

Interview with LEONORE HOLLANDER

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Q. TODAY IS JULY 12, 1990, AND WE ARE HERE AT THE HOLOCAUST CENTER DOING PART 2 OF LEONORE HOLLANDER.

SO WHEN WE LAST LEFT OFF, I BELIEVE AT THE VERY MOMENT, WE WERE TALKING ABOUT YOUR GOING TO THE DOCTOR WHEN YOU WERE PREGNANT WITH YOUR SECOND CHILD.

A. Well, that didn't actually happen because I knew there would be a mob scene at the doctor's office and I didn't have the time to take three days as I would have had to do if I had been sick. I would have had to but I was so busy taking care of the place, taking care of the children, just keeping up with the difficulty of just getting from day to day.

I had to garden for a good bit of what we ate and tried to shop for what we couldn't grow, and of course, everything was on ration cards that you couldn't control yourself. People tried to scrounge and some were successful, others were not.

Well, I didn't have much time for that either, but sometimes I got referred to things. The towns

people were really rather kind to me. The funeral merchant always saw to it that I got my ration of briquettes which were what we used to heat with.

Keep in mind, in every room, there was one of these ceramic stoves. There was no central heating in that house, which was just as well because nobody could get enough fuel to run the furnace. So we heated just the nursery for the children. And I slept in there for a good bit of the time because it was too cold anywhere else in the house. Winters were cold like anyplace else.

So we had a lot of difficulty, I had a lot of difficulty just getting supplied. But if it hadn't been that the towns people were kind to me, the woman that sold the milk in the corner store was nice to us, she saw to it that we got all the milk that was coming to us on our ration cards. If she wanted to be mean, she probably could have and most of the time, people in that town knew the truth about me: That I was half Jewish, but what helped me a lot, I felt, in retrospect and of course even at the time, that was a kind of a personal victory.

I did, of course, a lot of thinking about anti-Semitism American style and anti-Semitism German style. Now, in the German style anti-Semitism, you had it coming from the top down. Orders were given of how

to treat the Jews.

Well, there were only, in all of Germany, I have been informed reliably, there were 650,000 Jews at all in Germany. The big slaughter was out in the eastern regions beginning in Austria and Hungary and then going on in Poland and the western part of Russia. That's where the big slaughter came in.

And the Germans themselves, most of them were not really so very anti-Semitic and a number of them were very friendly with Jews. Actually, my father couldn't have gotten where he did if they hadn't been.

A lot of them had married Jewish people and they had a lot of grief, but a lot of them helped the Jews as much as they could, and some suffered bitterly, others got away with it and -- of course, you probably have a lot of those stories too, don't you.

Well, at any rate, I was seen in the town as a very busy person which I was, and mostly if I was seen around the streets of the town at all, it was pushing a baby carriage and with two toddlers in tow, all blond. And my husband blond. And he engaged in necessary war time chemistry work. Nobody could touch him. And as I already said in the previous tape, the Reverend Hass company was extremely important.

I think I may have mentioned but maybe I didn't, Dr. Rim was the inventor of plexiglass. And all

those nose cones of all the airplanes were made of plexiglass, a not very pleasant topic to think about when they were buzzing around overhead ready to drop bombs on them. And the thought that some of the pilots of the planes might have been kids I had babysat -- that's war, that's war.

Well, Nan of course will remember the war part of it rather than the Holocaust part and partly due to the fact that everybody was suffering from the crunch of that war, that was what was really painful.

I remember the sensation of fear, mix of fear and anxiety and whatnot. It got settled in the solar plexus. My diaphragm was tied into a knot sometimes for days on end. The big relief was climbing on ladders into the fruit trees to pick the plums and apricots and the apples and the cherries.

Q. FOR PLEASURE?

A. Relief, pleasure.

And I remember one particularly awful day when I had been out picking these beautiful little yellow plums called Mirabelles, they don't have them here very much, they exist but they are not very popular here.

Anyway, I was out picking those and enjoying that and the children were splashing around in the little concrete basin that had a little fountain in the middle, sort of a faucet in the middle. The children

were having fun, and we had the sirens going off. Everybody had to get down out of the garden and flee into the cellar, and it was serious bombing. It was really horrible.

Now, that particular day, the mother of my helper who was a teenager that had been brought to me by her parents sort of she had been my "plister majen" or the girl doing household duty with me. She came back.

Her parents felt she would be safer out in the country and with an American, and they, like a lot of people, realized that Germany was not all that firmly sure of being victorious. The people fought on and put up with all these sacrifices doggedly and patiently.

They had heard, of course, the threats that things were going to be fought out to the bitter end and this had been capitalized on by the Nazis saying, well, you better hold on and fight to the last minute because there is going to be no mercy for you. That was actually said by the allies.

And there were broadcasts that reached Germany. I never tuned them in. We religiously did not do anything of that kind, partly because it was forbidden, that didn't stop many people, but very largely because we felt that psychologically, we would get very confused, and we realized that both sides were doing propaganda and we were not going to find out the

real truth no matter what.

So we averaged things out as best we could, didn't believe anything we didn't see or hear from first-hand sources.

Q. YOU MENTIONED HOW THE TOWNS PEOPLE TREATED YOU AS FAR AS SAVING FOOD.

A. Oh, yes, I began to. Now I began to talk about anti-Semitism German style. Actually even in the war when these strict regulations were put down, how to treat Jews, and in the previous tape I mentioned that malicious people and informers exploited that kind of opportunity, but I personally didn't experience anything of that kind being dropped by the people who found out that I was not the right kind of person, color, that was something I perfectly well could put up. I didn't want that kind of friends anyway.

So it was very selective in knowing who was your real friend and who wasn't. And the fact that I was taking care of these children, very put upon and very busy. In other words, I was not having a great time. I was not really doing anything that would get anybody upset.

Q. DID YOUR FEARS THAT YOU HAD MENTIONED INCLUDE FEARS THAT YOU MIGHT BE DISAPPEARED?

A. So oh, absolutely. I was quite aware of that and of course, once in a while, it came up among people,

among people who were trustworthy, it came up as a topic of conversation, "Why do you suppose they haven't moved in on you" and this kind of thing, and we could only guess, and I would say "Well, I know that they have these priorities set up who is going to disappear and when and until they do, I'm not going to spend time worrying about it."

Well, after the war, my goodness, the war itself was a terrible threat because I was still an American, and I think I explained about holding onto my American citizenship and the episodes in which I maintained that. I'm sure that's on the tape somewhere.

Q. YES.

A. Well, this was the kind of thing that made me feel the interpersonal side was winning, that in other words, I was doing as well as anyone could in that setting.

I contrasted it in my mind with the American type of anti-Semitism which was always very much more covert. My father was aware that he was living in a house with a restricted deed. You know all about restricted deeds, I suppose, don't you?

In most any city, Jews in the older cities anyway, Jews were relegated to certain locations. This was not publicized openly but everybody knew it. And in the real estate ads, there actually were little words

like "restricted deed" which was supposed to help sell the place.

Well, my father had become Christian when he married my mother as I already explained in the previous tape, but he always found it kind of a source of amusement that he was living in a place with a restricted deed. All right.

Now I contrasted the strict Nazi type anti-Semitism which left room for the personal shielding that I got.

Q. DID YOU THINK THAT WAS UNUSUAL?

A. I really don't know how unusual it was but I have a strong suspicion that it wasn't as unusual as all that.

And I did hear from a neighbor when the war was over about how his mother was Jewish. He was half Jewish. He was a journalist and he had a lot of trouble maintaining himself. Finally he was a freelancer and managed to survive. He had a little money on the side. He managed to survive freelancing but he had the kind of difficulties you would have being like blacklisted by a good many, however his mother was on their list to be disappeared.

Well, on the day the Gestapo man showed up, he had an arrangement with the doctor. The doctor showed up and he had a piece of paper with a rubber stamped



swastika on it and his signature. The lady was too sick to move. So she never did get to the concentration camp. The poor lady died of natural causes soon afterwards probably broken hearted like a good many who felt threatened in that way, particularly old people.

Well, the old people had it terrible in the war anyway. Their rations short and a lot even felt guilty about eating anything because it didn't really pay any more; they were old and on their way out so give it to the kids.

Q. YOU MENTIONED SCROUNGING.

A. Oh, my yes. Well, people came out to my place for fruit. And I think I didn't tell the story about how I got to the end of my potato supply.

In the country town, usually you could get potatoes on your ration cards and they were rationed like anything else. But usually it wasn't too hard to get them but then there was the time I ran out of potatoes. Potatoes and carrots were buried in the root cellar which had my racks of preserves in it where I had put up, I had plenty of glass jars. Fortunately, I had put up fruit and vegetables.

Well, in the corner, there were buried my supply of carrots and potatoes. Well, they ran out. Well, my landlord knew a place about seven miles away, by bicycle, of course, so I loaded the kids on the

bicycle and off we went. It was a beautiful little town named Liendorf. I remember it like yesterday. The mayor's house had a stork up on the chimney top.

That was the first time the children had seen a stork. They had heard the stories about the stork, which they only believed to a certain extent. But anyway, there was a stork's nest up there. Fascinating.

Well, the mayor took us in and giving one look at me and the children, he gave us slabs of rye bread spread thick with butter and pieces of ham. I never tasted anything so good in my life. It was wonderful.

And we did indeed make a deal with the lady that lived across the way. I was to give her seven pounds of apricots which I had beautiful apricots, they were better than the California apricots. Wonderful apricots, and they were fun to pick, too, beautiful shiny leaves.

Well, I showed up with a few days later with the seven pounds of apricots and took away the first installment of my potatoes. I was going to get a hundred pounds of potatoes for those seven pounds of apricots. They were a great delicacy, a big prize because you could not only eat them but you could make marmalade out of them with not too much sugar.

Anyway, here I was on the bicycle this time without the children and on the baggage rack was a

splint basket with twenty pounds of those potatoes in it.

Well, I was bouncing along the country road, and the basket broke. The potatoes rolled around on that dirt road. It was dry but the potatoes were rolling around and it was a place that all I could do was put the standard down so that the bike stood, and then I had to try to get up those potatoes rolling around.

Well, along the road towards me came a couple of GI's. This was after the war was over. Couple of GI's. So I called to them in English, "Can you help me, fellows? I've got a problem."

Well, they were astonished out of their wits. But they helped me pick up the potatoes and somehow or other, I got them home.

Well, as an afterthought to that, they were there on assignment to screen the prize of films, they were to go through all the films. The object was to identify who was a Nazi among the pictures because there were no Nazis that would admit that they were. So they were to find the ones in uniform and so on and so forth. That was their job but they got to look at all the films, including the children's films. The children got a whole afternoon of looking at fairy tale films out of that interview.

Q. WERE THERE ANY EXAMPLES OF WHAT KIND OF EXAMPLES OF SCROUNGING WENT ON, SAY, DURING THE WAR WHEN THINGS WERE DIFFICULT?

A. Well, oh, during the war, there was a rather lively black-market. It was very much verboten, but it went on anyway as one would expect.

Actually anybody that had a full compliment of subcutaneous fat was suspect. I was really very properly skinny. I was so thin that I only weighed 95 pounds at the point where I got sick. Well, this is not a Holocaust story, this is a war-time story.

Q. YES.

A. So I don't know how much detail you want on that.

Q. THIS IS AFTER?

A. Well, I'll make it very short. Naturally with food very short, the children got what -- I as a biochemist, I could sort of calculate what they actually needed and try to ration it out. For instance, we had chickens and I saw to it that each child got three eggs a week and that was sort of the protein minimum and whatever we had in the way of sausage or meat of any kind, very much to be cherished, they got most of that.

And I lived on scraps of sausage on bread, lots of bread. Fortunately, they couldn't afford to doctor up the bread very much so it was good old whole

grain rye and quite nourishing.

Q. Was there very much stealing going on of vegetables and fruit?

A. Well, there was the time when Darmstadt was bombed. They had fire bombs going off in Darmstadt and the whole city was in flames. I remember watching it from up in the cat walk and thinking it was the ammunition depot only a couple miles away and here it was ten miles away. City of Darmstadt all burning. It was terrible.

Well, the people had to be quartered somewhere so here were like I got a family of four people and a single person. They were quartered in my house. And of course they were even hungrier than we were.

So there was the thing about my preserves cellar which didn't always count up really right and of course, confronting them was not to be thought of because they would have of course denied having taken any.

So my ally in that situation was a bat. A bat was hanging in the root cellar. Came in every morning, and hung upside down from the ceiling. That was my friend and watch dog. Everybody else was afraid of the bat. So that's how I hung onto my preserves for a while.

Q. THEY DIDN'T TAKE THEM DURING THE NIGHT WHEN

THE BAT WAS GONE?

A. No. Well, for one thing, we didn't have flash lights and there wasn't any electric light in the cellar. They could have brought candles down but I suppose, well, I think they were afraid of the bat, period, and weren't aware that it always batted out. Not being bat-\_\_\_\_\_.

Q. WHAT YEAR WAS NAN BORN?

A. She was born in 1941. And it was war time, and the hospital had to use the underground rooms for operating rooms and for the recovery rooms.

I remember there were little bitty windows, you know, basement windows to look out of during recovery time. And the operating room was down in the cellar, too.

By that time, my precious midwife named Carolla, when she heard it was me, she came down with only one stocking on, and did Nan for me and that was in a big hurry. And they managed as best they could improvising.

I never experienced any discrimination with regard to medical care. I don't think the doctors, shall we say, I don't know whether they were issued instructions to be mean to part-Jews, but one doctor, one that was the one that was the pediatrician, had to come around on a bicycle and I remember his coming

around repeatedly to take care of my children in the terrible siege when they all got the measles one after another.

The man who would come on his bicycle a two mile stretch, he didn't have gasoline for his car, two mile stretch to take care of. He did sympathize very much. I felt a really warm feeling of being taken care of by this wonderful man, and he described that his family personally had helped Jewish friends get over the nearby border. I think I described how near the border was.

Q. RIGHT.

A. Well, he didn't specify which border. Swiss border was of course quite far away but they probably had ways of relaying people around.

Q. YOU HAD BEGUN TO TALK ABOUT WHY WAS IT THAT YOU THINK YOUR HUSBAND WASN'T DRAFTED INTO THE ARMY. WAS IT HIS JOB?

A. Didn't we do that on the previous tape?

Q. IN PART.

A. Well, his job was important in that his assignment was to try to improve the quality of rayon. You know, they didn't have wool and they didn't have cotton, in abundance anyway, so they had to try to figure out methods for reusing the stocks of wool and cotton that they had, improving the quality of the

reused fabric and improving the quality of the rayon.

See, they did know how to make rayon, they could use wood as a raw material but it was not very good quality and all the fabrics that we had during the war were rather fragile and poor feel. It wasn't good, it wasn't even good quality rayon and of course it didn't hold hold up under wear and my husband's assignment was to try to improve the wearing qualities and the durability of rayon. So that was considered very important.

You all heard about Albert Spare and trying to preserve the manufacturing structure which was very much respected and permitted the Germans to hold out much longer than anybody thought possible.

Q. DO YOU THINK YOUR JEWISH-NESS HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR HUSBAND'S LACK OF ACADEMIC HONORS?

A. Didn't I discuss that in the previous tape? I may not have but it was a matter of terrible heartache that my being half Jewish prevented him absolutely from becoming a docent which was the precursor of becoming a professor.

A person who hadn't been through the academic stages could not become a professor, and although he had planned to go into academic life and couldn't do it because in Czechoslovakia because he was ethnic German, that's why he went to Germany. He had very good



academic connections and was a very, very capable research scientist but he still couldn't get into the academic field. That was a matter of real heartache. Heartache for us.

But he didn't, that was not a cause for alienation between us. That came about when the attractive assistant got into the picture. That was later when the children were toddlers. That's a story that just about anywhere in the world, the --

Q. DID YOU HAVE A SEPARATION WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE TODDLERS?

A. Well, yes. It was sort of gradual and my husband, let's give him some credit, was very torn about it.

He was loyal to his family, and he did feel affection for me, but then he was really in love with this other woman. And he was quite open about it. He told me so, and that was a matter of great heartache.

There were two big heartaches and of course the first one was my being half Jewish and preventing him from having the career he wanted, but we did have some happy years during the time that the children were little until the attraction to this other woman came up.

But that's a story that gets lived out anywhere, had nothing to do with the Holocaust. It wasn't the Jewishness that broke us up.

Q. WHEN YOU DID SEPARATE, HE CONTINUED TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT YOU?

A. Yes, he did. He regularly gave me support money, and he came around every Sunday to visit with the children, and he helped me as best he could with whatever time he had.

He chopped wood for me, I had to chop a lot of it myself, we didn't have enough coal. The children would go up in the woods to collect brush wood to make fires. That was for the bath water. Every evening, the children had a bath. My Number 2 helper girl, her mother always wondered, these children get a bath everyday? She'd take the fire wood and make fires in the bath water heater. The children got a bath everyday, that's extravagant but later on, they appreciated it.

Q. THE WOOD WAS HARD TO COME BY?

A. Well, not for us because right up at the end of the garden was the woods so we just went up there and fetched fallen brush wood and there usually was enough.

Actual fire wood was not as easy to come by but we didn't need it for that. It took ordinary scrap wood but in the winter time, we really were not warm enough. Quite regularly, we had to bundle up with everything we had all day long. Being hungry on top of that, of course you can't maintain your body temperature

all that well. I was wearing everything I own all the time.

Q. WHAT WAS THE DAILY LIFE OF THE CHILDREN LIKE DURING THAT TIME?

A. Well, they didn't, except for the frightening intervals having to skitter down into the cellar, regular routine was the helper gal would take the two older kids by the hand and lead them down, and I would carry the youngest and we had improvised bunks in the bomb cellar which had been the wine cellar of the original proprietor. Had beautiful vaulting and of course was very superior, was a place of refuge because it was probably very sturdy and probably would have withstood a bombing, however, if the house had fallen down, it was a stone house, it would have fallen right over the windows and we wouldn't have been able to get out. Fortunately it didn't.

There was, on the occasion of that serious bombing that I was telling you about where we had to flee and it came closer than they ever had before, the next day, we could come out again and I remember going around with a big plastic bucket and a pair of pickle tongs, and great big tongs, about 18 inches long picking up pieces of shrapnel and putting them in the bucket to throw away before I let the children out. They helped find them but they realized how dangerous it was if they

were to step on them.

Q. DID YOU HAVE SOME FORMS OF AMUSEMENT FOR YOURSELF DURING THIS TIME OTHER THAN DURING THESE HARD TIMES OTHER THAN PICKING FRUIT?

A. No, not really. After we separated, I had the radio for a while but then came the time when the radio went elsewhere. I remember the neighbor remarking "Well, too bad to lose your husband but the radio at least functioned."

I did miss the radio. It was a very good instrument that would also play disc records and we had a substantial supply of those. I did enjoy the music.

Q. WAS IT ALWAYS YOUR INTENTION TO RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES WHEN YOU WOULD BE ABLE?

A. I realized that I would and particularly after the separation and the divorce, that was the natural thing to look forward to. The big riddle was what to do about the oldest who by that time was living with Franz my ex-husband, and the second lady. He was extremely fond of her. That is of Gerda, the oldest, my older daughter.

And of course the second lady realized that this was a big treasure in his life and worth holding onto as a kind of a trophy so as long as she kept the child buttered up and preferring to stay with them rather than go home, there would be incidents where for

instance the older child would get into mischief and rather than risk punishment, she would run off and go to the other household where she would be safe from that.

Well, that's kind of hard to compete with. There was a certain amount of that and the feeling of course was on her part that she wanted to stay with her father. Did that answer your question?

Q. YES. AND THEN WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT IT?

A. The subject of repatriation came on gradually. When the war was over, it took another whole year for there to be any kind of possibility of repatriation for which I had priority. My document that I finally got -- did I describe how I got a document? Identification paper?

Q. WELL, YOU HAD TO BICYCLE TO --

A. I think I told that story. Yes.

Well, I had a gray, quite a formal piece of paper, and it had the remark that I still claimed American citizenship. Well, now that stood me in very good standing along with the expired passport. So I had priority and then my father and brother had been trying to get hold of me. My brother had the CIA look for me and the CIA, CIO, it was called then, dually reported back that I did indeed exist, I was living in the country, getting along all right.

Q. MUST HAVE BEEN A GREAT RELIEF TO YOUR FAMILY.

A. Well, yes. Well, they had regular monthly communication through the Red Cross but of course that was only 25 words. I think I mentioned that already. That was the only connection. They could send 25 words and I could send 25 words through the International Red Cross.

Q. SO THEY KNEW YOU WERE ALIVE?

A. They knew I was alive but of course they didn't know about the divorce which had already been a year and a half behind us by that time. So when I could write letters, I had to write about that. The letter exists somewhere or other, maybe I can still find it. It should be put in my autobiography. I'll find it sometime.

Q. HOW WAS THAT YEAR FOR YOU AFTER THE DIVORCE?

A. Well, it was quite an interesting year and that might be interesting for your record.

The logical move was for me to move closer to Darmstadt, the city then about way out ten miles in the country. And I maneuvered myself into an apartment or a shared apartment part way in and left the country house to my husband and successor and particularly after the divorce --

Q. WERE YOU STILL LIVING ALL TOGETHER?

A. Oh, no, no, my husband was living in separate quarters with the second family by that time. There had

been, say, one and a half other children in the second family and the divorce had happened in 1945 already. But that's not really part of this story. However how I was treated afterwards probably is.

I asked to be employed as an interpreter in the German regional government and got a job halfway connected with the German military government working with the regional government.

They needed interpreters so I was given the more difficult translation jobs. I was working next to a lady who had been in hiding and I gathered from her conversation she was actually a double agent, and had survived. This was a Jewish lady. And she had survived by being a double agent.

She did give certain anecdotes which I don't really remember, but her personality had become so confused that she hardly knew herself who she was anymore. She had bleached her hair and called herself Mrs. Hoffman, which wasn't her real name.

Well, she described some of the steps that she had been through and one of them was being screened to be deported to the concentration camps and she had survived by double agenting. I didn't ask the details of just how but anyway, she described what did happen to the people.

The first step really was to take away their

passports and any identification. The documents went first. That was to try to obliterate the identity of these people and fudge the whole issue that way. I think you are quite aware of this; I'm sure it's a matter of record because all the people that went through this process had the same thing happen to them.

Well, they were deprived of better articles of their clothing, and according to where they went, they were treated various not terribly pleasant ways and often families were separated. In fact, usually families were separated but I don't really know the details because this was not part of my story.

Well, I didn't find that out until afterwards and I found it out from this lady that I talked with.

Q. IN THIS CASE, WHEN YOU SAY DOUBLE AGENT, DO YOU MEAN SHE WAS PASSING AS A CHRISTIAN?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes, indeed. I do indeed mean that.

However, she maintained this disguise because they were using her as an informant. In other words, the Nazis were using her as an informant.

At the same time, according to her at least, she was able to help a number of people and was able to live with herself at least that way. I'll give her credit for trying the best she could in her confused way.



She was the person who in the fall of 1945 received from a connection she had in East Prussia the news of what was happening to the ethnic Germans in the eastern regions. They were being literally shoved out by the thousands. The total number according to her was 3 million according to the lady who wrote the letter, wrote a letter that got to Mrs. Hoffman.

And one day when I came into work, she had been crying. Well, this letter described how these people were shoved onto box cars or shoved out into the cold. This was fall, mind you, October going on November, in those cold winters.

They were being moved, being shoved out of their homes, their homes were being confiscated, their businesses were being confiscated by the people in the towns. These were Germans, mind you.

This was supposed to be punishment for their crime of having been Germans and started the war and this kind of thing.

By the millions they streamed into west Germany where most of the housing had been destroyed by the bombing, and the food supply was miserable. The people in west Germany swallowed everything and took them in as best they could and everybody suffered. This is not generally known and should be. The ethnic Germans. This was the rebound and the allies hushed it

up. They let it happen. Stalin took part of Poland that was nearest to Russia, the Poles were given the part of Germany that was closest to Poland, and that's how they had Poland come up again. And then of course the Germans were shoved into east Germany which was separated from West Germany.

(Blank in tape.) But the human side of it (blank in tape.) ... documentation about it in the February issue of the Atlantic Monthly.

Q. WHY DO YOU THINK THE ALLIES HUSHED IT UP?

A. Well, it was part of the price the Germans were supposed to pay for having started the war. It was of course the price of having lost the war, plus having to put up with the Nuremberg trials which nobody really felt all that terrible about. But I think if it had been known what happened to the common people who were not really guilty, any more guilty than anybody else, there would have been a reaction by the world public opinion which there was not.

Q. I PRESUME DURING THIS POST-WAR YEAR, YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE ATROCITIES THAT HAD HAPPENED IN THE CAMPS?

A. Yes, oh, oh, yes, yes, of course. That was a tremendous shock. I had not really known about it and of course the reports were broadcast and were of course

made very much known to the German people.

The German people really were given that to understand. They did feel, a lot of them, particularly the young people, felt very much under the collective guilt feeling so that was actually more or less why you didn't hear more complaints because among the Germans, they just swallowed it and suffered through by and large. It was part of the general suffering that everybody knew was going to happen when the war was over.

In fact, during the war, the word went out, "enjoy the war while it's still on, the peace is going to be ten times worse." And it was for several years. But the fact that this report came out, I was able in November 1945 to smuggle it to an American officer who was being sent back home, and he got it to the American Friend Service Committee.

Q. WHICH WAS THAT?

A. The letter from the East German countess who had written a letter to my colleague in the office. I described it, the letter came and she was devastated by it.

But of course if she hadn't been compassionate about it, she wouldn't have passed it onto me, which she did. And I got it to the American Friend Service Committee.

I found out after I was myself repatriated that was one of the first reports they got of that situation, and it helped to prompt the post-war effort which the Friends did like they did after World War I.

Q. DID YOU HAVE PROBLEMS GETTING FOOD AND OTHER ITEMS?

A. Well, during that year, I was helped by my status of being a government employee. That meant that I could go to the American mess and eat lunch and that was regular food, lunch, American food, which I tanked up on and gained a lot of weight which I needed.

And I did get increased rations when they became available. But the general population really was still suffering very badly and we didn't have too much, however I did get some augmented supplies. I remember one very compassionate Red Cross nurse who brought me some powdered milk and some powdered eggs and some soap.

Q. YOU WERE THERE FOR THAT YEAR BY WORKING AS --

A. As an interpreter in the combined military government and regional German government.

Q. AND YOU DESCRIBED IN THE OTHER TAPE YOUR TRIP BACK TO THE UNITED STATES?

A. Did I?

Q. YES.

A. On the ship.

Q. WITH THE CHILDREN?

A. Yes, and that panicky day when we suddenly had to make up our mind to go. However, I had made a lot of decisions ahead of time, what to take along, lined up a suitcase to take. We were allowed a suitcase for each family member and believe me, there had to be some rigorous selection of what to take.

Q. AND FROM THERE, YOU GO ON AND TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW YOU MADE YOUR ADJUSTMENT BACK TO THE UNITED STATES?

A. Oh, my goodness, do you really want that? Is that part of -- oh, yes I think you should know that the sponsorship was the H.I.A.S. which you know very well I'm sure, the Hebrew Immigrant -- well, you know what the letters stand for. It's gone out of my head but each of us had a tag with our name and a number. Numbers were very prevalent on that ship. About 85, everybody on the ship except the 85 Americans who were being repatriated and there were about 800 other people on the ship all with tatooed numbers on their forearms.

I may have said this on the other tape, I tried to make myself useful by offering conversation lessons and they were quite popular. I remember standing on the deck talking to a big crowd of people and answering questions, how important was it to know English. One fascinating session dealt with etiquette and how to act. So I told them, all you have to do is

just act respectable and you will be all right.

Q. WERE YOU REUNITED WITH YOUR FAMILY RIGHT AWAY?

A. Oh, yes, they knew when the ship was going to come. They had been trying so hard to get us back that by that time, letters were going back and forth and the exact date was really very well known.

The whole family turned out. My older brother couldn't be there but my younger brother was there with his wife and my father and mother were there, they were standing on the dock when the ship came in. Oh, what a wonderful scene that was. Well, the children were the only children on board.

If I remember correctly, they were the only children on board so all cameras zeroed in on these children. For days, people were writing to us and phoning us from all over because here we were in the big -- not me but the children.

Q. THEN HOW DID YOU PUT YOUR LIFE BACK TO THE --

A. Well, of course I tried to get professionally established again, but it was really quite difficult. Not only was I a woman but I had been out of the field for ten years and of course not able to keep up with any developments, let alone the technical ones.

I tried to catch up the best I could but well, it was a time when male chauvinism was even worse than it is now because now there are gestures in the

direction of equal employment et cetera, et cetera, which there weren't then. They haven't healed the situation yet, I don't think. A lot of people will probably tell you that.

But I finally did get a job on the strength of some of the research that I had done. One of the scholars in the National Institute of Health in Washington found that he could use me with the experience I had had in some of my research.

I decided I would be useful so I went there and worked with the other chemists there and we got out a couple of interesting papers. And that lasted for about two years, and then I got a job in the Lehigh Valley. That's where Nan's memories probably begin.

I had really a lot of difficulties as a full-time job in taking care of the children besides and just getting a place to live, housing was tight after the war, and of course trying to get placed with two children in tow. They were by that time 6 and 7, needing to go to school.

Q. YOUR OLDEST DAUGHTER HAD REMAINED?

A. She stayed with her father, yes. We were not very well in touch at all. She would write occasionally and I would write occasionally and at first, I sent packages. I heard later that those packages were a real lifeline for practically the whole family.

Q. HOW WERE YOU FEELING AT THAT POINT ABOUT YOUR JEWISHNESS AND THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE?

A. Well, the experience was a day-to-day survival topic and discrimination didn't have anything to much to do with the discrimination that I felt as a woman and as a person with an interrupted career. Those were the big obstacles and the fact that I was Jewish didn't fall into perspective at all.

I was interrogated by interested people and got out a couple of articles about my Holocaust experiences and the hunger experience and things like that but those were long forgotten, and I have lost most of the material. I did have one, there are a couple of documents that I still have, things that I wrote at that time, but the Jewishness didn't really play the part that the war experience did. At least at that stage it didn't.

Well, during the war, there was always the crushing feeling that I was under threat, and I described that already: the constant fear, the immediate threat of the actual bombing and the distant threat of what might happen.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY SENSE OF LONG TERM EFFECTS OF THESE EXPERIENCES?

A. Well, in this life, everybody has a bundle of some kind. And let's put it this way, I'm doing okay, I



survived, and the starvation experience put an outer layer on me which is only 40 years old and I really think that that's played a part in shall we say staying young. Nobody has said it didn't, so --

Q. EXACTLY WHAT ELEMENTS DO YOU THINK THE EXPERIENCE HAS MADE YOU STAY YOUNG?

A. Well, it figures that if you have been deprived of calories and your weight is way, way down, the recovering tissue is new tissue so really I'm not kidding when I'm saying the outer layer of me is only 40 years old.

That's something that's worth recording but of course the other people, I'm sure you've interviewed people that have actually been under starvation in the concentration camps, did they have a similar and I'm interviewing you -- I would say they might have had a similar phenomenon happen to them.

Q. THE PHENOMENON CAME UP AS A COMMENT; DIDN'T COME UP QUITE THAT WAY. IT'S AN INTERESTING ONE.

A. Well, it might be interesting to ask people if they feel that. There have been experiments performed with animals in calorie deprivation that these animals live longer which is what triggered the remark in the first place.

Q. WERE YOU ABLE TO SEE YOUR OTHER DAUGHTER DURING ALL THOSE YEARS?

A. No. There was a whole series of years when we were completely out of touch. I would send packages and letters and she would send greetings and love to her brother and sister, and actually her father mostly made her do it. But she did it with good grace and there were some very cute letters that I still have which I appreciate and that was our only link.

The first I could go back was in 1955 when air travel began. And I went, I was able to take advantage of the World Congress Of Biochemistry which that year took place in Brussels, Belgium, and from there, I could take a very nice trip over into Germany.

I was able to visit on that occasion. In 1961, when Nan was 14 and her older brother Gerhardt was 15, I could take them along, and we had a more extended contact at that time.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF GERMANY WHEN YOU RETURNED?

A. Well, I was amazed at how well they had put their city picture back together again. Darmstadt had been a pile of rubble. You went back to the city where you had done your more important shopping and visited friends and so on, you couldn't tell where you were. There were piles of rubble with little pathways here and there for foot traffic and here and there were little crosses so and so family is under here. There would be

a wreath here, a bouquet there, a little note saying the so and so's are at such and such an address. And that was Darmstadt in 1945, 6.

Q. DID YOU TALK WITH ANY OF THE LOCAL PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR POST-WAR EXPERIENCES OR FEELINGS?

A. Not really. See, the contact with the other family was a bit strained, let's put it. I was having my children visit with their father, and having been careful all these years not to bad mouth him and not to bad mouth my successor, and I think Nan will bear that out that I didn't, but it was not exactly cordial. This was 1955, the first contact, and second one in 1961.

Q. BUT NOT WITH ANY OF THE OTHER TOWNS PEOPLE?

A. Well, I did look up friends. I don't recall if they said anything very significant that I didn't already know from general knowledge.

Q. I GATHER YOUR SON HAS RETURNED TO EUROPE TO LIVE ALSO, VIENNA?

A. Yes, he went there in 1981 by invitation as a special scholar in the philosophy field connected with the university. They have a very lively interest in philosophy in Europe, much more so than in the U.S. so he didn't really make connections with anything very remunerative until his connection with the -- his subject dealt with the philosophy, the logic that preceded the development of computers.

Most people don't realize this, but the theoretical work needed to be done in order to work out this technology and he had been researching the people and their methods and of course the subject so he connected with the computer field in that indirect way, and that's what established him shall we say in the solid fashion.

Q. I ALSO UNDERSTAND YOU VISITED NIESBAUM TOO?

A. Well, I went back as often as I could afford to, just to keep the family feeling going and had my daughter come visit.

One occasion I think when she came was about 1950 and my father sponsored that because I really didn't have any extra money so she came and visited us then but she didn't want to stay. And she was what then, 14, and she had her friends and didn't want to go to school in English, and didn't have, in that short visit, wasn't able to establish a real family relationship with her brother and sister. Children that age don't automatically take to each other.

This is the problem in just about every merged family, and you have probably heard about it among step children coming into new families. And this is the kind of feeling that you get with so little contact so that didn't develop. My father wanted her to stay on that occasion and she didn't want to stay. But that's not

part of the story or is it?

Q. WELL, EVERYTHING IS PART OF THE STORY. BUT I WAS WONDERING WHAT WERE YOUR IMPRESSIONS GOING BACK JUST VERY RECENTLY GOING TO GERMANY SEEING YOUR DAUGHTER?

A. Well, the last visit was only a month or so ago, from May 24 to June 6, and a very short visit but most exciting. It was a period in which Germany was gearing up for the economic merger which has since taken place and the Germans were part ecstatic over the reunification, and we heard stories of how the visits over the border back and forth were just so emotionally charged, the West Germans going over and being greeted in East Germany with bouquets of flowers and cups of coffee and invitations to come in and sit awhile. And of course the East Germans coming pattering over in their not very good vehicles which elicited some complaints because of the stench, that got in the news here, but the whole picture of getting together again really dominated the picture.

I have an audiotape interview with my daughter on the political developments which you could if anybody is interested, can borrow. I can have a copy made if it's wanted.

Q. DID SHE OR YOU HAVE ANY MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE REUNIFICATION?

A. Not really because she is, you see,

established in west Germany and her troubles are personal ones and having nothing to do with contacts with the East but of course, she keeps herself very well informed and she had a friend who is Czech. She may visit Czechoslovakia.

My son, by the way, is quite ecstatic with the eased contact with Czechoslovakia because he has some colleagues in Prague and in Brattislava. He has been able to visit and they have been able to visit in Vienna and much improved communication all around which of course is a subject of a lot of satisfaction.

Q. SO THEY ARE NOT EXPRESSING FEARS OVER THE REUNIFICATION?

A. Not really. The people that are having a lot of apprehension are of course the bankers and the people for instance that are getting very skimpy pensions in east Germany, and they are not going to be able to afford the much higher prices for staple commodities that are coming now.

The first reaction was the people that had a little money could buy things that they never could buy before. This is, I think, well covered in our news.

Well, conversely, the banks were giving out bonuses for East Germans and they came over by the thousands to claim these hundred mark subsidies. First visit, hundred marks, second visit, 60 marks. And they

would come by the family, bringing grandma and the baby and per person they would get their hundred marks and with that, they would be let loose into the west German stores to invest in whatever they wanted, but I think it's been pretty well described, the reaction with the one to one.

My daughter sent me a clipping which I didn't bring with me because it's in German, it wouldn't get across to you right away I don't suppose, but it described the reaction that followed the ecstatic first hour in which people could bring their east marks and get west marks for them.

Q. I WAS JUST WONDERING WHETHER THERE WAS HEARD ANY FEARS AS SOMETIMES WE HAVE HEARD EXPRESSED ABOUT MORE THE RISE OF NATIONALISM.

A. Well, there is a feeling in the eastern countries like Poland, Russia, a very real fear of increased anti-Semitism. I don't think that that is happening in West Germany or Austria at all where these folks tend to go to. I think you probably would hear if there, I have not heard of any incidents of the West German or even East German population being anti-Semitic.

Now in East Germany, there were no indemnities paid to the Jewish population. This is well known, I'm sure, by your records also. And there is a lot of

controversy now as to what to do about that. That's a matter of adjustment that will have to be made among many others. It's possible that there will be an official reimbursement made to try to equalize what was done in West Germany.

It was represented to the East Germans by the communists that they were victims of the Nazis as well as the Jews, and it wasn't their fault that the poor old Jews got bumped off and so on; they didn't pay any compensation. But now they are beginning to question that and this is a subject that's up in the air and I cannot inform you about it at all except that it is mentioned by thoughtful people in West Germany as well and it's come out in the interview with my daughter, she feels very badly about not only in East Germany but in West Germany, no compensation like the Jews got, was paid to, for instance, the families of the disabled who were killed, nor the homosexuals nor gypsies nor anybody else.

Q. INTERESTING.

A. Yes. She felt that that was an injustice that comes out in the interview. Now, the East Germans do feel that but compared with their own apprehension about how they will manage with their industry not competitive with the West German industry at all and the West Germans of course are worried about how they are ever



going to integrate their operation with the very deteriorated ones in East Germany and try to furnish livelihoods for everybody, which they are very much more inclined to do than for instance in this country, well, somebody is suffering a loss of a job or an inequity of some kind, well, tough.

Q. SO, OVERALL, DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE THOUGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BRING OUT OR ANY KIND OF SUMMARY?

A. Well, I have tried to bring out the very badly underrepresented phase of the shift of populations that I've have quoted 3 million, ten million people just shoved out of the eastern regions. That is a low priority item in most people's books and I have yet to speak with an ordinary American who has ever heard of such a thing.

And I already cited to you the one documentation that I have seen. I have not been able to land a letter explaining this in the New York Times or the Washington Post or anywhere else. I'm wondering whether the project censor says you will bring that out. They are considering that among their topics for the current year. Possible. That's I think, in the world's history, a large scale inequity that has not only not been looked at but is completely hidden.

Q. THE PROBLEM OF THE EXCESS GERMANS?

A. Well, what happened to them was not all that

terrible in the long run. They were made use of in West Germany, they were mostly skilled people and had relatives, some had relatives, but in any case, they got jobs and were put into the general population, they pulled their weight like anybody else. And in the long run, you don't hear any complaints from them which is fine for them but it soft pedals the inequity that has happened in the world's history.

Q. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN THINK OF?

A. That's the most under reported item. The fact that, I hope it's true that there isn't any anti-Semitism in West Germany. I have not heard any among the people that I have talked to. And it very well may be that it's that it occurs in other countries but I really wouldn't know that.

I deplore the scooping out of the Jewish populations in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, et cetera that happened under the Holocaust. That is really dreadful when you think of the genocide on that scale.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR MESSAGE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO INCLUDE?

A. Well, let's hope that the turn the world history has just recently taken is going to lead us out of some of the black phases of our history and that we don't get into anymore guilt traps like we have had in

the past.

Q. WELL SAID. THANK YOU VERY MUCH, VERY, VERY MUCH.

A. Well, it was a pleasure.

Q. THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR COMING AND BEING IN THIS INTERVIEW.

A. Well, thank you for asking me. By the way, how did you ever find out about me? I still don't know who told you folks about me.

(End of interview.)