

Interview with Margaret Berlin  
Holocaust Oral History Project  
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BY CONSTANCE BERSTEIN:

Q I'm talking with Margaret Berlin today. It's August 9th. We are at the Holocaust Center in San Francisco. Margaret, what I would like to do is simply let you tell your story and I want to begin at the very beginning when you were a child, something about your family and where you were born and your grandparents and what your life was like when you were a little girl.

A Okay. I was born in Oxberg. It's a small town in Bavaria. I had a very happy childhood. I had an older brother. My father, together with my uncle, had a factory, manufacturing men's sports clothes and my mother didn't work. When my father's mother died, I was four. But I do remember her and my other grandmother. My mother's mother, she was still in Oxberg when I emigrated. One grandfather died very long ago when my father, his father, when my father was 18. So, he had to support the family after his death and my other grandfather died when I was a year old. So, I don't remember him.

Q So, your mother and father were originally from--

A From Oxberg.

Q From Oxberg?

A Yes.

Q So, your bulk of the family is there. You must have had a large family and cousins and aunts?

A Well, my mother had a sister and so I had my older brother and two older cousins and we were a very close family. We met every Friday night at my grandmother's.

Q At your mother's mother's?

A Yeah.

Q Both families?

A Yeah, both families and also they were in business together, my father and my uncle.

Q In the clothing business?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q What did your father's father do?

A I don't remember, because he died when my father was a your man. I don't know.

Q And that's when your father went into the business?

A No. He did not go into that business. He was bookkeeper for another firm and later when he married my mother he went in to this business because this was my grandmother's business on my mother's side.

Q I see.

A And built it up. It was a small tailoring business. But he and my uncle built it up and in the end we had 400 employees.

Q 400?

A Yes.

Q So, it was a big plant?

A Yes, yes.

Q How did your mother and father meet, do you know?

A No, I don't

Q Well, if this were such a big plant, you must have been a wealthy family?

A We were well-to-do, yes.

Q What kind of a house did you live in?

A We lived in apartments in Germany. Very few people had houses. Although, my father would have liked a house, my mother was not in favor. We lived in very nice apartments and we took summer vacations every year.

Q Where did you go?

A Always to the mountains.

Q To Austria?

A Austria, Switzerland, because my father loved the mountains. Once, when I was 7, I had been sick for a long time and so a specialist recommended that I go to the seaside for a change of climate and I was thrilled. It was a change from going to the mountains.

Q Where did you go?

A Actually, I was thrilled at the prospect of it, but it didn't come off because another doctor advised that we go high, so we did end up in Switzerland.

Q Again?

A Yeah. And I never got to see the seaside until I was 16 or so.

Q How big was Oxberg?

A Oxberg had 175,000.

Q And were there very many Jews?

A About a thousand.

Q Oh, so very few Jews?

A Yes.

Q And did you feel anti-Semitism? Did you go to a Jewish school?

A No, I don't think there was a Jewish school. As a child, no, I didn't feel any anti-Semitism.

Q Your friends were all Christians?

A Some Jewish. In school, I had Gentile friends.

Q but, being Jewish in the environment where there was so few Jews, you must have felt different. You had your holidays separate from Christmas holidays.

A We were able to take off from school for the Jewish holidays. It's hard to say. We were really assimilated.

Q Did you go to a temple?

A Yes, I had a religious school, Hebrew. We went to temple. We had a children's service Saturday afternoons and always for the high holidays.

Q But, you considered yourself very assimilated into the Jewish community?

A Yes, definitely.

Q So, any anti-Semitism? Where was the first inkling of this in your family?

A When I was about 10. I was at a children's summer camp in Bavaria and there I felt it for the first time and that was in '31.

Q Do you remember how you felt it?

A Yes. I think there were remarks about Jews by older boys and there was swastikas and this was a place where Hitler got started.

Q And you knew what a swastika meant?

A Yes, that it was a symbol of Nazism. We didn't know too much. This was still very early and everything came so gradually and my father was a patriot fighting World War I and even after Hitler came to power, he and a lot of people thought this can't last. This is insane. It won't last, Holocaust. And of course this was his downfall, because he didn't make up his mind soon enough to emigrate.

Q When you first felt this anti-Semitism, did you talk with your mother and father about it?

A Yes, I told them.

Q What did they tell you?

A I don't really remember.

Q Was it surprising for them?

A No, I don't believe so. I don't think so.

Q What about with your brother, did you talk to your brother about this?

A No, we weren't really very close. He was seven or eight years older, so when you're a child, it was a big difference. He was at a different level.

Q So, what kind of school did you go to?

A I went to, well, four years of elementary school and then to a girl's school. There were two divisions. One was called (letseim) and the other was called (gignoxseim) and (gignoxseim) was going on to a big tour, which is for transfer to a university and choose that. I had Latin and English and French, but in the end, I was not allowed to finish. There was, in '37, that was the end of our school, because no Jews were allowed.

Q So, let's talk about that process, that gradual process and more and more rules and laws about what you could do and couldn't do. After this first feeling of anti-Semitism<sup>m</sup> when you were 10, tell me a little bit about what happened when you were 11 and 12 as much as you can remember.

A Well, when I was 12, Hitler came to power, 'cause before that I remember there was one chancellor after another that didn't last very long. And Germany was in ?? and everybody promised wonderful things and so did Hitler, of course. But, at the same time, we knew what Hitler had in mind to do to the Jews up to a point, I guess. We never did read the

book, Mein Kampf, but he made it clear after a while what he wanted to do, what he had in mind. Germany at that time did need some help and as I said, he, like all the other chancellors before him promised great things. So, I guess people fell for him.

Q So, he came in power when you were 12?

A Yeah.

Q And you remember that, when he--

A Yeah, I think so, yes.

Q Did you have a reaction in your home?

A Oh, it was not a happy one.

Q People were very concerned?

A Yes, yes.

Q when was the next time you felt something, the result of this?

A I guess later in school, but I don't--that was in high school.

Some friends turned against the Jewish students. We had a course, (ratsankunda) which means students were explained how wonderful the Aryan race is.

Q Everybody had to take that course?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q That must have been difficult. I mean, did they single out Jews as being inferior in the course?

A No. It was merely mainly to point out how wonderful the Aryan race was and it had to be preserved. And that the race is superior. I remember they took head measurements of the Aryans. The Aryans were supposed to have a superior brain. One of my Jewish friends turned out to have the best measurement.

Q Oh, that must have been funny.

A But, I think later we were excused from that course, but then there was an elective, typing, and I remember registering for it and we

got started and the second time we came to the room there was a note, a typed note on my typewriter. And it said, there were a lot of applicants for that course, and it said, in so many words, in order that the Aryans could participate, the Jewish ones were excluded and I found out later that my best girlfriend had begun this.

Q What do you mean?

A She had organized this because there were too many applicants for the course. She wrote this little slip to let us know that the Jewish students were excluded.

Q You mean she took control?

A Yeah.

Q It could have been with the teacher's permission? And how did you know it was your best friend?

A Well, someone else told me.

Q Did you ever talk to her about that?

A No, I just wasn't friends with her any more.

Q When you found out?

A When I found out.

Q So, this is what you meant, that friends began turning on you?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q So, how did you feel when you got that note? What did you think was happening?

A Oh, it was just horrible. You know, just because I was Jewish. I couldn't do certain things and of course, there were gradually so many other restrictions.

Q Tell me about those, the other restrictions.

A Well, I wrote some of these down. There were signs outside

swimming pools. We would go swimming every day in the summer. "Dogs and Jews forbidden". Many places. So that was swimming pools. We couldn't participate. We couldn't join any clubs.

Q School clubs, you mean?

A No, like tennis and sports clubs. And we couldn't go to the movies or hairdresser.

Q You couldn't go to the movies?

A No, no. that happened a little later.

Q How could they identify that you were Jewish?

A They couldn't. But, you didn't really want to be caught.

Q Were people caught?

A That, I don't know. You were so intimidated. You didn't want to cause any trouble. Um, there was an organization. Some couple founded a sports club for Jewish youth and actually we had a wonderful time there. Everybody met, everybody was friends there and the athletics and ball games there and everything. Tennis and a lot of friendships were founded there. but, we were definitely excluded from all other clubs.

Q How old were you at this time?

A Oh, my early teens.

Q 13, 14?

A Yeah, 14.

Q What other things, any other things you were excluded from?

A Well, then things that didn't affect me personally. Lawyers were no longer allowed to practice, nor were doctors. And businesses were boycotted and when I was 16, I had to leave the school.

Q You weren't allowed to continue in school?

A No, no. And I wanted to prepare myself for profession. So, I went



to Berlin to attend a fashion school, design dress making and so on. That was also a Jewish school, of course, and my brother had been trained originally to take over the firm and all aspects of the trade: business part, tailoring, organizing part, retail, textile, knowledge of textiles, and so on. And he also went to Berlin to study photography and I study fashion business. Later I was supposed to become an apprentice in a fashion house in another city in order to continue this education. This was only a year an a half or two years and by that time that business had been closed. It had been long-established. Very good fashion house and so I went to a-- to study some more with a dressmaker in my home town for a short while and one day when she was, I think in Munich to buy fabrics and to see to her business, the Gestapo came and closed the whole business and so that was the end of that.

Q Her dress making business?

A Her dress making business.

Q What year was that?

A That was in '37--'38. '38.

Q So, then what did you do?

A Then I went to a family who had a very fine household to learn cooking. They still had a cook at the time, so that I could emigrate and do something really practical.

Q Okay. Well, what had happened to your father's--

A The business?

Q The business in the meantime?

A Well, he couldn't sell. He had to give it up.

Q When?

A That was already in, I think, in '38.

Q So, was there a process of steps, though, where he wasn't able to buy certain things, where he couldn't make the business work or was it working fine and then one day they said, you have to sell?

A I think that was the case. He still had clients for the business, but he was not allowed to operate. And, there was pressure and he had to give it up. He was given a very small sum as compensation.

Q And this was around '38 or so?

A Yeah.

Q Tell me about your parents during this time. What was happening with them? What were they telling you and what were they talking among themselves? Were they thinking about leaving? What did you talk about on Friday nights?

A Well, of course, we realized that it was going to last at least for a while and that we would--they wanted us to emigrate, certainly, because they saw there was absolutely no future for us in Germany. My father, I think, was still hoping that it would blow over and that he could stay. My mother and grandmother--but gradually he realized that there was no future for them any more either and they registered at the American consulate and we were--my brother registered earlier. I was really too young then to emigrate on my own. My brother left in '38 and in fact during the Kristallnacht, the Gestapo came to the house, the 10th of November, very early in the morning. And, luckily he was already in the United States.

Q So, he got to the United States. Did you have relatives here?

A We had relatives, yes. My father had several cousins, but we were not able to get an affidavit for my brother. He was a young man, was barely able to support himself, so after a while, he did get an affidavit from the wife of Rabbi Steven Weiss, probably familiar with, and her name

was Lucy Waterman Weiss and she felt she was part of my family. My family name was (Fasserman).

Q How did she feel that?

A Well, her maiden name was also (Fasserman) and Waterman.

Q How did your brother make contact with her?

A That I don't recall any more.

Q She was in the States?

A She was in the States, yes. My mother got an affidavit from her and he was able to leave.

Q Would you feel -- you mean that took a lot of ingenuity?

A Yes. My father tried for a long time. We got in touch with cousins who were wealthy. I think one was a lawyer and I don't know what the others were, but he got out. That was the main thing and--but since my brother was not there, the Gestapo took my father to the local prison at that time.

Q How long was he there?

A He was there for a week. We didn't know when he was taken away where he would be going because, for instance, my cousin's husband was taken to (Dachau?) . Some of my friends, young friends, were taken to (Dachau?).

Q At this time?

A At this time, yes. We did find out that he was in the local prison and we appealed to a bookkeeper in our firm who had been there for about 20 years and he knew that my father was a decent person, to put in a good word for him to be released. He was not so healthy any more at that time, but she refused. But he was released after a week and he survived.

Q Did the Gestapo say why they were taking him?

A No, no. They did not explain or give you any reason for their actions.

Q And then he was just suddenly released. You don't know why?

A Don't know why. I guess because he was older at the time.

Q And you say at this time cousins were taken to (Dachau). What did you know about Dachau at the time?

A We knew that it was a camp for actually a lot of political prisoners. A lot of Communists, I think were there. Well, as you know, not only Jews were taken to these camps, but my cousin was there a long time.

Q When was he taken?

A Well, on the 10 of November--9th, 10th of November. The thing was that the people who were in concentration camps were told they would be released if they could prove that they could emigrate and so my cousin was able to emigrate. He and his wife and their little girl went to England.

Q How were they able to do that?

A On one trip to Switzerland, my aunt had befriended some English-Jewish couple and she asked them if her daughter and child and husband could stay with them for a while and they took them in.

Q So, how long was your cousin in Dachau before they released him?

A About six weeks, I think.

Q And you say other people from your family were taken to Dachau?

A No, no. My family was (I couldn't understand).

Q So you knew that Dachau was a place they were taking Jews as well as political prisoners?

A Yes, yes.

Q Well, tell me, when did they start taking Jews to Dachau, when you were--

A I think not until Kristallnacht.

Q So this was all just after a while?

A But before, we knew that political prisoners had been there.

Q When was Kristallnacht?

A From the 9th to the 10th of November, '38.

Q So immediately after that?

A It was at that time, yes, and also at that time our synagogue had been put on fire. My aunt and uncle at the time were on a trip away. I forget where, but there all of the Jews were rounded up and taken to the synagogue and then the synagogue was put on fire. But, I think they let the people out first cause my uncle was still live.

Q Tell me about Kristallnacht. Do you remember--how did you hear about it?

A Well, first the Gestapo came to the house. This was early morning. I guess in some places it started earlier. My aunt was staying with us at the time. She lived in Berlin. She was a widow and she often came to us and we heard shots in the street so of course we were terribly scared and this was when my father was taken in and we didn't know what to do, really. And the synagogue was put on fire.

Q So what did you do that day? You must have got--your mother must have gone to her family.

A Well, my grandmother had lived with us at that time. This was a family and my aunt and uncle were aware, some people just went on a train and went to Hamburg because Hamburg was supposedly a safe place at the time, but it wasn't either. They were a little more tolerant there. My husband is from Hamburg, but he was taken to concentration camps, so

we just stayed home, scared.

Q So what happened when your father came home?

A Well, by that time we really all tried to emigrate but knew it was getting more and more serious and he tried to go as a teacher to the (Kichner camp) in England. I don't know if you are familiar with this. As a matter of fact, my husband went there after concentration camp. This was an old army camp, but some Jewish organizations took in young people and until they were able to find, maybe some employment. There were a lot of donations as far as food and so on to keep young Jewish people from Germany, there.

Q And your father applied to go?

A As a teacher, for the teacher, but he didn't get the job. But, he tried. I was just about 18 and I tried to go to England until my quota number came up. We had registered before that but there was a long wait before the quota number came up. I tried to get a job as mother's helper, but that wasn't so easy either. Some of my friends left already. They had found a job, well eventually some friends of mine met a family in England. The girl took care of the little boy for a while, but she did something else, so they asked her if she knew someone who could do that, so they referred to me and I applied. I was accepted there, so I was able to emigrate in June 1939 and my parents, of course, were still waiting for the quota number. My father studied English. Well, we all took a lot of English classes to prepare for emigration. I learned it in school, but I don't think he did. At the time, my mother knew some English, so he studied very hard every morning and he also took classes in photography, color photography in Munich because there were better facilities and so on and this still happened after I left. For a short time, we were able to

communicate until the war.

Q Until when?

A Until the war came. After the war broke out, we were able to communicate through the Red Cross, message of 25 words, which was not very good. But, this went on until 1942. Well actually my parents received a visa just shortly before the American Consulate closed during the war. So, that was one step further, but they needed transportation. They could not go by the Atlantic. They could have gone via Russia, Japan, east, but their passage would have had to be paid in dollars and there was nobody to pay for it. My brother couldn't afford it and I certainly couldn't, so they were left behind. Imported. My grandmother also lived with my parents. She was also registered at the Consulate. She was, of course, older at that time, but she would have gladly emigrated. My aunt, who stayed with us during the Kristallnacht, she had to go back to Berlin where she lived. She wanted to move to Oxberg at least to be with my parents since she was all alone, but the police wouldn't give her permission to move. So, she was later deported to (?).

Q When was the last you heard from your parents?

A That was in 1943. I don't recall exactly how I knew at the time that they were deported. They at least found out that I was going to be married then and I'm sure that was great comfort to them, because I was completely alone in England. Of course, it was a lot worse for them than for me. When you have children you know how you are concerned about safety and so on.

Q Where were they sent?

A They were sent to (sounds like Orangewood). My brother later investigated that, but they didn't survive.

Q You found out when they were sent and how long--

A Well, in the beginning of 1943. This document, these letters that I have here, describes life of Jewish people in Oxberg before importation.

Q After you had already left?

A Yeah, after I left.

Q And what was the description?

A I can't read the whole thing. They were--my parents owned a house with three apartment. Originally we lived in one of them and my aunt and uncle in the other one and the third one was rented. Of course, Jews were not allowed to live in houses that were owned by non-Jews, so it seems that almost everybody who was left in Oxberg moved into my parents' house which was three apartments, but there is a description of it, too. But, ten to 15 people to one kitchen. But, this wasn't the worst. Later, they were moved to barracks, horrible situation.

Q Your parents?

A Yes, everybody.

Q In Oxberg?

A Yeah.

Q And it's written in the letter?

A It's all described in the letter, but I'm sure they were there, also, these people. My father's name is mentioned there. My grandmother's name and just so many older people.

Q How old were your mother and father at this time?

A Not that old. My mother was born 1890. My father in 1877, so my mother was only 53 when they were deported. My father was 13 years



older. But, some of the people this man describes, were older yet. When I'm asked sometimes about medical history, about my parents, it's hard to say, because my parents didn't get very old. I don't know what sicknesses they had in their old age cause they didn't get very old. But, I know my mother was really never very strong. She had all kinds of digestive problems and rheumatism. My father had angina pectoris and I think it came on when Hitler came to power. But, they would have been very willing to emigrate and come clean homes like many other people did in England. And in the end my father did war work, worked in a balloon factory and my mother, I think, also she said she was happy that she could work so much. So, she really never was able to do that.

Q In Oxberg?

A Yes, in Oxberg. It was after I had left, of course.

Q That was to survive?

A Yes. They were told by the authorities to do that, to do war work.

Q Seems to me that the worst part of this--everything is terrible, of course, but the hard part seems to me was that your parents did have a visa and there was no way you could help them.

A Yes, yes.

Q This must have been terrible for your brother.

A It was. We were always hoping to be reunited in the United States.

Q And it was a matter of money?

A Yes, yes. And, of course, we couldn't take any money out of Germany, either. Our jewelry was confiscated, silverware was confiscated.

Q But it would have been possible for them to get passage and

everything at that time?

A I guess, the regular way across the Atlantic, but not the other way, going east. It was tremendous trip, more than half way around the world.

Q But the other way, across the Atlantic, that was closed?

A It was closed. The war was going on. My quota number came up in about 1940 and I had a visa. I was issued a visa in England. The American Consulate had evacuated out of London and I got a visa. But, I couldn't get passage either because of the war. So, I stayed and later on I met my husband.

Q So, tell me about what happened to you when you left England?

A Well, I was very lucky. It was a very nice family. The man was a dental surgeon and the little boy was very nice, four years old and I had to take care of him. Take him out and so on, teach him some German. He used to call me "Fraulein". But, I also had to do a lot of housework and I wasn't used to it and so all the other girls my age gained a tremendous amount of weight. I guess they ate more than ever, but that was minor. The people were very nice. They had made plans for vacation, but I guess there wasn't enough room for me, so they arranged that I go to London, stay with another family and they all took care of me in a very nice way. They knew that I wanted to go to America eventually, that I got my visa there, but they were expecting another baby and asked me if I would stay on even if I had my visa to take care of the boy. They were very happy with me and I agreed, but then a year after (?) and where I stayed was a (?) area in (Essex) and there was a lot of problems in England. They weren't very prepared for the war. They didn't know what to do with all the aliens, so there was an order that aliens had to leave the

( sounds like cottel) area. They were afraid of spies and there was an order that I had to leave within three days.

Q From their home?

A From their home, yes. Before that, I should say that a lot of aliens, refugees from Germany, were interned, my husband was one of them. I didn't know that at the time. I had to appear before the tribunal, so did everybody else and we were--well I was a friendly alien, catagorized, and not many girls or women were interned, however some were. But, a lot of young men. So, I had to leave within three days. I wanted to go to London and do dressmaking. My father had bought me a wonderful sewing machine and I took that with me and I wanted to do this for a living. But the family was rather concerned about me. I was only 19 and to go to a big city and so on, they arranged, somehow for me to have another job like mother's help. Their neighbors had company during that year I was there, a woman and her little girl and I befriended that little girl. I draw children and somehow my family got in touch with these people to ask if they needed help, if they would want me to come and that was in the Midlands of England and they agreed. So, it was agreed that I would go there, however, I had to wait for the police okay to move to this town. It was not a coastal town and in the meantime, I went to London to wait for this permission and that was really the sadest and loneliest day of emigration. I contacted some friends to stay with them until I could get the permission to go to this new job. There was no answer. It turned out later, they were interned also and then somehow I got a room to stay and I contacted, tried to contact another friend and couldn't get hold of her and then I was completely alone in a big city. I had a room in a horrible area and I was--felt really desolate. After a few days, I was able to

contact a friend and after a while I got permission to go to this new job and this was also a very, very nice family in (sounds like Lington Spa) which was a victorian spa very nice town near Burmingham, Stratford, Coventree and I stayed there for a year and then the people couldn't afford my help any more, but they introduced me to another family and I worked there. And, there was an organization, International Refugee Club which I joined and there were a lot of young people in this area, refugees and that is where I met my husband.

Q Tell me about that.

A Well, he had been living , after a lot of different experiences (bad ones), he had been living and working in Coventree. He was farmed out and moved to a place where I was staying. And, so we met.

Q At a party? At a dance?

A No, at a meeting of the club that we had every week-end. We had meetings and we met there.

Q Was he from Germany?

A Yes, he was from Hamburg.

Q So, how long did you know each other before you decided to get married?

A Oh, well, a year and a half, I think. He had a girlfriend at the time. He wasn't that interested in me.

Q Were you more interested in him.

A Yeah. I had been terribly lonely since I left home and so I didn't like the situation for that reason. So, I--we all today, do some kind of war work in a house and I didn't want to be confined to a munitions factory, so I joined a civil nursing reserve which was a war time nursing organization as a mobile member and this was something I was

more interested in. And, I had my training in Birmingham and then I was sent to different places, first to an TB sanitarium. I was there only briefly. Then they moved me to another one and that one was very bad. Sanitary situation was abominable. I was fortunate not to contract TB. They had advance cases there. Cats and food in the elevators, the patient's beds and so on. I had to do night duty there seven days a week and in the daytime do errands for the matron and this kind of thing. So, I applied to the regional officer for an interview for a transfer, which I got and I was transferred back to the place where my husband was living.

Q But you had meanwhile, quit your job with the family?

A Oh, yes, yes. There were live-in--in England, nursing was live-in.

Q But, you said it was volunteer, you were volunteer?

A No, no. It was a war time organization like an auxiliary nurse. We did the same work as Red Cross nurses did, but for pay.

Q But, did you have an alternative to doing that? Could you have stayed with the family or--

A Maybe I could have stayed with the family, well, no, no. We were all then asked to do war work, mother's help was not war work. We had to do some kind of work to help the war effort and this was one thing that I choose.

Q So, then you moved back to the place where your husband lived?

A Yes, I was still in the nursing reserve at a local hospital.

Q And he had since broken up with his girlfriend?

A I guess so, yeah. Yeah, he had--

Q And you had your eye on him the whole time?

A Oh, yes. We corresponded and came to visit. Transportation was

really a problem in England during the war. Our trip would take four to six hours, but that was not that important.

Q So, when did you get married?

A We got married in 1942. We met in July, '41 and got married December, '42.

Q Did you have a wedding?

A Yes, we had a wedding. We had a civil ceremony. We had no relatives so there was no point in any kind of religious wedding. It was a civil ceremony. We needed two witnesses. One was sick. We had to get him out of bed. The other one was okay, and that just proves that a big wedding doesn't necessarily make for a happy marriage.

Q So you have a happy marriage?

A Yeah.

Q Wonderful. So, after you got married, did you still work?

A I was still working, yes. Marriage was no excuse not to work for the war. We enjoyed things. We went bicycle. We had to work Sundays, too, but it was interesting, very interesting. I was able to watch a lot of operations. We had to tend for the patients before and after the operations. I really didn't have that much training. It was an intensive two week training course, but we were always under supervision and I worked quite a long time in pediatrics, orthopedics department and then I became pregnant and after three months, I was excused because there was a lot of heavy lifting to be done and I retired. I did some babysitting, too, for one of the doctors in the hospital. And then our daughter was born in this town. And a year later, we moved to London. At that time, my husband was working in Coventree also for the war work. He was doing grinding,

Triumph Engineering, but then after the war in Europe was over, we moved to London and he no longer had to do war work. He did some furniture repair first and then war damage repair which there was a lot to be done.

Q How long did you stay in London?

A Until '51, but my wish was--well, he started his business and he built up a clientele. It was hard because there was a lot of red tape for every job, lots of applications and paper work and so on. He was trained in the building business. He wanted to be on his own, but in the meantime my cousins were in the United States and my brother, of course, and I wanted to go there, too.

Q Which cousins were here?

A Well, the one that I grew up with, my mother's family.

Q And where were they located?

A They were in New York, but my brother was in Hartford, and he also thought that, you know, we could have better future especially for our daughter, too, in the United States. But, my husband wasn't in favor for a long time. I really had to work on it. It was hard because he had started a business. He would have had to start over again. He was about 30 at the time and he thought he was too old to start over, but eventually he agreed and we came to Hartford where my brother was. Well, we landed, of course, in New York and the whole family and some distant family, too, after 12 years. And we went to Hartford and it was very hard to get housing. We had a bedroom and use of the kitchen and bathroom in somebody's house and my husband started--that was February. It's hard in building trade in that climate. He didn't like it too much and housing was very bad and his brother had moved to San Francisco in the meantime, so

he said he would go to San Francisco and go see his brother and look around for a while and then decided what to do. Well, he went there, at that time there was not a direct flight from New York to San Francisco. He wrote back and said, Come. He arrived on a Saturday and in a month he was working and of course my brother was sad and in a way, I was sad, too because we had just been reunited with a family, with a family that was left, so I stayed in New York for a few days ~~with our daughter~~ just to visit for a little while and then we came out and started a new life here.

Q How many more children did you have?

A I have another son. He was born in San Francisco.

Q And you've been in San Francisco ever since?

A Not San Francisco, we lived there until '56. Almost all my husband's work was in Marin County and so we built a house.

Q Where?

A San Rafael. Are you familiar with the area? You know the civic center? You know, well that's a mile east of the civic center and we live just a little bit further, right in the woods.

Q That's a nice area.

A Yeah, it's wonderful.

Q So, I can imagine that you lived happily ever after at that point?

A Yeah.

Q What about your children, though. If I were to ask them what was the hardest part growing up with parents, survivors, what would they tell me?

A What was the hardest part for them?



Q Yes, for them growing up with survivors?

A I really wouldn't know because they didn't know of the hardship.

Q How do you think your experiences affected the way you raised your children or related to your children?

A Well, since we had a very unusual and hard youth, we wanted them to have a better life, of course. But, other than that--

Q Do you think you spoiled them?

A No.

Q You don't think--there are organizations of children of survivors so that there are some things these people feel that they have shared, some common concerns of being raised by survivors. Do you think that your experiences affected in any way the way you raised your children?

A I don't think so.

Q Well, how do you think--how do you carry this with you? How did it affect your life?

A Well, I felt very lucky to have survived. And didn't really worry about the hardship I had to go through because I knew that it was a lot harder for my parents while they were still alive, to have their child away in a strange country. That was something really I forgot to mention. When I was in England, my parents were still alive, briefly, and I was able to communicate. First it was even letters and then even a phone call and then through the Red Cross. I think my emotions froze. I just had to be very--normally I'm a very emotional person, but I have had to be very strong. Very--maybe, cold. I don't know. I just couldn't let myself go having left my parents behind, my grandmother and aunt and that lasted actually until I met my husband. I think then something thawed. But, coming back to my children, I don't know if our situation had any bearing on their upbringing

except for the fact that we were hoping to give them a better life, better youth, more carefree than ours was.

Q Do you have any habits in your life or any reactions to things as a survivor? For example, I talk to people who say they can't stand to throw away food because they starved in camp. Is there any kind of residue behavior that you carry with you?

A Well, I personally can't stand waste. But, you see, I didn't suffer, personally, didn't starve. There are always too many hungry in the world, for different reasons. I know my parents, I'm sure starved besides all of the other things they suffered, but other than that--

Q That hardest part of this, obviously, is your parents, thinking of what they suffered after that?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q What were other things beside being hungry?

A Well, that's common knowledge, isn't it?

Q Yes, but you were saying among the other things from the letters, for example.

A Well, these are only received fairly recently. I had dreams that certain terrible things happened to my parents and I'm convinced that those were always the times when the worst things happened to them.

Q What were your dreams?

A Oh, about atrocities and I don't recall in particular things, but it happened periodically.

Q How do you think your brother has survived this?

A My brother? Well, my brother is no longer alive. I would have to say, well, of course, we left for California and he was still in Hartford and soon afterwards he and his wife moved to Los Angeles. He was not able to

do much with his photography studies. He studied engineering in Hartford and then did some engineering work in Los Angeles, too. I don't--I really can't tell. He had no children. We corresponded regularly. I don't know how it affected him, really. We never were that close to talk about it. He was concerned about my welfare since he couldn't do anything about our parents. But, then in his middle 50's he suffered a stroke and lived for another 18 years, but was very sad existence.

Q One of the questions I wanted to ask is, what the are mechanisms that you used today to deal with your past in terms--people say they put it aside and go on living. Is that the way you--that you have felt that you put the unhappy things aside, the tragic things aside and you go on living?

A Yes, to a point. You have to go on living. But, you remember the wonderful times you had as a child and you remember your parents very dearly and you want to be a credit to them, but you can't dwell on the past. I think as with other things, especially sad experiences, I think everybody would try to put them aside and you have a tendency to remember happy events, I think that's human. But, you hope that things like that will never happen again. But, you're not convinced. I'm not convinced. I mean there is anti-Semitism everywhere.

Q In the States you feel it?

A Oh, well, we hear of incidents here in the city. There have been many incidents and other parts of the world, in France recently and Germany now and the skinheads. I'm afraid there always will be anti-Semitism. Racism. I'm hoping that international travel and as the world gets smaller should be more understanding because people meet, not governments. And I can't condemn people of other countries whose government is Communistic or whatever. It's the people, and I'm hoping that through world travel

and trade and so on, it's more understanding among people, so that a lot of things will not happen again, but there's no guarantee.

Q Do you know a lot of people in the area who are survivors?

A In this area?

Q Uh-huh. Do you associate with them?

A Yes, several. We don't have a large circle of friends, but yes, I know quite a few.

Q Is that helpful to talk to other people who have had similar experiences?

A You know, we don't talk about it. Even our close friends, no we don't talk about it. It's a long time ago now, it's over 50 years. We had a friend of mine who lives in New York, arranged a reunion of the survivors from our home town. It was two years ago in the Catskills and a lot of them came and it was a wonderful experience.

Q It must have been.

A But other than that, we don't really talk about our experiences. I don't even know a lot of what happened to my husband cause he doesn't like to talk about it, the concentration camp, I don't know any details. You can't dwell on the past.

Q What prompted you <sup>to</sup> come talk to us today?

A Our friend called us with the interview sometime ago, asked us and they gave our name.

Q And you agreed?

A Yes. We feel it's worthwhile and hopefully will do some good. In fact, I'm hoping to show this tape to our children because they don't even know a lot about our past.

Q This is something you haven't talked to them about?

A Well, certain things, yes.

Q It's strange, isn't it, the way we don't want our own children to know about these things?

A They know some facts, yes, but we don't elaborate.

Q You don't think it would be helpful?

A Yes, yes. Yes, I think definitely and especially my grandson. I mean he's too young now to listen to this, but it's already another generation. Many years, different lives. Different way of life. But, well, the main thing was that we wanted our children to have a more carefree youth than we had.

Q Is there something that you haven't said toady, that you haven't said, that I missed? You'll have a chance to answer questions.

A No. I can't--maybe there's something else in my notes here. Probably when I get home I'll think of something else. I don't believe so. Maybe this will interest you. We were invited to the rededication of the synagogue in Oxberg in 1985.

Q And did you say no?

A There are some Jews there, yes, but they are Jews who immigrated from Poland and Balkin States. I don't know. We had a liberal congregation of reformed--about the same as liberal Germany at the time. We had a very, very beautiful synagogue and as I mentioned, was destroyed, partially destroyed in the Kristallnacht and nothing was done to it for a long time. But it was a landmark and I think the state paid for the reconstruction and there was a rededication service and the former Jews from Oxberg were invited by the city for a week's stay. The trip was not paid, but a week's stay was paid for and my husband and I went and so did many other people, of course. And it was extremely moving. Very emotional, naturally. All kinds of dignitaries. We had a welcome by the mayor. The city hall luncheon and

all kinds of things. It was an experience. My husband was also impressed. You feel that now you are an American and you come back to the place where you grew up and you have family--all kinds of mixed emotions. And you meet all kinds of friends after 50 years. The speaker was the son of the rabbi who was rabbi in my days. The son was a little boy at the time, but he's rabbi now in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and he looked so much like his father and spoke like his father and it was just unreal. In fact, since we only had a civil ceremony, I would have liked a ceremony by this rabbi, a Jewish ceremony.

Q To get married?

A I'm a very sentimental person. But, there wasn't enough time. But, we talked to him. It was very, very moving, needless to say.

Q Have many German towns done that?

A Many German towns have invited the former, the people who used to live there, yes. And even paid more expenses, some trip for some of them out of town and they have a little guilty conscious, especially the younger people. I mean, people our age, probably all Nazis, and you don't want to associate with them unless you've known them personally and you knew about them. But, the younger generaton, there are a lot of people who want to make good im some way. But, I also know that many people like us will not set foot in Germany because they can't forgive what happened. Well, I can't forgive what happened, either, but it's a new generation and we took a trip before to Europe. We wanted to show our daughter the way we grew up, the background. We went to Hamburg and Oxberg and I mean there was time before--

Q How old was your daughter?

A She was 46.

Q How old are you?

A I am 69, closer to 70. I'm preparing myself mentally .

Q That's fantastic. You look very young.

A Thank you.

Q Anything else that you think we should know?

A No, can't think of anything.

Q Would you like to trade seats?

BY APRIL LEE:

Q Can you tell me a little bit about your husband? What kind of a man he is?

A About what kind of a man he is?

Q Yes.

A All right. Well, he is a very determined man. Let's see. I guess that's it. I fell for him in the beginning, but he didn't have the same feelings about me until he got to know me a little better, I guess. He's a very good family man, wonderful provider. He is, I guess, as emotional as I am, but he doesn't show it as much.

BY CONSTANCE BERSTEIN:

Q We're going to meet him aren't we?

A Yeah, you're going to meet him in about half an hour.

BY APRIL LEE:

Q Did he have any reluctance about doing this? You mentioned that he has had difficulty in telling you about his camp experiences and that you don't really know that much about it.

A Well, he was willing, because he feels that this is a good cause. For his 70th birthday we had a big party and he asked no presents, but to

but donations to the Holocaust Library. So, he has strong feelings about it but maybe he hasn't communicated as much about it.

Q And he's reached the point now where he wants to?

A I think so, yeah.

Q I was interested that you wanted to show this to your children also.

A Yes, especially because we haven't talked much about it.

Q Do you think that will in a way catalyze more talk about it that your children might welcome?

A I don't know.

Q Can you tell me just a little bit what your children are like as people? Are they more like your husband or you?

A Our daughter, I think, is more like my husband. She is like my husband. Likes to be his own boss and likes to guide people and organize people and our daughter is a lot like that also. Independent. She's a single mother by choice. She was married a few years in New York and didn't work out and she wanted to come back here. Well, they had an agreement to come back here together. He's a New Yorker and there were other reasons, too. And she came back. She probably would like to marry again, but she hasn't found the right person. But she wanted to have a child very badly and years were running out. So, she wanted to have artificial insemination in order to have a child and have the whole responsibility for the child. And, so that's what she did. And, I admire her for it. It takes courage. I would never have done anything like it, I'm sure.

BY CONSTANCE BERSTEIN:

Q Did she choose a donor?

A Yes, to a point, but it's anonymous, of course. The doctor who takes care of it has certain choices and she wanted to have a Jewish donor



and he's such a wonderful child.

BY APRIL LEE:

Q It's a little boy?

A It's a little boy, yeah.

BY CONSTANCE BERSTEIN:

Q And what about your son?

A Our son, he's much younger. He was born in San Francisco. In fact, at one time we had three nationalities in our family. We were German, our daughter was British and our son was American. I think he takes more after my family, already in looks and build. It took him a while to know what he really wanted to do. He did some traveling after high school. Then he is now also in the building business. He has his own firm in Sonoma County and he bought some land and lives in the caretaker's cottage there on this land. And then he created and built a vineyard. So, we feel we have roots in California now. This is a side line for him.

Q He grows grapes?

A Grows grapes, yes.

Q He has a vineyard?

A He has a vineyard, yes. And he started going to college. He wanted to be a film maker. He was a photographer for the school, for the yearbook and for school activities. And he was very talented. But, he couldn't--he didn't have patience to go to college. Even though he took his favorite courses in his first year, he decided it wasn't for him and in the meantime he wanted to travel. Did a lot of reading. He's very knowledgeable on many subjects--That's my husband's voice.

Q Ah, looking for your husband?

A Yeah, yeah. And he married last year, very nice, very loveable girl.

Q Jewish?

A No, she's of Irish descent.

Q How do you feel about that?

A I look at the person. Well, of course the Jewishness will disappear. I think, which is unfortunate, but as for the marriage, I do look at the person. He had a Jewish girlfriend before whom we did not like at all. And so in this particular case, this is the best choice. It is sad that many of our children or all of our friends' children actually have married non-Jews and this is the trend of the time, at least in this area, I think, more so than on the East Coast, New York area. But, she's a lovely person and my main concern is their happiness.

Q How old is your son?

A He's 37. He waited a long time. A lot of his friends were married and their marriages didn't work out and I think he was scared like a lot of young people are today, but I think they will be very happy.

BY APRIL LEE:

Q So, both of your children have had what you have wanted for them? A happy childhood and they achieved independence and productive lives?

A Yes, yes.

BY CONSTANCE BERSTEIN:

Q Can you tell us what your daughter did?

A Well, she went to Cal and she was very much in love with a young man and they were engaged to be married, but this young man was killed in a car accident before Christmas. They wanted to get married the following June and, of course, this was a tremendous trauma in her life. She deferred her finals. It was shortly before her finals. She couldn't go through. She did later and didn't have the courage to find out if she passed or what

her grades were. But, then after this happened she wanted to get away from it all and she joined the airlines. She joined Pan-Am just to get away. She wanted to have a new life, totally different and she was based in New York in the beginning and that is where she met her husband. And, later on, after the marriage didn't work out, she got a transfer back to San Francisco. She always wanted to be back in California, right in our area. And so, she's still with the airlines and so we take care of the little boy any where from two to six days and nights. He has a second home and it's working out beautifully.

Q Keeps you young that way--

A Maybe that's what it is.

Q --raising second children.

A Yeah. I feel like I'm part-time mother again. He's very affectionate and he's very happy when he comes to stay with us.

Q Grandparents are wonderful.

A Yeah. Of course, then I could have had a grandchild maybe 20 years ago of Susan was married--would have been married, you know, to the young man who was killed. I was getting a little impatient to have a grandchild. But, he's making up for it and we hope to have more grandchildren from our son and it's a whole new life for me. Very rewarding.

Q I'm dying to meet your husband. I really want to thank you. I just feel your contribution has been wonderful.

A Well, I just hope that it's doing some good somewhere. You're very welcome.

Q It's so important. Hopefully this will make sure it won't happen again.

A Yeah, that is the most important.

Q Thank you.

A You're welcome.

Shows pictures of her family. Proceeds to tell who people are. Mother, father, uncle, grandmother, aunt. Date on picture, June 1937.



# Wassermann Margaret Gretl

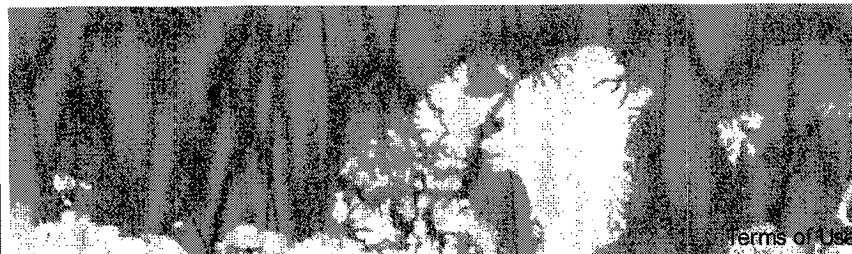
♀ 1915 - 2008

1921

Birth	10 Jan 1915	Augsburg, Germany
Gender	Female	
Hebrew Birth	24 Tev 5675	
Immigration	22 Feb 1951	New York, NY, USA  [1]
Residence	1951-2008	San Rafael, CA, USA
Hebrew Death	22 Kis 5769	
Immigration	England	
Obituary	<p>Margaret 'Gretl' Berlin, Germany Born January 10th 1921, died December 19th, 2008 in San Rafael CA, her home for over 50 years. Born in Augsburg, Germany, she attended fashion school in Berlin, Germany before moving to England to escape Nazism. There she fell in love with and married her husband of 57 years, Herbert Berlin, Germany with whom she had two children, Susan and Steve. Susan, Steve, Margaret's daughter-in-law Megan, and two grandchildren Jeffrey and Sean all live in the area and spent much time with 'Nana' and 'Opapa' throughout the years. Margaret was a sweet, kind, and generously devoted person, often donating herself to helping others whenever possible.</p> <p>She was a war nurse in England, a volunteer at Marin General Hospital for many years and helped her husband navigate the challenges of declining health before his passing in 1999. She also had a knack for couture, having spent some of her time in England making dresses for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's wife in London. She will be missed, but she gave so much to her family that we are all well-inspired to carry out her loving legacy. In lieu of flowers, the Family requests your help with her legacy by donating your service if possible. Margaret showed us all how beautiful community service can be for oneself and for the larger whole. She enjoyed the work of the Jewish Family and Children's Services here in Marin, whom you can contact to learn more at (415) 491-7960. Services will be held at Mount Tamalpais Cemetery, 2500 5th Ave., San Rafael CA at 10:00 AM on Monday December 29. [2]</p>	
Residence	Augsburg, Germany	
Residence	London, England	
Died	19 Dec 2008	San Rafael, CA, USA
Person ID	I5974	Blank Family
Last Modified	22 Apr 2009	

Family	Berlin Herbert, b. 14 May 1918, Hamburg, Germany , d. 27 Dec 1999, San Rafael, CA, USA	
Married	1942	England
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Living</li> <li>2. Living</li> </ul>	
Family ID	F1973	Group Sheet















### Event Map



### Event

	<b>1</b> Birth - 10 Jan 1915 - Augsburg, Germany
	<b>2</b> Married - 1942 - England

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	<b>Immigration</b> - 22 Feb 1951 - New York, NY, USA	
	<b>Residence</b> - 1951-2008 - San Rafael, CA, USA	
	<b>Immigration</b> - - England	
	<b>Residence</b> - - Augsburg, Germany	
	<b>Residence</b> - - London, England	
	<b>Died</b> - 19 Dec 2008 - San Rafael, CA, USA	
 = Link to Google Maps  = Link to Google Earth		

Pin Legend

						
= Address	= Location	= City/Town	= County/Shire	= State/Province	= Country	= Not Set

Photos



Gretel Berlin



Margaret Berlin

Sources

- [S171] New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 , Ancestry, SS Liberte from Southampton.
- [S426] Marin Independent Journal, December 25, 2008.