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INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET KAPLAN

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Interviewer: Evelyn Fielden

Transcriber: Grace C. Johnson

Q. TODAY IS JULY 18TH, 1990. I AM EVELYN FIELDEN, INTERVIEWING MARGARET KAPLAN FOR THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HOLOCAUST CENTER IN SAN FRANCISCO. WE ARE AT TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL-JUDEA. GOOD AFTERNOON, MARGARET.

A. Good afternoon.

Q. WOULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD AND WHERE AND WHEN YOU WERE BORN?

A. I was born on June 30th, 1926, in Stuttgart. I have two brothers and a twin sister, and we were there -- we lived in Germany until 1936. Then we thought it was time to leave, and my parents shipped us off to an aunt in Switzerland, and they sought permission to settle in Belgium, in Brussels. So the lift and everything went to Brussels, and then they found out they had no permission to settle. So they joined us in

Switzerland. And we ended up moving to Meran, which is in the Tyrol in Northern Italy. And we were there for about three years until Hitler and Mussolini made their pact and we couldn't go to school anymore. Then we went back to Switzerland. And then we got our visa in Naples, and then we came to the States in May of 1939.

Q. WOULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD, YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER?

A. Oh, it was lovely. Let's see, my sister and I, we are the youngest of the four. My father was first a lawyer. Then when he married my mother, he became a tax consultant. My grandfather had a series of department stores in Germany.

It was very happy childhood, a big house. We lived on the main floor, and my mother's brother and his family lived on the upper floor. So there were seven of us playing together all the time. My mother's brother and family moved to England in 1933. They were the first ones to leave. And then the aunt that we used to go to in Switzerland, she left Germany about '35.

Q. WHAT WAS HER NAME?

A. Wolf. And her husband's family had a big factory. It was cotton waste, leather and silk. They

had a silk factory in Switzerland. That's why we could go there. And they ended up moving to Argentina.

There was another brother of my mother's. He ended up first in Luxembourg, then went to Lichtenstein, then to England. He tried to come over to the States, and then came Pearl Harbor. So he ended up five years in Panama on a coffee plantation. They came here in '45, '46, something like that, and they stayed here.

And my dad had one brother who went to England. And he came here in '41, he and his wife. And they also lived in San Francisco until their death. So we were a pretty complete family.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTER, YOUR TWIN SISTER?

A. Nothing.

Q. I MEAN, WHAT--

A. Nothing. My sister still lives here, yes. There were the six of us that came, my mother, my father, my two brothers, and my sister. And my sister and I, we started in junior high school here. The younger one of the two brothers, he started city college. And the older one went to work. He worked first in Modesto, and then he worked in a hotel here as

a desk clerk.

Q. CAN YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR EARLIER LIFE IN GERMANY?

A. The one thing I remember is that after a while, we weren't invited to birthday parties anymore. That was quite a blow. And one day, my sister and I beat up this one little boy. He was a real little guy. Because he was calling us names. And then our folks told us that we better not do that again.

Q. WHAT DID HE CALL YOU?

A. Oh, probably dirty Jew. What else could they call you? I mean, it was in the second grade. Their vocabulary wasn't that extensive. But the funny thing is before we went -- no, I was in the first grade already. I used to have long blond braids, you know, hair parted in the middle and all that. My sister has dark hair. And some photographer came up to the nurse, I guess you would call her, and wanted to have my picture taken as the typical Aryan girl. You know, I had those bags you wear for the books on my back and a little basket in my hand for our handiwork, you know, the sewing and what have you. And so the nurse said well, you couldn't do that because she is Jewish. And

the fellow said well, who's to know.

And that was about all I remember, because we were eight when we left so there wasn't really that much that happened to us. My brothers were out of high school already. In fact, my older brother, he is 11 years older than I am. He was already in Italy working.

Q. WHEN DID HE LEAVE GERMANY?

A. Well, he was born in 1915, so he must have left about '35, '36. But he went to Italy and we went to Switzerland. And the other brother is seven years older, and he finished high school in Italy.

Q. IN ITALY?

A. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. It wasn't so bad, because we went to a private school in Germany, you know.

Q. WAS IT A JEWISH PRIVATE SCHOOL?

A. No. No. No. But after Hitler, we had to go to day school in the afternoon; and we weren't too crazy about that. We figured school in the morning was enough, but we had to go to Hebrew school then, not that we learned too much.

Q. AND YOUR PARENTS, WERE THEY OBSERVANT JEWS?

A. No. No. No, not at all. We had a Christmas tree and everything. And then in Italy, no more

Christmas tree, and we did go to temple in -- oh, it was orthodox because we had to sit up in the balcony. We went for the holidays. And then, of course, in school we always had religious instructions. They used to bring the teacher in. But I didn't learn Hebrew until my daughter learned Hebrew. And my brothers went to synagogue just for the holidays, and so did my parents, you know, because they all worked. My mother and my father worked in my grandfather's store, and that was open on Saturday.

Now, my grandmother became extremely observant after her husband passed away. She started keeping kosher, and she wouldn't turn the light on on Saturday. And it was difficult, because she was close to 80, and we were afraid she would hurt herself going up the stairs in the dark.

Q. THAT WAS STILL IN GERMANY?

A. No, that was -- oh, that's right. No. My grandfather and my grandmother, they finally got out of Germany in '41 with just, you know, 10 mark.

Q. WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THE DETAILS? DO YOU REMEMBER THE DETAILS?

A. I don't know too much. I know they didn't

want to leave, because he insisted if I deal correctly with you, you deal correctly with me. And if anybody tried to get money out of Germany, you had to bring it back. He wouldn't let you do it. He was a multimillionaire, and he left with 10 mark. And they went to Switzerland to that same aunt, because that was their daughter. And he died in Switzerland about at age 82 or 83.

And my grandmother, oh, she must have been in her middle 70s. She first was in Switzerland. And then when her husband died, she moved on to Argentina to stay with the other daughter. But I mean, she left with nothing. But they were never in a concentration camp. They had everything confiscated, but they never were in a camp. The only one that was in a concentration camp was my father's brother.

Q. WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

A. Well, we were all Kaumheimer. And he was a pediatrician in Munich. And after he was in Dachau, my aunt took his Iron Cross, First class and wrote a letter to the SS saying that he had earned that during World War I. Oh, he was, I think, a Lieutenant Colonel in the medical corps. And that she thought it was only right

and proper that they would release him, and they did. He had about six weeks to get out of Germany. Now, that's the letter I gave to Joel. I mean, she had nerve.

But other than that, nobody that's very, very close to us that I know of had any problems, because we all left. My mother didn't want to leave, but my dad convinced her. Well, it's not easy to leave.

So then in Italy, it wasn't too bad because she still had somebody to help with the house. But then when we came to the States, she had the six of us and then my aunt and uncle to take care of all by herself. And she wasn't used to it but she managed.

My dad, he went to work and he started out as a messenger boy for I think it was McKay Wireless, and then he ended up carrying documents around for Dean Witter, which was quite a come down. When he was old enough, he retired. They used to go to school to learn English, although my dad and mother knew some. And then they took out their citizenship papers, and then we changed the name from Kaumheimer to Kay because it was just too awkward.

Anything else you would like to know?

Q. DID YOU GET TO SAN FRANCISCO RIGHT AWAY?

A. Oh, well, my folks took -- we took the train. We landed in New York, of course. We went from Switzerland to Naples to get the visa, and then we went back to Switzerland. And then we took the train to Rotterdam, and we took a Holland-America liner there, and we landed in New York. My dad had some fraternity brothers there, and we spent a few days there because we got to see the World's Fair. That was in '39.

And they took tickets to San Francisco. And it was a matter of -- well, we went New York, Chicago. He knew some more people there, and we stayed there for a few days. And then we went to Los Angeles, and they didn't like that too much. It was too big. And we did know somebody that had worked for the Jewish community in Stuttgart here in San Francisco. So that's why we ended up here. And they got us -- she got us an apartment on Sutter Street. And then we ended up with a flat on Arguello Boulevard and haven't moved out of the district since. It's now, what, 51 years. And we all got -- my sister and I got our whole schooling here in town. And we went to junior high and then Lowell and then city college and then University of California.

Q. WHAT CAN YOU REMEMBER? YOU WERE ABOUT, WHAT, 13?

A. When we came here, but we were only ten when we left. See, we left in '36 Germany.

Q. YES.

A. And then we spent, oh, altogether, about eight months in Switzerland and the rest in Italy. And Italy, I mean, there was no problem at all. So you know, really, we didn't suffer much. I mean, my folks, I'm sure, suffered financially and all that. But physically, we didn't.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR LIFE IN GERMANY AT THE TIME YOU MOVED IN MORE DETAIL WITH YOUR PARENTS AND HOW YOUR PARENTS REACTED?

A. You know, they didn't talk much about it. If we were around, they would talk in French, and we didn't know what they were talking about. My mother would say plus tard, and that meant we weren't going to understand the rest of it.

No. They kept most of that from us, because we didn't know what was going on in the business. I mean, who cares when you're eight years old. So we were just worried that we couldn't go to birthday parties any

more. And I remember we had to stop our swimming lessons because they wouldn't let us in the pool anymore.

Q. DID YOU WONDER ABOUT THAT AS A CHILD?

A. Well, we were told that's because we're Jewish, and that was the end of it. You know, we didn't question as much as children do now. You were told, and that was it. And you know, you tried not to make waves, and that was -- but see, we lived a little bit on the outskirts of Stuttgart, so things were easier going. You know, it was strictly residential. And we didn't get to go downtown too much. No, I can't remember too much about it. I mean, not too much happened to us. And then I always had my sister, so we really didn't need too many friends.

Q. YOU WERE CLOSE TO YOUR SISTER?

A. Well, she is a twin, so you can get very independent that way, you know. In a way, it's good and in a way -- but then the lady that took care of us, she was fabulous. She got into a lot of trouble for opening her mouth too much. And we went to Germany -- well, in '67, we went to Europe once. And we didn't -- I didn't want to go to Germany, but I said it wouldn't be fair

not to visit her. So we went one afternoon and left again the next morning. And we visited her and her husband and her son. Now, the son spoke English, so he took my husband and the children around and I sat and talked with them. And I've never been in Germany since.

My family is pretty uptight about buying German, you know, the other generation, about buying German products. And my uncle, he loves those, you know, the gingerbread, the Lebkuchen. He wouldn't even buy those. And he wouldn't buy those stuffed animals for the kids if they were German. Of course, he was there much longer and he was that much older. I mean, when you're young, things don't concern you that much. So that's why I really didn't consider myself that much a Holocaust survivor because, compared to some of the other people, we had it very easy.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE IN THE STATES, DID YOUR FATHER EVER TALK ABOUT IT?

A. Well, he would talk about -- see, we missed Kristallnacht altogether. He would just talk about, you know, you had to give up your jewelry and this and that, and you had to pay high taxes before you could get out, and you had to give up -- you know, they sold your

business for practically nothing. It was my grandfather's business. You know, they were just kind of like partners. So it didn't affect us that much. And then later on, they got quite a bit back with the reparations. Of course, by then, my grandparents were dead, so it went straight to my grandparents' four children.

But my mother and dad never went to Germany, uh-uh. They went to England to visit the brother, and that's it. They didn't go to Italy or Germany after the war. My mother went to Argentina once, but that was just to visit.

So I wouldn't call it carrying a grudge, but there was really no reason why we should go. Things would have changed, you know, and would be so different anyway. And there was really nobody left for us to visit, except that one couple. Not very exciting.

Q. DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL? DID YOU LIKE GOING TO SCHOOL IN ITALY?

A. Well, it was strange. I liked going to school in Germany. In fact, we still have our autograph book, and you would be surprised what one of the teachers wrote in it. I mean, he compared the German government

with, you know, with Little Red Riding Hood and The Big Bad Wolf and, you know, he or more less intimated. So we were quite surprised that he had the nerve to put that down in black and white.

And in Italy, we couldn't go to public school, but that was because we were foreigners. We weren't Italian. So we ended up in a Catholic school. Well, that was the only private school there was. Meran is a very small town, and it was even smaller then. And they would send -- I think his name was Dr. Jaffee. He had to come once a week and give us religious instructions. I mean, no Hebrew. We didn't have that. We have him in the autograph book, too. So that was about it. We were very happy. We didn't have to go to mass. We didn't have to go to catechism. We had a lot more free time. We did enjoy it, and most of the people spoke German, even the kids in school because, I mean, the Tyrol was 100 percent Germany as far as the admiration for Hitler was concerned. But in school, you had to talk it. You had to speak Italian.

Q. DID YOU LEARN ITALIAN?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact, it was a big blow to us. My sister had scarlet fever, so I missed six

weeks of school. When I came back, we had to take entrance examinations for like middle school, and I passed them. And then came that edict that you couldn't go to school any more. And I was crushed, because I had really worked hard, you know, to get decent grades. And that's when my folks decided that it was time to leave Europe. But I mean, in Italy we really had no trouble at all.

Then we had to wait for -- we were lucky that we could get your visa through Naples. It was a much shorter wait. So we all took the train to Naples, the six of us. And then we went back and waited until, you know, our number was called, and then we went on to Holland. And the lifts went on ahead, so when we came here, we had the furniture. We didn't have all of it because the Italian government took most of it. My folks collected porcelain, you know, Meissen and Nymphenburg and what have you. And what they do is once you have it in the country, it was considered like a national treasure. So when you wanted to leave with it, you had to give a price on each piece. And if you priced it low, they bought it from you. If you priced it high, they taxed you. So my folks lost most of the

miniatures that way. We still have quite a few of the dishes and things, and the plates; but the figurines are all gone. They were sent to the museum in Turin, and then it was bombed and there is nothing left.

But I mean, compared to what other people lost, it wasn't that terrible. I still have the catalog. My mother made a list with photographs and descriptions. So that, we still have. I think it was much, much harder for my parents than for us. I mean, as long as the whole family was together, it didn't matter that much.

Q. HOW OLD WAS YOUR MOTHER WHEN SHE DIED?

A. My mother was 71. My dad was 77. It was hard for him, because he died in '58, so he was at the end of his 50s when he came here. And you know, he couldn't get a job as a tax consultant. So that's why he started as a messenger. I mean, it was a real comedown for him, but he was marvelous about it.

We try to speak English at home. That's why my German is so bad now. I mean, I speak German, but I put a lot of English endings and stuff like that on. And we made it a point to speak English so, you know, we would learn it more quickly. And we started in the

seventh grade. And by the eighth grade, we had skipped half a year. So by then, in half a year, we knew English. We came in May. And June, they put us six weeks in a camp to learn English. And after that, we started school and that was it. I mean, we had no trouble with it.

That's why my sister and I are dead set against English as a second language. We feel people, when they are here, they should learn it. It's much quicker when you are a child. And my brother -- both my brothers had been in England, so they knew English much more than we did. But it seemed like such a nuisance. First we had to learn French, then we had to learn Italian, and then we had to learn English. And the French, we never used. And the Italian, we did use.

Q. YOU WERE IN THE FRENCH PART OF SWITZERLAND?

A. No. We had to study French for Belgium.

Q. FOR BELGIUM?

A. But then we never did make it there, which was -- we were lucky in a way. I mean, my brother's wife, she went from Hamburg to Holland, and she was underground for three years. See, it could have happened to us, too, if we had been in Belgium. So we

escaped all that.

Q. WHERE DID SHE HIDE?

A. She hid with a family. She was like a maid. And it really left a scar on her. It was very difficult for her. I think she was underground from ages 12 to 15. And she lost her brother and her father -- she lost both parents, that's it. She lost both parents and her brother there, that's right. And she had relatives here. So she came to San Francisco, and that's how my brother met her. But I mean, she went through a lot more than we did. And my other brother, he went from Italy to -- you know, he came with us. And he died when he was 32, so he was pretty young.

Q. HOW COME HE DIED SO YOUNG?

A. He had rheumatic fever. And as you know, there was no penicillin, so it affected his heart. That was pretty rough on my folks.

But then when my aunt and uncle came, we had a big room upstairs in the flat, so they stayed there until they got their own apartment. Then they both worked. My uncle was an orderly, which wasn't that easy considering he had been a physician. And my aunt worked in, oh, like a notions place. And then my uncle, he

kept private patients as an orderly, you know, or practical nurse. And my aunt worked at that notions place for quite a while. And then they both retired. My aunt is still alive. She is 89 now. In fact, she came over yesterday. She kind of dwells in the past quite a bit, but she does all right.

And the other aunt and uncle that came to San Francisco, they both died within the last eight years, eight or nine years.

Q. THE AUNT WHO IS STILL ALIVE, WAS SHE BORN IN STUTTGART?

A. No. She was born in Berlin, and she doesn't let you forget it. She was in Berlin. My dad was born in Munich. My mother was born in Ulm. And two brothers were born in Munich and then my sister and I in Stuttgart, because a few years after the two boys came, my dad moved to help, you know, to work for my grandfather.

Q. WHEN DID YOU MARRY?

A. I married in 1950. In fact, we are going to have our 40th anniversary next month.

Q. CONGRATULATIONS.

A. I'll take it in advance.

Q. IS YOUR HUSBAND ALSO FROM GERMANY?

A. No. My husband was born in St. Louis. And it's a funny thing, everybody thinks I am a war bride. I met him at Chevra Thillim at a youth group. Oh, he had been here since 1936. So I met him there. We met in '48 and got married in '50. It's working out very well.

Q. HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE?

A. We have three; a boy and two girls. Girls -- one man and two women. I mean, they're 38, 36 and 32. They don't know too much. I mean, there is not that much to tell. They look at photographs. I have mainly photographs of my dad and my uncle from World War I. We didn't take too many later on, you know. So they wonder what the uniforms were about and all of that.

They are all three very Jewish oriented. And in fact, the one who is in New York, she a demon for Jewish daycare, you know, Jewish day school, Temple day school, Young Men's Hebrew Association school. And the little one just told me, she said she was in day camp and they have a Gauner and a good man there. So we asked what does the Gauner do. Well, he steals my documents. So I mean, she is very gung-ho. And she

converted. And she -- oh, yes. She learned Hebrew. She went to the Mikveh and everything. She asked me if she should go to the Mikveh. I said I didn't go; I mean, how can I tell you to go. And she says well, in case we join a conservative congregation, I don't want the kids to have any trouble. So she went all the way. She complains my son doesn't like to go to temple. I said I can understand that. So no, she is marvelous in that respect. When she went to work, she would take her Hebrew books with her and read them on the subway. So my husband said doesn't that embarrass you, you know. And she said well who reads English on the subway. What's the difference if you read, you know, Spanish or whatever they have. So she really knows quite a bit.

And Janet, the youngest one, was always very Jewish minded. And Carol, too, really. They may not show it, but you can tell. They take the kids to children's services. I mean, you can't ask for more when the kids are that little. The oldest one is only five, so you can't do too much. In fact, last week, we had a baby naming here. That was an experience. I think I aged ten years.

So I mean, my husband, he came from an

orthodox family, but I kind of toned him down and I kind of went up a little bit. So that's why we joined Beth Israel, the old Beth Israel.

Q. HAVE YOUR CHILDREN EVER BEEN TO GERMANY?

A. Just that one afternoon. And I don't think it means anything. They were nine, 12 and 15. And the son of that lady that raised us, he drove them around and said this is the old castle and this is the new castle. So you know, it really didn't mean anything much to them.

Q. BUT IN RELATIONSHIP TO YOU HAVING BEEN BORN THERE, DID THEY ASK YOU ANY QUESTIONS?

A. Well, if they asked, I told them that we left and why we left and, you know, that was that. And Jan is extremely proud of being Jewish. She used to complain that -- she used to wear her little Star of David when she went to Davis and she said, you know, most kids don't even or a lot of them don't even want to admit that they're Jewish, you know, at college.

So once she went to Hillel service, and she said that wasn't her for her. She liked the real service. She is very conservative in all her views, and it took her a long time to get used to a reformed

temple. She used to adore Rabbi Berstein. They had a correspondence going. So it took her a while, but she always wanted him to marry her. And I said honey, don't expect it. I mean, the gentleman was well in his 70s when she was 12. So she was very happy to have Rabbi Morris marry her. In fact, he married both girls, and Rabbi Hirsch married Bruce and Anne in New York. He just passed away, I think, last year.

But it's nice. My husband, the first thing he always asked when the kids said they had a steady friend, is he Jewish or is she Jewish and, if not, are they going to be Jewish. And I said don't push so, because you have to consider the other parents, too. But they never had any trouble. In fact, with Anne, I think one of her cousins gave her a book how to run a Jewish household. They were Unitarian -- I mean, she was Unitarian. No problem at all. We consider ourselves quite lucky.

Q. IS YOUR SISTER VERY MUCH LIKE YOU?

A. No. Completely different. She has got black kinky hair and a ruddy complexion. She must weigh about -- quite a bit more than I, and she is much more outgoing.

Q. DOES SHE REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT HER CHILDHOOD IN GERMANY?

A. No more than I do, because we were always together. No.

Q. WHAT ABOUT YOUR BROTHERS, HAVE YOU EVER TALKED TO THEM ABOUT IT?

A. No. Of course, I mean, they left -- John left Germany the same time we did. So I mean, it was all the same. It wasn't any different as far as than discussing whatever happened during the day except he started, you know, school at a higher level, that was it. But it was interesting. During the war, they had enough sense to send him to Europe rather than the Pacific. So he went from Africa up Italy, and he met an old girlfriend in Milan that he had known while he was in Italy. He never did make it to Germany though, but he spoke Italian better than we did. He still speaks it fluently. With me, it takes a while, you know, for the ear to get used to it again. But really, we didn't have anything much as far as experiences are concerned. Sorry.

Q. NO. IT'S ALL RIGHT.

A. I mean, we were just plain lucky.

Q. DID YOU EVER KEEP A DIARY?

A. No. I did once when I went to visit my aunt in Argentina. When I came home, I figured I better throw it away. I didn't want anybody to read it. No. See, my aunt in Argentina, they left Germany so early, they became Argentine citizens already in '33. You could do it. I mean, you didn't have to live there. You went there. And so then they were in Switzerland for the six years, and then they just went to Argentina as citizens.

And the other uncle, he went to England in '33, so that was no problem either. And the ones that stayed the longest, they had no children. So it was just he and his wife.

Q. HOW LONG DID HE STAY?

A. They didn't get out of Germany -- well, they went to Luxembourg about '37, '38, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein. I know they went to England. Then he was interned as an enemy alien, and then they released him. Then they wanted to come to the States, and that was after Pearl Harbor then. So he had bad luck in that respect. And they were up there on that coffee plantation and it didn't do them any good physically or mentally, you know, completely isolated.

And then the other uncle, as I said, they went to England and then they came here before Pearl Harbor. So the whole family really was together, you know, the nucleus.

Q. DID YOU EVER MEET ANY OF YOUR SCHOOLMATES OR DID YOU HEAR OF THEM FROM GERMANY?

A. No. No.

Q. I KNOW YOU WERE VERY YOUNG.

A. Well, they would all have married names now anyway. I wouldn't know what they would be. Now, I know some of the people here at the congregation, they go back for reunions. But I've never heard of any, you know, of any reunions or anything like that. And the same with my brother. He has never heard from anybody, you know, from Germany. We wouldn't know where to start. And I mean, to be truthful, we're not really interested.

Q. HOW FAR CAN YOU TRACE YOUR FAMILY BACK IN GERMANY?

A. Well, on my maternal grandfather's side, to 1700 something because, when my grandfather was 80, somebody made him a family tree. And it was supposed to have been made out of silver. I never saw it, but we

got the parchment, you know, where they put the family names on, and that goes to 1700 something. And considering how German he considered himself, there were an awful lot of Jewish names on there that you never -- my mother always said, you know, there was this business of Germany against East European. I don't think she realized how many Jewish words she used. You know, she just didn't know. She didn't know. Either she didn't realize or she didn't know that they were Jewish words or Yiddish words, rather. And it was the same with my grandfather. I mean, he was 200 percent German.

Q. HOW DID THEY FEEL ABOUT THE JEWS FROM THE EAST?

A. It's not nice. I mean, they felt quite superior to them. Listen, they didn't even like the Austrians, much less anything that was further east, you know, because, I mean, my grandfather, he used to be a cattle dealer way, way back, because he must have been born 1850, something like that. And then he started, you know, with a wagon like a peddler, and then he started buying. You know, he had one store, and then he had some more. And he was a self-made man. So you know, he figured if he can do it, everybody can do it.

And if they don't, you are just lazy. And his wife was ten years younger. I think he met her on one of his travels. At least that's what the other aunt says.

You know, in a way, it's a shame that we don't know more about the two generations back from me, but nobody ever talked. The only one that would talk about it was an aunt that married into the family. And she didn't get married until 1923, so we didn't trust everything she said. She had quite a sharp tongue, so we didn't know how much was so. But it was quite interesting. We all come from the southern part of Germany, my grandfather and grandmother. My grandfather had, I think, 11 brothers and sisters, and my grandmother seven. So it was quite a confusion of aunts and uncles. That's why the family tree is so interesting. But that is only on my grandfather's side. It was his birthday. The other side of the tree is empty.

And the same -- well, my dad only had the one brother, but his mother had about eight or nine sisters and brothers, but we really didn't get to know them that well. When we were in Germany, we stayed home. See, we were too young. We didn't travel with our folks

because, you know, there was somebody to take care of us. So we really didn't see too much of Germany or too much of the relatives unless they came into town. So we just know a couple of aunts here and we knew a couple of aunts there. I know one of them lived in Bombay, and I thought that was extremely exotic. Well, I think it is.

Q. DID YOU HAVE A JEWISH CEMETARY IN STUTTGART?

A. Oh, sure, a big one. They had quite a congregation, a reasonably large congregation. I still have the one prayer book, and in it are the little entrance tickets. And it says, you know, it is -- how did they put it? It is requested that you don't make any noise during services, and after service, you do not congregate on the street. Well, you know, it was in the '30s. So I kept those. But I don't think I ever went to the cemetary.

Where my grandfather was born, that was about 80 percent Jewish. It was, you know, maybe 2,000 people. And we went there once for vacation, that was it. Other than that--

Q. WHERE WAS THAT?

A. It was called Buttenhausen. It's a real little town. It's not even a town. It's a hamlet or a

village. And they thought we should see it, but it didn't make much of an impression on, even at the age of eight or nine. And I never went -- my grandmother came from Laupheim. See, everything is right close to Stuttgart, so we really didn't get around too much.

Q. BUT I'M SURE YOUR GRANDMOTHER AND GRANDFATHER WERE BURIED THERE, RIGHT?

A. No. My grandfather was buried in Switzerland, and my grandmother was buried in Argentina.

Q. YES.

A. And on the other side, on my father's side, my grandfather died in 1925, so I'm sure he is someplace in Munich. And my grandmother, she also died in Munich, and that must have been in the early '30s. But I mean, we were never taken to the cemetary.

Q. WHO LIVED WITH YOU? YOU SAID YOUR AUNT AND UNCLE?

A. An aunt and uncle on my father's -- my father's brother and his wife. And that lady is still alive. She is the last one of that generation, and then it's my turn.

Q. THAT'S WONDERFUL. LOOK AT HER, 85.

A. Oh, 89.

Q. OH, 89. THAT'S GREAT.

A. Yeah, it's quite something. But no, we never went to any of the cemetaries. In the old days, I don't think they took children to cemetaries. I don't remember ever going to a funeral until I was an adult.

Q. I DON'T THINK THEY TOOK CHILDREN ANYWHERE, DID THEY?

A. No, not us, not my sister and me. But then see, my one brother is seven years older and the other one 11. So by the time we were five, they were in their late teens, so they could go places. In the wintertime, they would go to Switzerland for skiing, and we stayed home. You just didn't question it. I mean, that's the way it was. But they had a good life. We all did, really.

On Saturdays, we would visit my grandmother, you know, for Shabbat. It was lunch and it was one of those children should be seen and not heard. And Shabbat was the only day they wouldn't let us pick berries. My grandmother wouldn't let us pick berries or pick fruit. You know, she tried to keep as much as she could, but with having to work, it wasn't that easy. And they only lived maybe five blocks away from us.

And then we had cousins across the -- well, they were distant cousins. They were cousins of cousins across the street. So you know, it was very nice. The houses were big, and there was plenty of help. We went to a nice school. What more can you ask for?

Q. ALL RIGHT.

A. You sometimes wonder what would have happened if you had stayed, you know, because across the way, they had twin boys. And when they were bigger and we were bigger, they would match us up and, you know, we would have a double wedding and all of that. But I think they both live in Los Angeles now. We see them once in a while, but not -- I mean, we really don't keep in touch with even too many cousins. I mean, they're spread out. We've got cousins in England. We've got one in Vienna that I've never met. We have one in -- a couple of them in Rio and in Sao Paulo. We've got some in Buenos Aires. We've got one in Seattle. So they're all spread out all over the place. But the only one we are in contact with is the one in Seattle.

Q. IMAGINE IF YOU HAD A GREAT BIG FAMILY GATHERING.

A. Well, we do have one family picture. You

know, every year, my grandfather and grandma had a family reunion with all those aunts and uncles. And there were over a hundred people by the time you figure, you know, a couple more generations. We were too young for that. I just have my -- I think my two brothers were in one of those pictures, but not us. So that must have been late '20s, I would imagine.

Q. ONLY ONE BROTHER WENT IN THE ARMY?

A. The other one was sick, and then he died. Yeah, he was 4-F. The other one went in the Army. He was drafted, you know, after he finished school. But he went in the Army before Pearl Harbor, which made it nice for my sister and me, because since we had a -- we were enemy aliens, of course, but since we had a relative in the Armed Forces, we had no curfew, because if you didn't, you had a 10:00 curfew, I think it was, if you were over 18. So we could babysit, and we made a fortune, because all those poor old ladies that used to babysit and didn't have anybody in the Army, they had to be home. So my sister and I, we did a lot of babysitting in those days.

Q. DID YOU GET TO TRAVEL AROUND A BIT IN ITALY?

A. No. No. No. We stayed in Meran. And the

only place we went really was Naples to get the visa. But by then, the folks were trying to save money. You know, it wasn't like in Germany. You really didn't know what was going to happen. There wasn't any sense, you know, in wasting more money than you had to, because my dad didn't work in Italy. So no, we really didn't. We would go -- every summer, we would go to Munich to visit the aunt I am talking about. We used to visit her and her husband, and we would get new outfits of clothes and shoes and that kind of stuff, and then we would go back over the Brenner Pass and back to Meran. It was a very quiet childhood.

Q. IF YOUR FATHER DID NOT WORK IN ITALY, YOU MUST HAVE LIVED OFF SOMETHING?

A. Well, they had -- I think he sent quite a bit of money out to England, you know, at the beginning. And so you know, you could live on that. I guess he tried to, you know, make everything as liquid as could be. See, that was another lucky thing.

Q. YOUR PARENTS MUST HAVE HAD SOME FORESIGHT TO REALIZE THIS.

A. My dad did. Mother didn't want to leave. Well, don't forget, her parents were there and the one

brother was still there. And like everybody else, she was hoping things would blow over. But no, it was mainly my dad that did the pushing to leave.

Q. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD THAT YOU REMEMBER, SOMETHING GOING WAY BACK? I KNOW IT'S NOT SO EASY, BUT--

A. Well, until Hitler came along, you know, it was just a regular childhood. We had a good time with the cousins. And the household help we had, we had until the day we left. Nobody quit, no. We used to -- it was a big family. I think there was seven sisters and one brother. And we had two of them, and then when they got married, the next two came. And we used to go visit them around Eastertime. One of them had a -- oh, she used to make caramel rabbits and chocolate rabbits. And we used to go there and we could help make the rabbits. We were really very not too religious a family. And they stayed until the end.

And in Italy, we had one woman that helped, and she stayed until we left. So really, we had no trouble in that respect. I don't know what went on in the business, you know, at the stores. But at home, we had no problem in that respect. And then don't forget,

we were shipped off to Switzerland while our folks dissolved the household.

Q. WHERE IN SWITZERLAND DID YOU STAY?

A. Linthal. It's in Canton Glarus. It's not too far from Zurich.

Q. THE GERMAN PART?

A. Yes. Mm-hmm. Well, we used to go there -- no, my folks used to go there once a month, you know, like on vacation in that general area. And my aunt and uncle had a huge house. So even having all of us in there didn't, you know, didn't make too much difference. Well, I mean, the proportion in wealth compared to then and now, you can't compare it. I mean, we are more than comfortably off, but we can never reach those standards, but we don't need to. I mean, we've got more than enough.

I do remember that my sister and I, we had two dolls, a black one -- we were one of the first ones to have a black baby doll -- and then a regular Kathe Kruse doll, you know. And they had one of those children's trains coming from Germany, you know, and we had to give up one of the dolls, which I'm sure no child nowadays would do. But we were told you give one away, and you

can pick which one you want to keep. So we kept the Kathe Kruse doll and we had to give the other one to one of the little girls, you know, that was going through.

Q. YOU HAD TO -- I DIDN'T QUITE CATCH THAT.

A. We had two dolls. We don't have -- it's not like Barbie dolls here where you have a dozen, you know. And I was told by my granddaughter you can never have enough.

So we had to give one of the dolls away to one of those little girls that went out of Germany with one of those children's trains.

Q. OH, I SEE. THAT'S THE PART I DIDN'T GET.

A. Mm-hmm. But it never harmed us just having one doll. But other than that, we really didn't notice anything much. We thought it was most unfair, but what can you do? Your folks told you to do it, so you did it.

But what my mother's sister and her husband did was quite interesting. They had a huge estate outside Stuttgart, and it was bombed pretty badly during the war. For about 30 years, they did nothing. They wouldn't sell it. They left it bombed as it was. And it used -- we have a friend here. It gets complicated.

He is half Jewish. His mother was not; his father was. So he went to the United States with his father, and the other brother stayed with the mother in Germany.

So when he got older, he used to visit his mother also in Stuttgart. And he used to get so upset. He said they haven't done a thing with that estate. And I said well, why should they. They want the people around the neighborhood to remember what had happened. Well, the war was over in '45. Oh, I don't think they did anything with it until about '70; '70, '75. They just left it the way it was. I thought that was pretty good.

Q. AND WHAT DID THEY DO THEN?

A. Oh, I'm sure they sold it. I mean, how long can you hang on to a piece of property if you're never going to see it again? But that's about the only exciting thing that they did. They went to one of those progressive schools that we weren't allowed to go to, you know, Pestalozzi, one of those things.

But we used to have a good time with all our cousins. We had seven in that one town alone. So we used to, you know, see each other quite a bit.

Q. YOU SOUND AS IF YOU REALLY HAD A HAPPY

CHILDHOOD.

A. Extremely. Extremely happy. Extremely happy. And I mean, as long as you went with the whole family, it didn't really bother you that much moving from one place to the next. In Italy, we spoke at least as much German as Italian, because as soon as you were out of school, you spoke German. And in our autograph album, I think we have more German verses than Italian verses. And it didn't take us that long to learn English here. And don't forget, I always had a sister to go with. You know, we always went together. It wasn't that I was ever lonesome if nobody talked to me.

We had a very happy childhood. That's why I couldn't -- you know, I didn't consider myself a survivor because I thought that, you know, you really have to go through a lot.

Q. DO YOU TALK TO YOUR SISTER ABOUT THE PAST AT ALL?

A. There is not enough of it, really. Look, I'm 64. And ten years, you know, of that we were in Germany. It's not enough. I mean, the interesting things happened afterwards. Oh, once in a while, I make fun of her German spelling, but that's about it.

Q. DOES YOUR SISTER STILL REMEMBER GERMAN?

A. Oh, we speak German to each other so we won't forget it.

Q. THAT'S GOOD.

A. Besides, that way, the kids won't understand. And to my aunt, we speak German. And then as my mother got older, you know, we would speak. Once we knew how to speak English, there was no need to at home, so we would speak German, unless the children were there, because my husband doesn't understand. He understands, but he can't speak. What German he understands is mainly from the Yiddish. So we try to speak, like with my aunt, I'm kind of bilingual when she comes. She forgets and she goes into German. So we say speak English, and she speaks a little English and then she goes back to German. And my husband says yah, yah. And so it's good. There is no reason to forget it. Besides, I like languages. But it's too hard. I tried, when the kids were little, to teach them German just, you know, for an added advantage. But unless your husband speaks German, too, you can't do it. It's impossible because, as soon as he comes home, you speak English again. You know, so we don't really reminisce

much. There is too much going on right now.

Q. I JUST WANT YOU TODAY TO REMINISCE A LITTLE BIT.

A. There's not that much to do.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I have a couple of questions.

MRS. KAPLAN: Go ahead. Maybe a question would help.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Okay. I would sort of like to backtrack along that process of all the moves that you made--

MRS. KAPLAN: Go ahead.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: -- and try to get a little detail.

MRS. KAPLAN: Go ahead.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I may be repeating some information you already gave.

MRS. KAPLAN: That's all right.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: And forgive me if I do that. For example, your first move from Germany was to Belgium?

MRS. KAPLAN: No. Only my parents.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Okay. Your parents.

MRS. KAPLAN: We were sent to Switzerland.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Oh, I see. Okay.

MRS. KAPLAN: So see, we missed that whole business.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I see, okay. Can you tell me what your awareness at the time was of how the decision for your parents to go to Belgium evolved, and then could you tell us about, say, the day or two of preparation before they left and the day they left?

MRS. KAPLAN: They didn't do a thing until we were in Switzerland, see. The only reason I think they went to Belgium was because my folks spoke French, and it wasn't that far from Germany. They could have picked Holland, too. You know, it was just a matter of luck. And I know the lift, the furniture lift, went to Belgium and then they couldn't get the permission to settle. So the lift was sent -- no, it stayed there. By then, they made up their mind they might as well as go to Italy.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So your parents did not actually go to Belgium at any time?

MRS. KAPLAN: My parents did. The

children didn't.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Well, could you tell me what that was like, your parents announcing to you that they were going to go to Belgium, and then what the day was like when they left?

MRS. KAPLAN: You don't ask. You were told you go to your Tante Fridl in Switzerland with your older brother, and you go. And what they did then, we didn't know, except we were supposed to learn French. And then one fine day, we were told there is no need to learn French; you better learn Italian. So we started learning Italian. And then the folks came back to Switzerland and told us we were going to settle in Merano. And we said when, and they told us whatever, you know, whenever it was ready. And when it's ready, we packed up, we said goodbye to our aunt, and we went to Merano for three years. And then when we couldn't go there anymore, they said we have to get a visa from Naples, and you're very lucky that we don't have to go to back to Germany because the wait is much longer.

And we went back to our aunt in Switzerland and stayed there until we got the visa. We went down to Naples to get it, you know, for the physical and all

that. We went back to Switzerland. By then, they were moving to Argentina. They left a few months before we did. So we stayed in Switzerland until May, and then we just came on over. The kids really didn't know much. We didn't know much about what was going on. We knew we had to learn first this language and then the other. And we weren't too crazy about our brother taking care of us, because he was rather bossy, as I remember. Well, he was seven years older. And that was it.

And when we came here, we found out, you know, this lady that had worked at the German community, she had gotten us an apartment and furnished, because the lift wasn't here yet. And then when we got the lift, we moved into a pair of flats -- you know, into a flat. And we went to junior high school. And then as soon as the folks could afford it, that was in '41, we bought a house in the avenues, and then life went on nicely. My aunt and uncle rented an apartment not too far from us, and there we were together again.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) WHEN YOU WENT TO SCHOOL HERE IN SAN FRANCISCO, DID YOU EVER TELL ANYBODY ABOUT YOUR GERMAN BACKGROUND?

A. I think by then, we were too interested in

boys. We were in the seventh grade. I remember we had to go to Sunday school, and we were most unhappy because it was a very or it is a very affluent temple. I won't name it. And the kids used to have beaver coats for Sunday school, and we had the seersucker dresses. You know, we felt very uncomfortable.

And so when we started high school, mother promised us we didn't have to go to Sunday school anymore. Oh, that was such a relief. That made you feel, you know, about this big, and kids can be cruel. And you know, this business of when they wear a different sweater every day, we had to wear our dresses until they had to be washed. At the beginning, it was a little hard, but then Ruth and I, we both studied quite a bit, so we did well with the grades. So there was no more problem after about, oh, a good year, because we started in the first half of the seventh grade and we skipped the second half of the seventh. And by then, we were almost in our age group again. And then we skipped another half year as a junior. And by then, we were actually with our own age group. So it wasn't bad. And as I said, this lady helped us, and then we had some distant relatives, very distant, you know, relatives of

relatives of relatives. And they saw to it that my brother got into junior high -- into junior college. And they took us to the principal in junior high, and they kind of helped smooth things out, and it worked out quite well.

Do you have any other questions? See, it's not very exciting.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Sure. My problem is that doing the camera work, I tune in and out of here.

MRS. KAPLAN: That's all right. I don't mind.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: And I'm not sure what you folks have talked about--

MRS. KAPLAN: I don't mind repeating.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: -- I'm embarrassed to say.

MRS. KAPLAN: No. I don't mind repeating.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I was just interested in getting your personal account of some specific moments, for example, what the travel time, the travel days were like in each of these moves that you made? If you could just tell us what happened in the

morning, in the afternoon, in the evening?

MRS. KAPLAN: You know, from Germany to Switzerland, it's maybe three, four hours. There is no distances, and it's the same.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So for you, was it just like, gee, we're going on vacation today?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, you said it, because we didn't have to go to school in Switzerland. My cousins were very envious because they had to go to school, you know, and we didn't have to. So of course, we had to learn the various languages. And then from -- that was from Germany to Switzerland. From Switzerland to Italy, it's no distance either. And once we were in -- it's almost a shame to call it Italy. It was Austria until World War I. And even now, we were there during vacation this summer, and it's exactly 50/50 who speaks -- everybody speaks German and Italian.

And what we would do is we would visit our grandmother in Munich, and that was maybe a five-hour automobile ride. The longest trip really was going down to Naples to get the visa, and that was very boring on the train, and then taking the train up to Rotterdam to catch the ship. And on the ship, everybody was seasick

the first couple of days.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) I WAS JUST GOING TO SAY, ON THE SHIP, THAT WAS YOUR LONGEST TRIP, WASN'T IT?

A. Oh, the channel was terrible. And yeah, that was about, what, five, six days on the ship, at least.

Q. OH, IT MUST HAVE BEEN LONGER AT THAT TIME, I'M QUITE SURE.

A. Easy. It could have been a week, ten days.

Q. YOU WERE SICK, ANYWAY?

A. Well, only through the channel. My mother was sick all the way. My sister never got sick. But it was nice. It was one of those one-class ships, so you could do everything you wanted. And once you got your sea legs, it was fun.

And then somebody picked us up at the ship in Ellis Island, and we went to this fraternity brother of my father's. And we were rather upset because his children had only been there two years and they refused to speak German to us, and we knew very little English. Then we went to the World's Fair. And we went on to friends in Chicago. There, the kids were nicer. They spoke German to us. And I was introduced to Jell-O. That was quite an experience. And then we came to Los

Angeles with another fraternity brother.

Q. HOW DID YOU COME?

A. Train. And not a Pullman. You sat up. That was a long trip. And then we came up to San Francisco, and that was it. We haven't moved out of the same neighborhood since '39. I'm still in the Richmond district.

Q. WHO TAUGHT YOU THESE VARIOUS LANGUAGES? WHEN YOU SAID YOU WENT TO SWITZERLAND, YOU HAD TO--

A. Well, you had these they were called Fraulein, whatever, and they taught us. They had them come in. And there was the French and the Italian. English, we didn't really learn until we came here, because there wasn't enough time. That was a little bit of a problem. Like I said, we came in May. And in June, they put us us into camp, and I cried every night for six weeks. Well, if you don't know what's going on. My sister, it didn't bother her as much. But there was one counselor who knew German, so that helped. And when we went to junior high, there was one math teacher who knew Italian, so we learned the fractions in Italian. And after that, we really didn't need any more help.

My brother tried -- our brother tried to teach

us I think it was Italian, but I mean, you don't want to have your brother teach you. It caused a lot of aggravation. We used to write letters to my folks, and I remember complaining bitterly about him. In fact, we still have the letters at home. And that was it. My sister is better at languages. She had less of an accent. But I'm better in grammar and spelling. So it balances.

Q. DO YOUR CHILDREN SPEAK ANY OTHER LANGUAGES?

A. Only what they learned in school. And once in a while, I try to talk Spanish to them, but it's not very successful. Well, they're all in science, so they took as little language as they could. They just took whatever was needed, and then they went on to math and what have you. So I can't follow them in that. And what little Hebrew they know is, you know, just what they learned in Hebrew school. Carol went further. She went through Hebrew -- I think most of Hebrew high school, and then both girls went to Israel for a summer. The boy didn't. At that time, it wasn't the vogue yet. And that was about it.

Q. HAVE YOU BEEN TO ISRAEL?

A. No. No.

Q. DO YOU WANT TO GO?

A. We tried twice. And each time, they had a war. The first time in '67, that's why we ended up in Europe. No, we haven't gone yet. We really just started traveling about two years ago, because our youngest one, she has only been married four years now or it will be four years. We like to have them all settled and out of the way, and now what happens is they come with their children. It's nice though. We can always travel.

You know, what you said about the traveling, people have no idea how short the distances are, even if you cross three countries. Now, I had a friend, she called me up. Her friend's son is in Brussels, and he wants to see San Francisco. So he called her up and said I'm flying to Los Angeles, can you pick me up at the airport. And she said my God, that's ten hours or eight hours away by car. But you're in the same state. They have no idea what distances are here compared to Europe.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I was just trying to get to your state of mind as a kid.

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, listen, it's no worse

than going to -- I mean, going to Tahoe, a little bit further than that. And I mean, you never took that much luggage with you. I remember when we used to go to Switzerland, we would get all kinds of little necklaces and bracelets hung up, because they figured they wouldn't search the kids as much as the parents, but we were always scared when we were over the border.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) YOU WERE PHYSICALLY SEARCHED AT THE BORDER?

A. Sometimes. I mean, you didn't know. But they -- my folks figured chances were they wouldn't search the kids. But I mean, you couldn't take out that much anyway, because it was too risky.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So on a series of several trips, your parents were trying to bring some things out?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, so we would get a necklace on, you know, which we ordinarily wouldn't be wearing, or they would have a new one made and we would wear it for the trip, and then they would leave it with the aunt in Switzerland. I mean, everybody did that if you could.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: And how many

different crosses of the border were made?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, you had to be careful. You couldn't do it too, too often because you got a -- right, you got a stamp in your passport. Besides, we just had the identification card with a J on it, so that kind of alerted them.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So in other words, your family did make this relocation to Switzerland, but they continued to go back and forth to Brussels?

MRS. KAPLAN: Not too often. Not too often. But every so often, yes. And like we went to Munich for, you know, summer vacation to visit my aunt and uncle. And then we would get new clothes there and then we would come back to Italy. That way, we would could still spend German money, rather than having to spend Italian money on clothing.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So in retrospect though, that was a little risky in the sense that you never knew when the -- (inaudible).

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, no. The guy that drove us, he was a real Nazi, but he liked money. So when you were with him, you didn't have to worry. Mother would hire a private car, and then my sister and I would drive

with him to Munich. And everybody knew him at the border, and he knew everybody at the border.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: He was a taxi sort of guy?

MRS. KAPLAN: Yeah, like a limo.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I see.

MRS. KAPLAN: And he made a good living that way.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So if you hired this man, then you knew--

MRS. KAPLAN: You had no trouble getting through.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: -- that he would take care of the border guards?

MRS. KAPLAN: Exactly, and we could get back again. And I mean, basically, when we went to Munich, all we got was new clothes which, you know, there's nothing wrong with that. We didn't come with arms up to here with gold bracelets. My grandfather wouldn't allow that. That wouldn't be honest.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: And as a kid, were you aware that going back to Germany to pick up some stuff--

MRS. KAPLAN: Na.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: -- and bringing it back was part of the plan, or were you just -- (inaudible).

MRS. KAPLAN: No. We just hated to go to my aunt's because it was boring. I mean, she would take us to museums and stuff like that, but I was homesick every time. And she would buy you -- oh, God, she bought shoes, you know, room to grow in about this much too big and you had to stuff cotton in front. And we had these itchy dresses she had made by a dressmaker. We weren't too crazy about going to Munich, but we never told her.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: As a child, did you feel any fear or danger around these situations, particularly returning back into Germany?

MRS. KAPLAN: No.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Or were you completely unaware of any political turmoil?

MRS. KAPLAN: My sister and I used to talk Italian and make believe we were tourists. And my sister is quite dark, so there was no problem. People would look at us because we didn't speak German. We had

a good time.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did you ever ask your parents why are we living in Italy instead of living in Germany?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, they told us. I mean, listen, when you have to go to Hebrew school after regular school and they don't invite you to birthday parties anymore, it doesn't take much to figure it out.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: But even so then, you did not feel any sense of danger returning to -- (inaudible)?

MRS. KAPLAN: An eight-year-old doesn't really feel that much, not unless somebody would be attacked or something like that. And then that never happened to anybody in our family, not while we were there.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) BUT YOU MENTIONED A THING WHICH I FOUND INTERESTING, THAT YOU HAD THE IDENTIFICATION CARD WITH A J ON IT?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. RIGHT?

A. I think we gave that to Joel.

Q. YES. NOW, THAT WAS A PASSPORT OR AN

IDENTIFICATION CARD?

A. I don't think we got passports as children. Weren't we stateless by then? No, not that early. Not that early.

Q. DID YOU HAVE TO TAKE THE JEWISH NAME LIKE SARAH?

A. No.

Q. THAT CAME LATER?

A. My grandmother did. My grandmother was Sarah Cecelia Landauer, but we weren't.

Q. YOU WERE TOO YOUNG, I SUPPOSE?

A. Yes, or we left too early. In '36, I don't think they did that yet, did they?

Q. I THOUGHT THAT WENT TOGETHER WITH THE J IN THE PASSPORT, BECAUSE THAT'S -- (inaudible).

A. I'll have to look. I'll have to look. If I still have one, I'll have to look.

Q. BECAUSE IF YOU, WITH THAT JEWISH IDENTIFICATION--

A. I know it's a red J in the upper left-hand corner.

Q. IF YOU CROSSED THE BORDERS ALL THE TIME.

A. Oh, it wasn't all the time like that. It was

every summer for, what, three years.

Q. OH, ONLY THREE YEARS?

A. You know, the rest of the time, we went to school.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: And what was school like? Can you give us an average day in school?

MRS. KAPLAN: All I remember was I was always afraid they would take my pigtails and put them in the inkwell. That was my biggest worry.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did that have anything to do with being Jewish?

MRS. KAPLAN: Na. That was first grade. And then I remember one girl had a fountain pen. I was terribly jealous because we didn't have one.

No. Except for this one little character, we really had no trouble. And one of them, her father, one girl, her father was, I think, an Army officer. She could be -- you know, she is the one that you can't come to my birthday party, that kind of stuff. But other than that, it really wasn't bad.

The teachers were all more than nice. And like I said, in the autograph album, it's amazing what that one gentleman put. I mean, he really was taking

kind of a risk because, if you read between the lines, you knew darn well what he meant.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) DID YOU TELL YOUR PARENTS ABOUT THE CHILD WHO WOULD NOT INVITE YOU TO THE BIRTHDAY PARTIES?

A. Oh, yeah, but what can you do? We also told them about the one we beat, you know, we beat up, and they told us to stop doing it.

I think, if anybody, my brother might have noticed it more because he was already 16. See, we were only eight or nine -- eight, about. He was 15 or 16. So I mean, even here in school, you get plenty of kids saying I won't let you come to my party, and they don't care, you know, what reason it is. It's just for being spiteful or nasty or being eight years old.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Was school different in Italy from Germany?

MRS. KAPLAN: Not really, except we went to a Catholic school. So instead of lay teachers, you had nuns. But I mean, they were perfectly fair.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did your Jewishness ever surface as an issue in the Catholic school?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, definitely. We didn't

have to go to mass and we didn't have to go to catechism. We only had religious instruction once a week, and they had it every day.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: What percentage of students in the school were Jewish?

MRS. KAPLAN: A couple of refugees; that was it. Maybe 2 percent, 3 percent; not more than that. I know one girl, her folks owned like a restaurant. She was a native. She was terribly orthodox. And you had to go to school Saturday mornings, too. See, you got Wednesday afternoon and Saturday afternoon off from school. And the poor thing had a maid carry her books to school, and she had a hankie tied around her wrist because she wasn't allowed to carry anything. I mean, that was hard, much harder than what we went through. We just took the books and walked off to school. And then at the end of the day, she was picked up again and somebody took her books and she went back home.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did you experience any anti-Semitism by your classmates in the Italian school?

MRS. KAPLAN: No. Uh-uh.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I know from personal

experience, having gone to lower educational levels of schools in different countries, in different cultures, it was quite a shock for me as a kid, and I found that school was taught very differently in one country from another country. You didn't have that experience going to school in Italy after going to school in Germany? It didn't seem like a completely different sort of animal to you?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, in Germany, we went Grade 1 through part of Grade 3. And then in Italy, Grade 3 or 4 through 5. You know, they graded differently. In Germany, we had to learn first sonderlich, you know, the one kind of writing and then then the regular kind of writing.

And in Italy, there was more officiousness. You know, every time you got a report card, there were a bunch of stamps on it from the government. And when I took the entrance exam to the middle school, God knows how many stamps were on there, a thousand lira, 50 lira, and then the official stamp, which you didn't have in Germany. You just had the regular report cards. But the nuns were very, very even-handed. If you studied, you were fine; if you didn't, you got in trouble. But

we had no choice. We couldn't go to public school.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: And why was that?

MRS. KAPLAN: Because we weren't Italian. It had nothing do with with religion. We were not Italian, because public school was free. I can't really blame them.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Were you a good student?

MRS. KAPLAN: (Nodding head affirmatively.)

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Were you a good student both in the German schools and in the Italian schools?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, yeah. I was always in a lot of competition with my sister.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) WHO WAS BETTER?

A. I was better. In fact, we had -- oh, she still teases me. Once, I say the teacher got us mixed up, and she said no, she didn't, because she got more A's than I did. Oh, I cried and I cried and I cried.

No. We did all right though, because we both went through Berkeley. She took social welfare, and I was a Spanish major.

Q. DO YOU STILL SPEAK?

A. Oh, yeah. Spanish, yes.

Q. AND ITALIAN?

A. Send me four weeks to Italy, and I'll speak it again. In fact, I was surprised how quickly it came back to me. But she doesn't like languages. She is much better in the other fields.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Can you tell us what the boat ride from Holland was like, what an average day was like as a kid? Was this a wonderful adventure?

MRS. KAPLAN: I threw up five days in a row. Now, my sister had a good time. I think they showed movies and, you know, the usual. You play shuffleboard and lots of meals and hardly anybody in the dining room. We were all very happy when we finally landed in New York. And we went to Ellis Island for the processing.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) WHAT WAS THE PROCESSING LIKE?

A. Well, it was nothing much, because we were all healthy and my folks had their own affidavit, so you didn't have to depend on anybody. So we just -- the six of us marched in, and then these friends of my dad's

picked us up and, you know, so it was really quite easy for us.

Q. YOU WERE ALL HEALTHY?

A. Oh, I mean, really, the way we were raised, why not? So we had no problems in that respect.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: The boat from Holland, was a large percentage of the passengers traveling on that boat people fleeing -- (inaudible)?

MRS. KAPLAN: That, I really wouldn't know. Don't forget, I was -- what was I, 12. Who cared. You know, you played with somebody and probably you didn't know what language they were speaking anyway.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Was that a regular commercial passenger boat?

MRS. KAPLAN: Yes. It was, I think, the Rotterdam, the Old Rotterdam, one of those. And since it was a one-class ship, you know, you didn't feel better or not quite so good as the rest of the people. Everybody was treated the same. And we had, you know, our two brothers with us, and dad and mother, so it wasn't any big thing.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Was there ever any discussion of the relationship between fascism in

Germany and fascism in Italy, since you had a firsthand view of both cultures?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, in Italy, I remember we were -- my sister and I, we were just crushed because they have -- the boys and the girls are members of the Ballilas. And since we were Jewish, we could not wear the fascist, you know, the axe with the bundles of wood, we couldn't wear them on our blouses. We just had plain white blouses and black skirts. But I mean, we participated in everything, but we couldn't wear that, and we felt quite bad about it.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) THAT WAS BECAUSE YOU WERE JEWISH OR BECAUSE YOU WERE A FOREIGNER?

A. No. No. Jewish. That was because we were Jewish.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: But this was the Italian Fascist Youth Movement?

MRS. KAPLAN: Yes. This was Italy, Hitler and Mussolini, when they became chummy.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Now, did you have to join that organization?

MRS. KAPLAN: We weren't allowed to join it, you see.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Oh. Oh.

MRS. KAPLAN: We couldn't wear the insignia.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Oh, you weren't in the organization at all?

MRS. KAPLAN: That's it. We could wear the skirt and the white blouse, you know, but we couldn't wear the insignia.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So you could wear some clothes, but did you participate in any of their meetings or activities?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, no. No. No. Well, like activities was usually doing exercises, you know, for some holiday or marching around, but we couldn't wear the insignia.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) ALSO, YOU WOULD WEAR A UNIFORM IN SCHOOL THEN, DIDN'T YOU? DID YOU HAVE TO WEAR A UNIFORM?

A. We wore white aprons and a blue bow and, I think, these sleeve protectors. And the boys had the black aprons with the blue bows. But that was only in Italy. In Germany, we didn't.

Q. BUT WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT INSIGNIA AND NOT

BEING ABLE TO WEAR THE INSIGNIA, THAT WAS ON YOUR SCHOOL CLOTHES OR ON SOME OTHER CLOTHES?

A. No. No. That was just like on the gym clothes or events clothes or whatever. Not on the apron, no because, don't forget, the school was Catholic, so they had nothing to do with that. That was like if they had, oh, some kind of an athletic event and you did exercises for all the parents, then you put those clothes on, the black skirts and the white blouse without the insignia.

Q. SO THAT'S ACTUALLY THE ONLY TIME YOU WERE DIFFERENT?

A. And the religious observances, yeah.

Q. PHYSICALLY DIFFERENT?

A. Yes, absolutely. That's the only time.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did anybody in your Italian school ever talk about Hitler?

MRS. KAPLAN: Na.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did the nuns ever talk about -- was there such a thing as current events for fifth graders?

MRS. KAPLAN: We didn't even have it here 40, 50 years ago. That started with show and tell. And

you would be surprised how few kids know current events even now. No. You took your subjects, your reading and your arithmetic and your handicrafts and what have you, and that was about it.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did they talk about Mussolini in your Italian school?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, you couldn't help but talk about it, just like they talk about, what, Roosevelt when we went to school here. After all, he was the leader.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Was he spoken of in reverent terms?

MRS. KAPLAN: Of course. I mean, they would be crazy if they didn't. You had a picture, just like you have Reagan or Bush in the school now.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: What did they say about Mussolini in your school?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, he was a great leader and he led them out of unemployment. And then they were quite proud of the war they one in Ethiopia, although some people had their doubts about that. And of course, when you write a letter, you wrote the regular date and then you wrote the date of which year of fascism it was.

You know, I think it started in 1922 or something like that. So let's say you wrote the 25th of August 1939, and then you put down in Roman numerals whatever year it was of fascism. I mean, that was part of it.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did you ever take any of that homework and show it to your parents, or did you ever discuss with your parents that in school you were recording the date in terms of fascism?

MRS. KAPLAN: They knew that.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did they talk to you about that at all?

MRS. KAPLAN: No. I mean, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. I mean, you're not going to endear yourself to anybody. And I mean, the nuns didn't order it. It came from the department of education.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So that was a rule that you had to follow?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And you had that on your entrance exam, too, you know, where they graded you. They have the regular date and then the date of fascism.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) DID YOU KEEP ANY OF THOSE PAPERS?

A. That report card, I still have.

Q. OH, YOU HAVE YOUR GRADES?

A. It's a big thing like this, tremendously official looking. And then my birth certificate is in German and Italian. Yeah. They didn't recognize the German birth certificate. It had to be translated officially. And then when I applied for social security here, they didn't accept it either. It had to be translated into English.

Q. YES. RIGHT.

A. As if I'm standing there, it's not enough. No. But I mean, as a child, as it's going on, you don't think about these things. You're told to do it, and you do it. You may think about it 40, 50 years later, but not at that time.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Did you have any sense that what you were being asked to do in writing the fascist date system was something that was oppressing you in any way?

MRS. KAPLAN: No. No. We were just unhappy about the insignia. And then we were furious that we took the test and we passed, and we couldn't go into that school, and we had to learn English. That was

about it. And you know, when you're told now you do this and now you do that, in those days, you did it. My granddaughter wouldn't be like that. She would say why.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) YOU MUST HAVE HAD THE RADIO GOING?

A. Oh, we listened to the Olympic games in Berlin, oh, every day. And my uncle who was still in Munich, he used to send us the Olympic papers, so we used to read those.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE SPEECHES, I MEAN, YOU COULDN'T ESCAPE THAT, COULD YOU, BY MUSSOLINI OVER THE RADIO?

A. Well, you didn't turn the radio on. I mean, he didn't come to our school, and he certainly didn't come to that little hick town we were living in. And you know, some of the worst Nazis lived there anyway, so they wouldn't listen to Mussolini unless they had to.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Was Mussolini generally a very popularly revered leader?

MRS. KAPLAN: Not up there. Not up there.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Not up north?

MRS. KAPLAN: Way, way north, because they would, any day, still prefer belonging to Austria

rather than Italy. And that was, what -- that was only about 20 years after the war after World War I, so they felt much more German still than they do now.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) IN FACT, THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN ANTI-GERMAN OR ANTI-ITALIAN.

A. Anti-Italian, that's what I meant. The kids would only speak Italian when they had to in school, unless they happened to be in an Italian family. Otherwise, all the shopping and all of that, you did in German. And when we were there now, it's about 50/50, and that's 40 years later.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: When you drove from northern Italy to Naples, did you sense a change in the political climate, or were you not in engaged in (inaudible)--

MRS. KAPLAN: At ten? At 11? You know, that's the thing. We left when we were relatively young. We didn't feel any of that. We knew it was a long, boring train ride, and you had to get down there, and then they examined you and they looked at your papers, and then you could go back to Switzerland and wait for your number to be called, and that was all there was to it. We really didn't do much sight -- oh,

we did go to Pompeii and Herculaneum and all that business, but we didn't -- it wasn't like a vacation.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) YOU DID GO TO POMPEII THOUGH?

A. Yeah, but we couldn't go inside. They made -- the children had to wait outside. Why are you laughing? It happened to you, too?

Q. I KNOW THIS IS SO COMMON.

A. Well, now they let you in, but then in those days, they didn't want you to see the paintings on the wall.

So then we went back to Switzerland. Oh, there we had a good time. I know my cousin, he was being readied for bar mitzvah. And a Hebrew teacher came, I think, three times a week from about 30, 40 kilometers because--

Q. WHERE FROM?

A. From Glarus, which was the capital of the canton.

Q. IN SWITZERLAND?

A. In Switzerland, yeah, from the Canton Glarus. He came to Linthal to teach him his Haftarah portion. And then my sister and I, we were considered too young

to go, so we stayed home with the cook and had a very good time. See, they didn't take kids with them like they do now. You just stayed home with whoever took care of you, and that was the going thing. You didn't question it. It was a very mild case of exodus for us.

Q. BUT YOU HAD YOUR EXPERIENCES?

A. Oh, absolutely, but I mean, nothing that I would have nightmares over.

Q. BE GLAD.

A. I am. I definitely am.

Q. WELL, IF YOU THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE--

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Again, I have one more question I would like to ask, but you may have covered this.

MRS. KAPLAN: That's all right.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: You've returned to Germany since the war once?

MRS. KAPLAN: Just that one time for one day.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: In the '60s is when it was?

MRS. KAPLAN: Yes, just to visit those people that had taken care of us. That was the only

reason, you know.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: You choose not to go back to Germany?

MRS. KAPLAN: There are plenty of other places I can go to.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) WELL, YOU TOLD US YOU WOULDN'T GO BACK TO GERMANY.

A. I mean, if they say there is a pot of gold, you know, under one of the houses that my grandfather owned, I would definitely consider going to look for it. But I mean, there is really no reason why I should. I feel funny sometimes when I hear German spoken in Zurich, even though it's different. I mean, it's a different country. You just don't get used to that. No, there is really no need for me to go. And it would have been so -- it's so different now anyway.

Q. DID YOU GET RESTITUTION FOR MISSING YOUR EDUCATION IN GERMANY?

A. Not too much. Barely, because I only had three years. My brother did, and then my dad got a pension.

Q. OH, HE DID?

A. Yeah.

Q. DID HE GET COMPENSATED FOR THE LOSS OF HIS--

A. For the loss of the properties, yes.

Q. YES?

A. Oh, yes. It took a while but, in fact, I think he got it partially from the German government and partially from the U.S. In Munich, yes, in Munich, he did. And I know, I remember the Americans paid much better than the Germans. It was the higher percentages.

Q. WHAT WOULD THE AMERICANS PAY FOR?

A. Air raid damage.

Q. OH, THAT'S INTERESTING.

A. I think there was only -- on my dad's side, they only had the one building. With my grandfather on my mother's side, it was much more complicated. So the German government -- you know, we had somebody in Germany that took care of it, and so they took care of it. I remember we tried to fill out the forms, and we didn't know what half the words meant.

Q. THAT'S HARD. LEGALESE, THEY CALL IT.

A. Oh, terrible. We looked them in a big dictionary we have. They weren't even in there.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Are there ever any reunions in your original hometown in which survivors--

MRS. KAPLAN: I'm still--

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: -- who left during the war -- (inaudible)

MRS. KAPLAN: That's a sore point you hit. In Stuttgart, they have, you know, what do they call him, the Desert Fox, General Rommel. Well, his son is mayor of Stuttgart. And for years, he used to support a kibbutz in Israel. And now he started that business that I think he takes 50 a year in the month of June, July and August or something like that. And I do a lot of swimming, and one of the gentlemen that swims, he was there this summer or last summer on one of those free trips. But he is 82, so you can imagine I have a few more years ago.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: So you--

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, I signed up for that. I figured I might as well get everything I can out of them. Now, my aunt does not agree with me, but we have a difference of opinion. I said why not.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY APPLICANTS, RIGHT?

A. No. I mean why not take advantage of it. My aunt says I shouldn't.

Q. OH. OH, I SEE.

A. You see?

Q. NO. I MEAN, YOUR--

A. Oh, I know. There are a lot of older ones ahead of us.

Q. THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO WAIT THAT LONG?

A. Yeah. I hope I'll make it to 82.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: You're on a waiting list, is that what you're on?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Have they given you any sense as to, if they froze the waiting list like right now, how many years would it take to get to your number?

MRS. KAPLAN: Well, they can't do that because they don't know how many die in the meantime.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I see.

MRS. KAPLAN: So I know about--

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Is there more than 500 people on the list?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, it was a big German Jewish community in Stuttgart. And I know the people that live in the little villages, they've all been. But

I think about four years ago, I got a letter saying that they hadn't forgotten us, but we just had to wait our turn. And listen, if I don't make it, I don't make it. I mean, I'm not going to sit there and bite my fingernails waiting for them to call me.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: If your number comes up and they invite you to--

MRS. KAPLAN: That sounds awful.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: It is a horrible question. If you're invited to attend, would you come back and talk with us afterwards and tell us what you did?

MRS. KAPLAN: Oh, absolutely, if you're still around.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Yeah.

Q. (By Ms. Fielden) LISTEN TO THAT. TALK ABOUT PESSIMISM.

A. Well, I hope I can do it very soon. I don't have too much hope. I'm sure it's going to be another 10, 15 years. It doesn't matter to me. Listen, if I don't make it, if I have the burning desire to go, I can always go.

Q. EXACTLY.

A. So far, it's not burning.

Q. WELL, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE. I LOVE YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR.

A. Listen, if you don't have a sense of humor, you're in a bad way.

Q. WELL, YOU HAVE TO COME BACK--

A. Oh, absolutely.

Q. -- AND TELL US ALL ABOUT IF YOU MADE IT OR NOT.

A. If it should happen, I will, if it should happen.

Q. OKAY.

A. Okay. I can put my glasses back on?

Q. ENJOYED TALKING TO YOU.

A. Okay, fine.

Q. AND WE REALLY WISH YOU THE VERY BEST.

A. Thank you.

Q. AND MAYBE A TRIP TO STUTTGART.

A. Who knows? Who knows? I'll let you know. I'll tell Joel.

Q. YES, YOU DO.

(Interview concluded.)

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