with them-- nice girls, the Motter girls, Edith Motter, and Harriet Motter. They're both not around anymore.

And they said, well, wait another month, and when you feel a little better, a little stronger, keep on taking your medicine. We'll get you a job with the American Red Cross. I says, right, yeah. Gladly. I'll gladly do that. I had to live from something. I had to make my living, you know.

So they got me a job in the field director's office. No, first, I was in a doughnut factory. The American Red Cross would

ship those big machines over that make the donuts, and they would make donuts by the thousands of dozens for the GIs and the fliers and what have you. And they said, if I can type. Yeah, I says, I do a little typing, not fluently, but I type. Then you could work in the doughnut factory's office. Fine, I said. Everything smelled donuts. I still can smell it now.

So I worked in the office there. And then in the meantime, they had American Red Cross girls coming from the United States to do the kind of work in the office. So I was transferred to the field director's office, which I liked too. It was very interesting. And later on, they had also two more girls coming from the United States. I worked for the club director, American Red Cross club director in the American Red Cross Club.

I got paid in yen. It wasn't much, but any little bit helped. And I rented a room together with my girlfriend, Alice Frank, in a Japanese home. We got a room together. And the rats came in the room. She let me have her bed from her sisters and let me sleep in a bed, a regular bed, you know. And she slept on the floor. Poor Alice. I'll never forget her that.

And she had a daughter. The little girl was four years old, I think. Yeah. And they had killed, tortured her husband to death at Kenpeitai. His name was Hugo Frank. I mentioned him before-- good friends of mine-- him, his wife. So she had to take her little girl to an orphanage home. There was no money because she had to go to work, Alice.

So the Red Cross took her in as taking care of the coffee machines in the Red Cross Club, yeah. And that was it, yeah. Oh, and then from Barg, Mr. Barg, the man with the Jewish wife, his-- they threw him in jail before they put Hugo Frank in. And somebody told me, did you know-- you know Mr. Berg? Yeah. I says, what about? He's in jail. I says, why? What did he do? He's a spy.

No, I said, he's not a spy. That's what they say. And then soon, I asked somebody, I says, where did Alice Frank go with her husband and the little girl? Oh, they moved to the side of Karuizawa, which was a kind of a resort place where the wealthy or foreigners spent the summer months because in Yokohama, it gets very hot. It's a subtropical climate there.

And I was told, he is in jail too because he is a spy. So Mr. Berg they said was a spy. Hugo Frank they said was a spy. And I says-- and they were all friends of mine. But I said, gee, why would they throw him in jail? Spy-- I don't think. I don't think they are spy, or they could be spies.

Well, people said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Who knows? And I think they were put in jail already in '43, if I'm not mistaken. And I was thrown in there when the war turned really-- I heard later on the war turned bad in 1944. So it seems that there was a list. Somebody discovered that Mr. Foerster. He was let out again after he was in as being a spy.

And he had a Japanese wife, and she could go here and there and there and there and talk to the people that her husband works, has his business, and employed these and these people. And the Germans didn't like him for that reason. In other words, he was not a Nazi, and they disliked him. I never went to the German house. They had a German kind of a meeting place or club place where they met. I never went there. So I wasn't liked by them either.

And all my friends, like that Mr. Meyer too-- he was also thrown in jail, who was a friend from my girlfriend's husband. And then Mr. Barg, that newspaperman, he came out all right, I heard later on. But then they brought him over to the United States. His stepdaughter was here and her husband. They brought the parents in, and later, he was so bad off. You know where he died? In Napa.

In Napa. He couldn't survive, I guess. He was longer in jail than I was. Yeah. And Hugo Frank too-- they had French people in there, I guess some who were for Vichy or against Vichy. I don't know what the deal was with the French.

He was in jail. I saw him when they had an air raid, and they opened the cell door, and we had to stand in the hallway. I saw Hugo Frank with a beard and very thin face. And I saw that Frenchman. I forgot the name-- Boise, I think Mr. Boise. I didn't see Mr. Barg. And then they put us back in the cell when the air raid was over.

So yeah, they killed that Mr. Frank. Unbelievable. And none of them was a spy. None of them.