Interview with HELLA KIRSCHNER

Holocaust Media Project

Date: 5/1/90 Place: San Francisco, CA

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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, TUESDAY, MAY 1, 1990

HOLOCAUST CENTER OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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HELLA KIRSCHNER

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EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q Today is May 1st, 1990. We're at the Holocaust Oral History -- the Holocaust Center of Northern California in San Francisco. I'm here today with Hella Kirschner, whose maiden name was Hella Muntzer. And I'm the interviewer, Barbara Harris, and with me is Emily Silverman.

To start out, Mrs. Kirschner, I'd like to ask you first to tell us where were you born and when you were born, what city and country, and perhaps a little bit about your family life, your parents, your siblings?

A I was born in -- I hate to tell my age and I hate to tell my birth date. But I was born December 6th, 1918, in Frankfurt, Germany. And I had one brother who died of cancer some years back. My father died in 1933. He was a newspaper man with the Frankfurter Zeitung. My mother was a housewife.

My parents were both quite old when they had their two children, my brother and me. And my mother was in her forties. My father was in his middle to late fifties.

And they were thrilled that at this age they still had two kids, and which was almost like a miracle to them.

We had a wonderful childhood with very caring parents, very nice, normal upbringing. And my brother was a great brain in school, all through school. I was not. I was the tomboy in the family, and he was the quiet and studious person. And gee, my father died in 1933 of all kinds of ailments. He was in his sixties at that time.

And then hard times started for us, my mother as a widow and with little income, a small pention from the newspaper. And things were hard but we always managed very nicely. My mother was a very resourceful person. And she was just an all-around great person with a tremendously strong will, and stubbornness, which I have inherited, and here I am.

I think maybe you better sort of lead me on from here. What do you want to hear?

Q Can you tell me a little bit about your family? You said they were pretty comfortable when your father was alive. Can you tell me a little bit about your religious affiliations and whether you were active, the family was active in community affairs in Frankfurt?

A No, my father's first wife was Catholic. And when he married my mother after his wife died, several years he was a widower. He was not affiliated -- he did not want

to have anything to do with religion, although, he came from a very orthodox family, and so did my mother. And my mother kept some of the holidays and -- but very -- really nothing particularly that -- we did not keep Shavuot. We kept Yom Kippur, but my father was -- I think the only time we went to the synagogue was when my brother was bar mitzvah.

I mean, we had of course religious training in school, you know. But other than that, we really didn't have anything at home.

Q Did you go to public school or private?

A Yes, I went to public school.

Q Public school?

A Uh-huh.

Q And how much education did you have?

A I finished high school and started college.

Q And I assume you had a great deal of contact with non-Jews in the public school?

A Yes, yes, most of my friends were non-Jewish. We lived in an area where there weren't a lot of Jews. And so I all of a sudden it was a surprise to me that I was Jewish and that I couldn't participate in this, and I couldn't participate in that. And that all of a sudden, you know, some of your good friends shunned you and crossed the street when they saw you so that they didn't have to talk to

you, that they could sort of bypass you and pretending they hadn't seen you.

Q What are your first memories of anti-semitism in Frankfurt?

A That was really in school when -- God, I don't remember. Really, it started pretty soon in '34, '35, when we couldn't attend this, and we couldn't attend that, and we couldn't participate here. So we joined -- I joined a Jewish scout movement, which was called the Judischer Verband of Deutschland, and got very active in it, and was sort of 150 percent involved in it. And became a Zionist, it was a Zionist group.

And which at this time that made me want to go to Palestine. And this did not come off because I then went from Frankfurt to Berlin into nurses training. And then in 1939 my mother just made me leave Germany, which was in, oh, July, June or July of '39. And I did not want to go. I wanted to finish my nurses training. But she insisted, and cut off my allowance and everything so I had no way to live and eat and survive. So I went, went to some friends of hers who lived in England as a domestic.

And I -- what I've forgotten, I did have some nursery school training, which I did when I left high school before I could enter nurses training. And so I was -- I've always loved kids. And I worked in this nursery school in

Frankfurt, and then went to Berlin, and then from Berlin to London. And I was stuck in London. I wanted to go to Israel. I was stuck in London. The war broke out and I couldn't leave. Nobody could leave at that time. It was '39, '40. And so I got stuck in London.

I worked in a hospital for incurables, for a while. And then I worked -- that was after I -- after my domestic run there. And then a friend of mine told me that Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, had a nursery and a treatment center in London and Hampstead, and that they were looking for people. So I walked there and introduced myself. I called first and introduced myself. And I was asked to come for an interview. And I was hired, and worked for two years at Anna Freud's at their treatment center, nursery school and baby nursery.

I left after two years and -- let me see, what did I do? Well, yes. I worked as an after-school counselor for -- well, they weren't really at-risk kids. They were, sure, they were at-risk. But it was a center where the children came after school to get off the streets to be taken care of and stay in in the evenings while the parents worked, the mothers worked. The father's worked. Some were in the war.

And we occupied the children. We played with them, and we played games, and occupied them doing art work.

And it was, well, a wonderful idea because the kids were off the street. The mothers didn't have to worry where the kids were. And I worked there for about a year until I emigrated to the States.

Q And what year was that, that you came to the United States?

A I came in I believe it was the first of July of '46.

Q So you waited --

A I waited the whole war. So the buzz bombs, I went through the whole bombing of London to the burning East End. And it was a real horror. I mean, it was one of those things that you -- when you go to your work place in the morning you were wondering, is everybody there? How many of their families got killed? Who got hit? And is your place of work still there? And you were lucky you were alive.

It was one of those things that it was always a miracle when we got up in the morning and when we survived another night and the tremendous destruction that was all over London.

Q You remember then the blackouts?

A The blackouts, and the moving the patients away from the windows when I worked at this hospital for the incurables. And we put mattresses in front of the windows and moved the patients to the inside of the rooms of the

wards. And it was a time that remembering back now it's -- it sounds like a real horror story. It was a horror story and it was a dreadful time to go through.

The one redeeming feature was that there were a few people in London who came who I knew from back home. And we met whenever we could when we had our days off, and spent time together, and sort of had a really good support group. But sooner or later somebody left, went to America, went to Shanghai. People went all over the globe. And we were sort of disbursed all over God's world.

Q You must have felt very lonely in those days?

A I felt terribly lonely and isolated and bitter, bitter of having -- especially when I came to London first. And although I stayed for just about three weeks with my mother's friends, but they couldn't keep me because I had to go and work and earn my keep, you know, and make money and to survive. And that was hard, you know. Sure, I was angry. I didn't want -- I didn't want to go near a temple. I didn't want to have anything to do with religion. I was an angry young woman. But on the other hand, I was glad to be alive and somewhat, you know.

And I didn't -- my brother came to England as an American soldier. I saw him in London. And he then was -- went with the army to the European Theater War. We had not heard at that point what happened to my mother. At the

beginning we had the Red Cross messages, which were 25 words, no more, no less, of what's happening to us. And there was really nothing, at least we knew that she was alive. She knew that we were alive. But we didn't know whether she would get our messages, and, of course, she didn't know whether we received her messages. So that was hard.

Then my brother went to Europe. He was one of the first ones to cross the Rhine. He was an interpreter. And after the war he tried to find my mother. He alerted all -- everybody that he could think of, all the clergy that he met in different areas, whether they were Jewish or any kind of chaplain, if they were going in any of the concentration camps, look for Anna Muntzer.

And low and behold, a chaplain came back to him -- and he was stationed in Austria at the time -- and said there is an Anna Muntzer in a displaced person's camp in the Russian sector, in (Dekendorf), I believe it was. So he tried to get permission to go there, and being an American soldier in the Austrian Theater War, he couldn't get permission. So he went AWOL. He went there and had, of course, a tremendous reunion with my mother. She was alive.

She came out of Theresienstadt extremely well. I mean, she was starved, and all that, but she was alive. She was -- the commandant of the -- of (Dekendorf), of the

camp told her, "There is somebody out there to see you." And she brushed him aside.

Better turn it off for a minute.

(Recess.)

That's good. Anyway, she knew when the commandant came to her and said, "There's somebody to see you," that it was her son. And they had a reunion and he had to go back. And she was reassured that he was alive and that I'm alive because we weren't in contact.

So we -- he was shortly thereafter he was sent back to the States and went to -- got a job as an instructor at Rockhurst University. And she come over in 1946, and followed him and lived with him at the campus at Rockhurst University. And she did real well. She recovered beautifully from whatever she needed to recover from. And she kept house for my brother, which she loved best. She loved keeping house and cooking, and all that.

And then my brother wanted some time off to write his PhD, his thesis. And I had come over shortly after her in 1946. I came to New York and started working almost immediately as a nursery school teacher on the Lower East Side at a day care, at a day nursery, day care center. And I was there with the recommendations I had from England. I had no trouble finding a job. It was great. I enjoyed it.

I had a good time in New York. New York was a wonderful place for a single young woman to live. And I knew that my mother was all right, and my brother was all right. And then I ran into -- this is very remarkable. I ran into a friend from Germany who I hadn't seen in years and years. We past -- almost past each other on 34th Street on a crowded evening, I after work, she after work, too.

And we stopped in our tracks and said, "Aren't you so and so?"

"Yes." And we went to have a cup of coffee and started talking. And she had gotten married.

And she said, "You know there are a lot of people here from Frankfurt and let's get together. I'll get a few people together. And I'll call you and you come."

Anyway, a week later she had a little party at her house and I went to her house. And there were several friends that I hadn't seen in -- well, by that time it was eight, nine years had gone by. And it was wonderful. She said she'd try to get a hold of a friend by the name of Fred Kirschner, who we were very friendly from the scout movement, from the troop scout movement. But she couldn't. His father was practicing medicine in New York and she got a hold of the answering service but she couldn't get a hold of him.

So since we were pretty good friends I decided,

I'm going to write a letter to him in care of his parents. If he's moved or something his parents will forward it. And he had then moved away to Alton, Illinois, which is near St. Louis. So his parents sent in his letter -- sent my letter to Alton, Illinois.

And he wrote back to me and said -- this was, I would say, July or August, July. And he wrote back immediately saying he was going to come over Labor Day to New York visiting his parent and he'd like to see me and to call me. Well, he called the moment he got to New York and we saw each other.

And I just started a brand new job as a director of a nursery school there, taking the place of a young woman who had just gotten married and left because she was getting married, left a little earlier. And so anyway, I made -- I made a -- I had signed up for a year. I had made a commitment for a year.

And here I met Fred Kirschner again. Well, he was there only a week. Make a long story short, within this week we got engaged to get married. And we were going to wait a year. To make it even shorter, we didn't wait the year. I quit my job and I got married in New York at my parents'-in-law home in February, February 8th, in 1948. We had a wonderful wedding at my parents'-in-laws home. My mother came and my brother came and a couple of real close

friends. And then we had a reception at their home. It was really a lovely small wedding for us.

And we left for Alton, Illinois, which is the mid-west, near St. Louis, across the river, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. Alton was very hard for me because I'm basically a city slicker. I have always lived in big cities, Frankfurt, Berlin, London, New York. And here I was all of a sudden in this small, very ugly, mid-western town, with a horrible climate, very cold in winter and icy and snowy, and very hot and humid in summer. So that was quite an adjustment.

But I -- my husband was working and I started a nursery school of my own there at the Unitarian church. And had that school until my first child was born, I should say, our first child. My husband always says, "Well, it's my child, too." So two years later on the date of our second wedding anniversary our first son was born. Then there were two more sons that were born within time.

And at one time we went to see my mother and my brother, who then had moved to California, to Pacific Grove. My brother was then instructor at the Army Language School, at that time, defense, it's now the DLA -- DLI, Defense Language Institute. So we one day left our kids with my sister-in-law and came out west.

And I said to my husband after we returned,

"Fred, we've got to move to California." And he wasn't -- California -- but this is God's country. We've got to leave this mid-west. And so we were cogitating around that. I had a very good business in Alton, Illinois. But I sort of kept nagging.

And he said, "Okay, you win." We came out here. He bought a business out here in Long Beach, and which we had for about a year. And then a wonderful opportunity came up, up here in San Francisco, which we jumped at.

And then our fourth child was born in Long Beach, a girl, after three boys. So that was wonderful. So we came out here to San Francisco with three sons and a daughter, who was just about three months old. And I -- it was wonderful. We enjoyed living here. We could go see my mother and brother.

And life here was so much more relaxed and we just loved being here. Life was good for us out here. The kids did well. The kids grew up, went to college. And life was great, and still is. We've been married 42 years and it still is great.

Q Can we go back a little bit?

A Sure. I sort of was jumping the gun a little bit.

Q That's perfect. That's perfect. Do you

remember what year did you go to Berlin for your school in nursing? When did you leave Frankfurt?

A '37, '38 -- '37, I think.

Q Can you tell me a little bit, let's go back a bit farther to when you were still in Frankfurt. Do you remember very much about the increase in anti-semitism? When do you first remember feeling that things were changing? What kind of discussions did you have at home with your mother and brother about the situation, about being careful?

A Well, it wasn't so much being careful because I was always a very precocious gutsy person. I really didn't care. But we were -- well, school, you were aware in school when your friends didn't -- you know, didn't want to have anything to do with you any more or as little as possible to do with you.

And however, the Jewish scout club was a wonderful substitute, meet friends there. I really didn't need anything else. It was a wonderful support for kids at that time. We were busy. We were -- we had idealistic discussions and, you know, it was -- that was our life, really. And what else happened around us we sort of pretty much shut out. And out of, you know, how unpleasant things you push aside and you don't want to -- unless we were made aware of it, we really ignored it as much as we could.

Q Do you remember any of in the early thirties when Hitler came to power, the anti-semitic posters, the books, the change in newspapers?

A Oh, yes, the newspapers, Der Sturmer, with his horrible characatures of Jews and the lies and all that. And people around us always said, the older people, "Oh, it can't last. This is impossible. This man is a madman and it cannot last. It's not going to be. And let's just be patient. Let's be quiet." You know.

It's unbelievable that people could live that way in fear and yet, hiding almost, you know, being unobtrusive and sort of crawling in the woodwork, almost. Which we didn't do because, I mean, I don't want to say I was fearless, but I really didn't care. I mean, it was I felt -- I think when you're young you feel nothing can happen to you, you know. And I lived my life the way I probably would have lived it anyway.

Q Do you remember the period when people were thrown out of their professions, when the laws for the protection of Germany started coming into effect, when the doctors were not able to practice except for Jews?

A Well, the Jews -- the Jewish doctors could take care of their own Jewish patients. They could not practice in the non-Jewish hospitals anymore. But you heard little about it because being that my father was dead, you know,

and we were not really thrown together with a lot of professional people. Oh, we heard here and there or, yeah, this one had to quit work. Or he lost his job, or he was taken to a concentration camp.

But at that time they took -- primarily they took nuns. They took priests. They took communists. So it was not directed entirely at Jews. So you felt sort of during that time, you still felt not the whole impact of what was really going on. And maybe I sort of put like a cocoon around me, too.

The first time the impact really hit me, when my mother had made arrangements for my brother to leave. He had gotten a full scholarship. He had one teacher who was not a Jewish teacher, came at night to say when it was dark, to say goodbye to my brother, who was such a decent person, and he was wished him luck.

And he was also instrumental that my brother would get this scholarship, which was a scholarship that was awarded once a year to one Jewish student in Germany. So it was quite something that he got this scholarship. And so the impact hit me when we took my brother to the Bahnhof, to the train station, and said goodbye to him. That was kind of hard.

Q That was 1935?

A That was in '35, yes. So he was one of the

early ones that left, and, you know, my mother was terribly distraught. She was very close with my brother. He was the only son. After my father died he was sort of, much more than I was, she could discuss things with him. He was much more level-headed than I was. I was sort of the scatter brain, and he was the level-headed, stable person in the family, who she really depended a lot on his wisdom and his -- generally on him, depended on him.

Q May I ask his name?

A Huntz Muntzer, Huntz Wilhelm Muntzer.

Q Did you -- in '35 was also the Nuremberg Laws. Did you feel more of an impact, did you feel more exposed without your brother being there, without having a man in the house?

A No, not really. No, my life then really revolved around the Jewish scout movement. And that I was really -- I think it saved my life and sanity, probably. And it was my life.

Q What kind of things did the scouts do? What kind of things did you talk about? What image did you have of Israel?

A Well, it was Palestine at the time. We had people come, Palestinians to come, I mean Jewish Palestinians come and talk with us and prepare us. And a lot of our friends, a lot of my friends went to the

(Agricultured) schools for a week re-training and preparation for Israel.

And, you know, I felt my nurses training was good preparation for Israel. And we all talked about Zionism, idealism, and we were just sort of such idealistic young people. And this was I mean a great help to most of us at that time.

Q What do you remember about going to Berlin to work in the Jewish hospital?

A Well, I remember the Kristallnacht, when all of a sudden our Jewish residents were taken in the middle of the night. And then we were somehow prepared for it. We also again moved our patients away from the windows. And we heard there was going to be a lot of -- allegedly, they took patients out of the sickbed and they disappeared. We have no idea where they disappeared. Our chief surgeon was taken. We heard the next morning after the Kristallnacht our windows were shattered, and it was a mad, mad night.

Q Were you in the hospital?

A I was in the hospital. And we just stayed in the hospital. I mean, there was nowhere to go. We were afraid to walk over to the nurses home. And God, I don't remember how long I was there at the hospital. And this whole incident is really, I blocked it out. I remember very little about it. It was horrible. It was dreadful. It was

frightening, and it was -- it happened.

Q You don't recall what you were doing, where the patients --

A I was racing around. And we were trying to hide some of our residents and interns. And they just came in and walked through the whole hospital, took patients out of beds and -- but this whole thing is like, I'm a complete fog. I mean, it's -- I just don't remember.

Q Was there any rhyme or reason to who they took?

A No, no. No, the nurses were -- we're all stunned. We were sitting there and we didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was -- nobody knew what was really going on, what happened, where they took those people. We knew they were going to take them to the police, to -- God, I just don't know -- concentration camps or what, where.

Q What did you know of the concentration camps at that stage?

A Very little. Very little. It was very quiet. I really knew hardly anything about concentration camps. We knew they rounded people up and took them to some camps but what happened there, nobody knew, nobody. Maybe the adults didn't want to know. I mean, everybody was such an ostrich policy. You stuck your head in the sand and you didn't want to know. You couldn't believe. I mean it was too -- the whole thing was really too unbelievable.

Q Did you feel more German than Jewish?

A Oh, God, yes. Oh, yes, I felt so German until '35, '34, '35, yes. My father was an officer in the Prussian army. And he was, my God, he was such a German, you know, that I'm glad he didn't have to live through all this.

Q Now, can you tell me a little bit about the -- what do you remember anything the morning after Kristallnacht, going out into the streets, what you saw in Berlin, what the city looked like, how people lived after that, got food, and did they rebuild?

A I don't. I do not remember. I remember we went back, some of us went back to the nurses home. We went back to the hospital. I don't remember.

Q And how long after Kristallnacht did you stay in Berlin?

A I didn't stay very long. I went back to Frankfurt and gathered some of my things. My mother had left Frankfurt, too. My mother was born and raised in Upper (Salashia), in a small town called (Vadibore), which was on the Polish corridor, which changed hands a couple of times. One time it was German. One time it was Polish.

And she had a brother there. And she went to live with her brother for economic reasons. And I shortly after the Kristallnacht left and went to Frankfurt, got my

things and then I went to (Vadibore).

And my mother, in the meantime, had made arrangements with her friends that I would come to England. And shortly thereafter, I came to England in March. It was in March, not in June or July. I came in July, went to America. I went to New York. So it was in March I left, and with very few possessions, very few things, and ten marks in my pocket and had to survive in London.

Q Ten marks was all you were allowed to take?

A Uh-huh. And mind you, my brother was a linguist and I was not. When I was in school I hated English. I said, "If I never have to speak English I'll be very happy." If I could just speak French, I was quite proficient in French. And I said, "Well, French is my language but not English. It's harsh, it's a horrible language." So I had this thing that I came to England and, okay, now, what can you do with the language?

Well, I was for three weeks with these friends of my mother's, and then I was a domestic. And there were three kids in the family and I learned English in a hurry from the kids. But I didn't -- they really taught me. With kids you have to learn because they would laugh at you if you made mistakes. And I didn't want to be laughed at, so I learned English very, very fast. And it was great. It was the best thing that could have happened to me.

Q Do you remember any of the -- recall any of the discussions you had with your mother about leaving and what her reason, what kind of reason she gave you?

A Well, yes. She said, "There's no future for you here. And things are getting from worse to -- from worse to worse and there's just no future. And things look dangerous."

And I have never had a sense of danger. That was not in my vocabulary. So I said, "Well, I really would like to finish this nurses training because wherever I go I will be a nurse. And it will help me."

And she said, "No, I don't see it that way. From what I hear from my friends, you've got to leave. You've got to get out. Things are just -- they're rounding up people." And at that time they had rounded up a cousin of mine who was about ten years older, a young man, who had disappeared. So she said, "There is just no point your staying here and your finishing. You can always finish when you get to England."

I said, "Mother, I don't speak English."

"You learn," she says. "You learn. You've got a brain in your head."

I said, "But I'm such a poor student as it is." I always hated school.

And she said, "You get out. You just have to

get out. And I'm just not going to support you any more." I mean, she really forced me to get out because she saw at that point the handwriting on the wall. So must have her contemporaries. So I left. I mean, there was no point hanging around.

Q Did she try to get out?

A No. My brother and I both tried to get her out. But at that time you needed a very high financial guarantee for old people. And she was -- at this time she was way in her sixties and there was no -- my brother was a student.

He -- God, she had an uncle in New York who was the Henry Bendel, you know, the Bendel Department Store? That was her uncle. She remembers him as a child. He came -- he was a bad sheep in the family. He was sent to America as the bad boy. He made good. He came back with toys and things and for the kids, you know. My mother remembered him very well.

My brother tried to get to him. He was an old man in his eighties and nineties at the time. He never got any further than the secretary. And the secretary said, "Well, Mr. Bendel does not remember any family in Germany." And I mean, my brother couldn't get first anywhere. The people I had approached in London were all refugees. They didn't have the kind of -- I didn't have any relatives in

London. And they were all people who had to look out for their own.

So that's how she got lost in the shuffle and the (Vadibore). And they were all herded from their homes to the (Cemetery). And all the people that were left there, including her brother, were living in the (Cemetery) until they were taken to Theresienstadt.

Q Did your mother talk much about Theresienstadt, what happened?

A Yes and no. She talked -- not too much about it. One thing sticks out in my mind. She was destined for a transport to Auschwitz, probably. They lined them up like 3:00 o'clock in the morning outside in front of the barracks in one big line. And my mother, being very gutsy, too, by the time it was 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock in the morning, she decided she was going to go to the bathroom and not return to the line. And since her number had been called and they were taken in the transport, they left and my mother remained in Theresienstadt. And she worked in the kitchen. And she -- well, she just survived.

Her number was called. The Germans are very methodical, you know, the number was gone, she was gone. So that's how she survived. It was either that or if she had been caught she would have been shot.

But she felt -- I'm not sure about the date or

the time but there was a -- I had a good friend in -- we were in nurses training together. We were real good friends. And she came to my mother probably a week or two before and said, "I am going with my cousin in a transport and we're probably going to Auschwitz and that will probably be the end of us." And she came to say goodbye to my mother. And that was the end of my friend, Polly.

She knew, they knew where they were going. So my mother knew where that transport was going to, and decided, "To hell with it. I'm trying whether they shoot me. If they do, it doesn't make any difference."

That was quick, I hope. So anyway, that was how my mother survived. And then after the war she was liberated by the Russians and came into the DP Camp in (Dekendorf). That's where my brother found her.

Q That must have been quite a surprise for you?

A Oh, God, yes, yes, it was.

Q And you didn't see her again until she came to the United States?

A I didn't see her. She preceded me to the States, you know. I came -- she came in the early part of '46, and I came -- she came in January or February of '46, and I came in July, the first of July, '46.

Q Going back to 1933, again. Let me ask you if you remember when you joined the youth group, there were

other Jewish groups forming as people were cut out?

A Uh-huh, yeah.

Q Do you remember any of the Jewish -- anything about the Jewish culture, like the symphony and the Jewish academy, that were set up in '33 through '35 in Frankfurt?

A Not really, no. We lived a very un-Jewish life at that time and it's a realty -- first time I was aware, was made aware that I was Jewish was about '34, '35, when things got a little tough in school. And, no, I really don't remember since we did not live a real Jewish life.

Q Do you remember, was it difficult for you to get a visa to go to England or what you had to do?

A No, it was not, because you could get domestic permits because they wanted domestics there. They needed domestics at that time, you know. And they couldn't get -- in those days they had a lot of the Irish maids and the country girls. And they were less and less, so they welcomed the -- I don't know that they welcomed us, but it was a good idea to have a domestic there who they could pay very little, who lived in and was -- I wouldn't say, exploited. I wasn't exploited, but it was hard work.

And it was something that naturally I hated, and was not cut out for. I wasn't domesticated at all. So I could barely cook, you know. Luckily, there were three kids in the family and I devoted a lot of time to the kids.

And that was fun. I took the kids out. There was a little baby and I used to take the kids out to the park and met with other domestics, you know. So it was all right except for the lonesomeness.

The people were very nice. This was a nice Jewish family. He was a barrister. He went with me, you know, we all had to pass tribunals at that time, whether we were friendly aliens or what. And this man went with me to the tribunal and he translated for me. And I was a friendly alien, you know. And a lot of them, of course, were taken to Canada as not such friendly aliens. A lot of people disappeared to Australia and Canada as aliens. But I was quite lucky, I guess, more or less.

Q What were the first signs that the war might be coming to an end? Did you have any news of what was going on in Germany toward the end of the war?

A Huh-uh, no, there was very little news that leaked through and we were so occupied with the bombing, and we were so -- it was such a peculiar life we lived from day to day that we didn't know really what was going on. You lived from day to day. And you were glad you saw the morning and you were glad you were there and you saw some of your friends, and that not too many people that you knew were killed, that the East End was bombed, yes, but, well, it was one of the things that happened during this war. A

lot of women lost their husbands and lot of the kids that we worked -- when I worked at Anna Freud's lost their father's.

And it was a -- it was an un-real life. It wasn't -- it wasn't a real life. I don't know how to really describe it. But I don't know how people describe this kind of life. Words fail me here. It's too -- what it was that you lived through this mess and that you survived this mess and that you came out sort of more or less sane of this whole thing.

But it is now like it's a story that I'm telling that didn't happen to me. I'm so far removed, the kind of life I lived here, and life has really been good to me here, that it was another life. It was another era. It was something that happened that you push aside. It's, okay, it happened. You're alive. You came out of it. And there it is.

People try and, you know, "What was it like? What was it like?" It was horrible. It was a nightmare, some of it. The buzz bombs were frightening when they were overhead. And you knew when they cut out right overhead they come straight down and you would get a direct hit and that would be the end of you. It was a constant fear, and yet, you know, we went out on the roof as wardens, as air raid wardens. And we never went to bed undressed for months at a time.

And we went in basements. I was always afraid of going to a shelter because I was always afraid of mass hysteria, if something would happen that people would get hysterical and I wouldn't get out of the shelter. So I just as soon was outside or in a basement with some friends or whatever, hiding.

But it was a whole nightmare that you ask me now the details, it sort of disappears. And you put it aside and you lived through it, and that's that.

Q What are your feelings today about how the war influenced you and did you ever discuss -- at what point did you discuss this with your children and tell them about your experiences?

A Very little. Very little. The kids sometimes say, "Why don't you -- why don't we talk about it?" It never comes to it. It's partially because I don't like to talk about it. My husband doesn't like to talk about it. My husband was in Buchenwald. He went through much more than I did. But also, I think the kids are hurting for their parents and don't want to rock the boat. And they don't want to go through the pain. I think that's partially it.

Q Did they know you were coming here today to do this? Did you discuss this with them?

A Yes, with my oldest one but not with the

others. I think I talked to my daughter in New York yesterday. I don't think I told her, no.

Q How do you feel now about being Jewish? Did the war change your experience as you mentioned earlier?

A Yes, yes, I want my grandchildren to feel Jewish. I wish -- my kids feel Jewish, yes, but they don't like to go to temple particularly. They always like to come home for Pesah. That is the big holiday in our family. They love Pesah. They were all home for Pesah, my children, my grandchildren from Los Angeles. And we had the house full. We were eight people in our house with the kids. We were 24 for Pesah. The kids love this holiday.

They feel Jewish but they don't practice Judiasm. We don't either, in a way. We have Friday nights with the kids, the ones that live here in San Rafael. They come every Friday night. My little grandsons, they know the Brochese, the four year old twins and the nine year old and they know the Brochese and the Shavuot, yes, and it means a lot to them, yes. I mean, their Friday night means quite a lot to them. They go to some of the things at temple.

My oldest grandson who is not Jewish by birth, my daughter-in-law is not Jewish. She converted to Judiasm when the twins were born. She is the one that really goes to temple with them. My son does not care to go. And if he can avoid it, he won't go. But if he has to go, if his wife

puts pressure on him or there's something from the school, or a purium party or something, he goes with them. But he just as soon not go.

Q Do you think another Holocaust is possible and why?

A It's possible. I don't want to think about it. I just -- it's very possible, especially when I see what's going on in Germany now. And it scares me. The unification of Germany scares me, absolutely.

On the other hand, we have both gone back to Germany, my husband and I. I wanted to go back because my father's buried in Frankfurt. And I wanted after many years saying, "I don't want to go back. I don't ever want to go back." Something all of a sudden -- I guess as you get older -- and I'm not old -- drew me there.

And my husband didn't want to go. And he said, "You go, and we'll meet somewhere else, and we'll meet in England." When it came right down he didn't want me to go alone. So he went. It was almost like a catharsis. It was something that we felt such hatred and such animosity.

Yet when we looked at the young people there, I couldn't feel any hatred. They looked just like my kids, jeans, long hair, you know, and the whole bit. They were like any of the kids here. It was just when we saw the older people, and that, I just -- I was seething. My

husband was seething. And we felt such hatred.

It was good. I mean, we talked a lot about it while we were there, much more than we did here, ever. And a lot of it came out while we were there, which was very good. So it was good for both of us to get some of it out of our system because we really have never -- my husband talks very little about his experience in Buchenwald. He does not like to talk about it. It's a closed chapter, like it is with a lot of us. And we need to -- it was finally a little breakthrough. We talked about, sure, he and I talked about it.

We never talk German at home, never. German has really not existed for us. Our kids have never heard us, except once in a while when there was something we wanted them not to hear we, you know, as they were growing up. Later on they took German in school and we couldn't do that anymore. But we never speak German to this day. We always speak English. It's just a closed chapter in our book.

Q Does the war still affect you despite the fact that you try to keep it out of your conscious life?

A I think it always affects us. It's always somehow in our background, although, it's so far in my background that I really have to think of some of the things. I just don't remember. I know they must be there.

But I just, you know, like the Kristallnacht. Maybe if I really sat down and thought very intensely about it, but I really don't want to. It's something that's gone. It's a closed chapter.

Q Do you remember any particular incidences that you left out or stories that you would like to add to this?

A Such as what?

Q Oh, anything. I don't know, any particular incidences you remember as a child or in school or leaving, the feelings you had leaving the country that you were raised in?

A Well, I was -- in one way I was glad it was sort of -- I tried to look at it as an adventure going to England. And I was wondering, well, it hit me after I was there and was alone and was speaking -- was not speaking the language, and it hit me. But I looked upon it as an adventure that would be helpful in my life. And, oh, it's great. I get to see a different country.

And the impact didn't hit me at the time, which was a very merciful thing. It was great that I didn't know what was in store and what, you know, what was ahead of me. It's always good not to know what's ahead of you. But it was a sobering experience all of a sudden being in a big town, in London, you know, finding your way around and not having money, just very little.

But God, I was determined to rise above all of this. I wasn't about to let this get me down. And I was -- God, I have friends -- I have girlfriends who became prostitutes, coming from wonderful, affluent homes. And they couldn't take this life, the poverty and what it entailed. And they found somebody and who kept them. Oh, my God, how could they do that? I mean, they had the same upbringing that I had. And maybe moreso, because I came really -- when my father died when I was 11, but I guess the values that my mother instilled in both my brother and me were very solidly entrenched.

And I thought, "Well, there must be other ways to rise above this." And I worked. I mean, I worked all my life. I worked from the day as a student nurse, as a -- in England, I worked all my life until now. And, you know, raising children is hard work. You want to do the best you can with what you've got. And you want to do a good job with your kids. And I think we did a good job. All our kids are great kids. They all achieved a lot of things, doing well.

And so I think all in all, life has been very good to me. I've got a very supportive husband, couldn't have a better husband. And now we enjoy what the fruits of our labor. We both retired the 1st of April. My husband has taken an office in San Rafael and he does consulting

work. And I'm going to start working for CASA, which is a court appointed special advocate for children. And I'm going to start that class next week. And I'm going to start that.

And we travel. We enjoy traveling. We want to travel a lot, although, we've always traveled quite a bit. We've been to Israel. We've been to Europe several times. So now I must say, life is great, as long as we have our health and the children are doing well, it's fine.

Q Do you have any extended family left in Germany?

A No.

Q Do you have any that stayed during the war?

A No, everybody got wiped out. My mother's brother, who went to Theresienstadt, they both were taken to Theresienstadt. He died of hunger. He was a wonderful person, a businessman. He starved to death. Came always crying to my mother, "I'm hungry. Give me something to eat." And you know, it was just one of those things. He said, "I don't have anything." And there was no food. So luckily, he died. I mean, his only son was taken away. His wife had died of cancer a long time before that.

So there's really nobody left. I have nobody. My only brother died of cancer 15 years ago. My uncles -- I had an aunt who disappeared, and uncles and I have no idea

what happened. There was one cousin of mine who lives in New York. We're not very close. We lost contact. And they're very much older. They had two kids that were my brother's and my age. But, no, there isn't anybody. My husband has relatives in Israel.

And my husband has stories to tell. I don't know whether he would come here. I wish he would, but he may. He said, "You let me know what it's like and then maybe I'll go."

A Do you have any questions? I'm sure you must have questions.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. EMILY SILVERMAN:

Q Yes. I think we didn't get your father's name.

A My father's name was Hugo, H-U-G-O, Hugo Muntzer.

Q I just want to get some factual questions, your uncle's name, your mother's brother?

A The oldest one was also named Hugo. She had a sister who died whose name was Hedrick. My real name, my given name is Hedrick Elizabeth. The one that was in the concentration camp with her was Karl.

Q And what was your mother's maiden name?

A Bendel.

Q Bendel?

A It's from the department. And it was spelled a little different B-A- with an umlaut. And he changed his name to B-A-E-N-D-A-L. And, yeah.

Q I just wanted to get the family names.

A And I had only one brother.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q Did he have a family?

A No, he was married to a Catholic woman who was first quite a shock to us that when my mother and I heard that he was marrying a Catholic woman. She turned out to be a wonderful person. She was -- she's a retired colonel in the army. And they met -- she was one of his students at the language school. And they fell in love, got married. There were no children, unfortunately. My brother died.

We were -- they were busy people. We were busy people. They lived in Monterey. We lived here in Marin. And actually, since my brother's death my sister-in-law and I have become a lot closer. We visit back and forth. A couple of years ago I had surgery and she came, since she's retired, she came to our house and took care of my husband and me. She cooked. And she's just a wonderful, really extremely bright, intelligent person.

So we were great friends and visit back and forth. Anytime I have a chance I buzz down there and stay with her. I go to church with her, to mass.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. EMILY SILVERMAN:

Q That's great. Can I ask some more questions? Do you remember the name of the hospital in Berlin that you worked at or at all?

A It was -- it was orthodox. There was only one orthodox hospital, orthodox Jewish hospital.

Q It's okay.

A It had a name.

Q After Kristallnacht if your mother hadn't forced you to get out, what was your plans, to finish nursing?

A Oh, yeah.

Q And go to Palestine?

A Yes.

Q Did Kristallnacht really alter your feelings or had your feelings been altered earlier?

A Well, Kristallnacht altered my feelings, yes. After that it was -- although, I really didn't want to leave before finishing my training, even I saw the handwriting on the wall and realized that it's -- you know, it's no use

staying here because things got that bad.

I mean, until Kristallnacht I really -- God, I went out still in Berlin. I met friends and things weren't -- you know, the individual -- I didn't look Jewish. And I didn't act Jewish. An individual could always sort of disappear in the crowd a little bit. But after that it was pretty clear that, you know, it's no use staying here. Things are not going to get any better, at least not for a long time. I just don't know how people could have been so shortsighted in '37, '38, you know.

Q So you already had your plans made like in '37, '38, that you were going to become a nurse and go make Aliyah and go to --

A -- and go to Palestine.

Q And Kristallnacht just speeded it up for you?

A Yeah.

Q Now, going back to your brother. He left in '35. What was the name of the scholarship and what exactly was he going to do a PhD in America? What exactly was the special thing he got?

A He was very gifted in languages. And he -- his PhD, believe it or not, is in old Icelandic.

Q That's very interesting.

A Okay. That might tell you something. He taught German and French at Rockhurst University when he

came out of the army. Then he taught at the -- when he came to Pacific Grove he taught German and French and I guess maybe Icelandic.

Q So he had finished Gymnasium and he was going off to study at the university in America?

A He was in Cinncinatti.

Q And this was a special scholarship that was only given to one Jewish student?

A To one student once a year.

Q And was '35 the last time they handed that out to a Jewish student?

A I don't know. I really don't know.

Q That's very interesting.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q Do you know the name of the scholarship? Do you know whose auspices it came through?

A No. I can dig that out for you. I can find that for you, if you want to.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. EMILY SILVERMAN:

Q And what was the name of the teacher that helped him get the scholarship? Do you remember his

teacher's name at all?

A It could be Mr. Jungblut, J-U-N-G-B-L-U-T, and it could be another one, too. I can check that out at home, too, and let you know.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q Do you remember ever getting any other help from non-Jews during this period?

A (Shaking head.)

People were so afraid. They were so scared, you know. Even this teacher came at night when it was dark. And people were scared. You know, children denounced their parents, parents denounced their children if they weren't Nazis, if they hadn't joined a group, a Hitler youth group, or whatever.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. EMILY SILVERMAN:

Q Moving along, what was the name of the family? Were they a Jewish family that your mother asked to send you off to a domestic? I know that you talked about working for a Jewish family. What was the name of the first family that you stayed with? Were they friends from Germany?

A Yes, they were friends. This was a young man

who was a dentist. And his mother and my mother were childhood friends. And she had -- he had -- she was a widow. She brought up their two kids. He came to England in '33, '34, I think, and was an established young dentist.

And they gave me this -- I mean, they saw that I would get this domestic permit, with the understanding that I could not stay with them, that I would move on from there. I could stay with them as long as I -- until I have a job, which I did. And three weeks later I had a job. You know, I went job hunting. And they were -- you know, that was the understanding, that I could not stay with them for good.

And if my English had been good, which I then cursed that it wasn't, I could have been his -- he was looking for an office -- for somebody in the office. And with my nurses training I would have been the ideal person to help him in the office, assist him. But my English -- so I couldn't. I cursed that many times.

Q I skipped a question I had. Do you remember at all what the name of the synagogue that your brother was bar mitzvah'd in? Was it a one shot time that you -- one deal time that you went for your brother's bar mitzvah? Do you remember which synagogue in Frankfurt it was?

A Yeah, it was the big reformed synagogue at the Kliniksteinenstrasse, yeah, it was the big reformed

synagogue there.

Q And your family had an affiliation with that synagogue?

A Yes, a very loose affiliation. My mother had a very loose affiliation. And I think she had this -- Rabina Salisberg was the Rabbi there. And I think my mother talked to him a couple of times. I think it was always hard on her that my father didn't want to have anything to do with religion at that time.

Q Moving back to England now, I found it really interesting that you worked in Anna Freud's nursery. Did you get to meet Anna Freud?

A Oh, yes.

Q Was she refugeed, too, or had she gotten earlier to England?

A Well, she went out with her father.

Q Right. In '38?

A Much before that, in '33 or '34, much before that. They were really -- '34, I believe. They had a very nice home in Hampstead. And she practiced, I mean, she was a practicing psychoanalyst. And she was the head of this home, which was -- they were actually three homes -- which was financed by the American Foster Parent Plan.

So we had actually a good life there. We had food, the food that was sent from here. And we were all

fairly well paid and had a pretty good life there, except for the war, of course.

Q Was she trying to help young women or Jewish refugees from Europe --

A Not particularly.

Q -- getting jobs?

A No, no.

Q Or just anybody, anyone that was qualified?

A Anyone that could be helpful to her projects, to her, you know, work with the children.

Q Did you ever meet Freud?

A No, he was dead. He was already dead, yeah. But we had regular sessions with her. She was a great lady. However, she was a very one-sighted person. I mean, she only knew her work and nothing else, hardly anything else mattered to her. But she was wonderful with the kids and it was great working there.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q Because it was her clinic did you earn better money? Were you a little more comfortable than some of your other friends?

A Yes, yes, because it was all financed with American money. And the food, you know, and the

accommodations were great, you know. I had my own room and an apartment in Besel Park Garden. For us that was plush, almost, you know. And great people, great people to work with, a lot of nice people. It was a very stimulating, very intellectual surrounding with lots of room for learning and very stimulating.

God, I learned a lot. I wish I could have applied all of it to my own children. But it doesn't work that way.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. EMILY SILVERMAN:

Q Can I ask some more questions? You mentioned once that you tried to make contact with your mother. This, you know, of course, was probably a major problem. What organizations did you go through, just the Red Cross? Direct mail? Did you try to send any underground messages that came across or was there any other contact whatsoever, just through the Red Cross?

A No, there were a couple of Jewish organizations.

Q Do you remember the name of these organizations that were trying to get contact?

A I don't. It was primarily the Red Cross. And what was that one? It was -- no, I don't remember the name

of the organization that I approached and told them my story, that my mother was left in Germany. And everybody said they would try. Everybody was trying to be helpful. But it was the money. It was strictly a money matter because you needed such a high guarantee for older people who, you know, they knew couldn't work there and couldn't, you know, would probably be a ward of the state, because neither my brother nor I had enough money to support her once she'd get there.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q What do you mean by "guarantee"?

A You needed a tremendous sum of a guarantee, financial guarantee, for the older person who you brought over who was not able to work any more. I don't remember exactly how much it was but it was a sum that I mean was unbelievably high that we couldn't even think of ever getting together between my brother and I.

If this old uncle, this Mr. Baendal, you know, if we could have gotten to him it would have been nothing to him. But my brother couldn't get first place and he tried, he really tried.

MS. EMILY SILVERMAN: I think that's it.

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EXAMINATION

BY MS. BARBARA HARRIS:

Q Thank you, very much. You've been very gracious with your time. I'd like to ask you just one question, and that is, how was this experience for you? Was it difficult or less difficult than you thought?

A The one part, yes, just the one part. The rest was sort of -- especially since there's so many things that I sort of shoved in the background, you know, that doesn't readily come out. It will. That I wish sometimes I could recall but I just -- I think if I would stew long enough over it, if I had more time and really dig into it I could bring some of those things back, but I also don't see any reason to bring up all this hard stuff and make your life miserable over it. Again, it's -- to me, it's worthless really to dig up all those old -- it should be perpetuated. I realize that. And our children should know about it and the future generation should, but I'm sure there are a lot of people who can delve more into their past and maybe even enjoy it. I don't.

That's why, you know, I was very hesitant. It took me quite a long time to make up my mind to whether I should do this or not. And I told my story superficially to people a lot of times who were -- especially non-Jewish people, "What was it like during the war in England and

London, the blitz and all that?"

And I always say, "It was another life." It was. It's -- I'm so far removed from this now that I just -- a lot of things I just don't remember, don't want to remember about it any more. The fear and all this kind of -- it's unnecessary garbage that you carry with you, I think. It wasn't garbage at the time. But it's good to be able -- for me, it's good to be able to laugh about it and push it aside and not dwell on it.

And we talk about it on Pesah, for instance. My husband brings up there is a -- my father-in-law and his father wrote biographies about this time. And so there is a lot of it that is written, documented, that we have. And every Pesah my husband reads certain segments and prepares the Seder for that, uses part of it without being too much of a tear jerker, because neither of us want to be tear jerkers.

And neither of us want to have -- we have one good friend there. She is the wife of a local judge. And she always breaks down and cries at stories like that. And we know it's good when Dottie cries. Then we know we hit upon something. And I don't mean to make fun of it, but it's -- we were striking or he was striking a cord, and that's part of what we want without dwelling, you know, too much on this.

Q May I ask the name of your father-in-law and the name of the title of his book?

A It's just an autobiography. His name was Dr. Max Kirschner and he was one of the greatest people alive, as far as I'm concerned.

Q Was that book published?

A No, no it's just -- he just typed it and my husband is now having it transcribed and made into a form of a -- so that it can be published. And then I'm sure he's going to write maybe his experiences, too.

Q Wonderful. We'd certainly like to see that here in the library.

A It's fabulous. It's really fabulous. And my brother wrote something, too, that some of his experiences that might be interesting, too. My sister-in-law had it -- had made some -- she had it -- not published. She had it made into a book form, had it typed, and so that we have something there, too, from him. So that's interesting.

I'm sure you hear so many stories about that. Every story is heartwrenching and different, and people's attitudes are different, I'm sure. And some people need to talk about it. Some people, you know, it's hard for them to talk. Some people don't want to talk about it. I'm sure you come across all kinds.

Q Yes, we do. Do you have any documents that you

have saved, correspondence with your -- attempted correspondence with your mother?

A We have some Red Cross messages, yes.

Q You do?

A Yeah.

Q We would love to photograph those for the library at some point.

A Okay, okay.

Q That would be wonderful. And perhaps your brother's manuscript might find a home here, also?

A Okay.

Q Anything to add?

A Oh, God, there's lots and nothing that comes readily to my mind at this point.

Q You know you can call us if you need us. Thank you very much for your time.

A All right. You're welcome.

(Whereupon the interview was concluded.)