

Interview with TRUDE PLACK
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: Wednesday, February 27, 1991
Interviewers: Judith Backover Fabian Cooperman Alan
Peters

Transcriber: Starr A. Wilson, Reporting, International

MAN: Slate. Here again. Five seconds running.
Any time, Judith.

MS. BACKOVER: Today is Wednesday, February 27,
1991. I'm Judith Backover with the Oral History Project
in San Francisco speaking today with Trude Plack.

Also with me are Fabian Cooperman and Alan
Peters.

Trude, good morning.

MS. PLACK: Good morning.

Q BY MS. BACKOVER: I'm going to ask you to tell
two stories that you reminded me about. One is your
flag story. And the other is, um, how exactly it was
that you came to be allowed to cross to San Francisco
during wartime.

A All right. The flag story is not so much a
story as a reaction, my reaction, to the thousands of
flags that Hitler peppered Germany with. Um, the last
interview I was asked what is the most vivid, first
recollection, and for some reason I did not think of
that but it definitely is the most vivid recollection.
To this day I find it upsetting to see a lot of flags
massed together anywhere. It just -- it's just
something that upsets me very much.

I recall coming back from Yosemite with my

husband and I guess at the time two children and we stopped in a small town along the way for lunch and on Main Street of that very small town about every six feet there was a flag imbedded in the sidewalk or at least there was a stand there for a flag and we had already parked the car. We had walked into the restaurant and I said to my husband, "I can't stay here. Let's get out of here." This is the very strong reaction I have to flags. And right now during this war when you see so many flags flying from houses, although I understand the sentiment behind it and I'm certainly all for upholding the flag of the United States, I find it distressing to see them. I see on one flag on top a building is fine, a lot of flags in one block is not fine for me. And that is probably the drum of flags were blood red all over with just the white center and the black swatika in the middle, and it is -- it has left an indelible impression on me. so that's the flag story.

I was quite young at the time, of course, but I know that whenever Hitler passed through a town or a small hamlet ahead of him came his minions with the flags and they were fluttering from every building and from every flag pole and along on standards along the street. It's just -- I reacted very strongly to it, obviously.

Q Do you remember what the first reaction was? Do you remember asking your parents about the flags or

anything?

A No, I really don't. I remember thinking, um, the equivalent of overkill. And which, of course it was. So it was very methodic. Just I don't remember discussing it at all.

Q Other than the accounting here today, have you discussed it recently with your husband or with your friends?

A No. Um, I think I did discuss it at this meeting in New York. The meeting of adults who as children were sent out of the country by a children -- kinder transport, children's transport. I think I mentioned it then. I also remember working, um, at the library as a volunteer at Brandeis Hillel Day School and coming across a small volume of -- one volume of a very small set of probably some sort of encyclopaedia and finding a book in there and seeing all these flags and that's just was like a rush. I brought it out back but that was some years ago. My son hasn't been in elementary school for a lot of years so that is a while back. So I have not, other than that, I have not discussed it. I'm sure when my husband at the time when we went through the small town he said, "Well, I thought you said you wanted to stop for the kids' lunch." I said, "Yes, but I got to get out of here." So that was about it.

Q Did he understand?

A Oh, yes. Yes. Since I'm not generally

irrational I think he understood. I have not talked at great length about any of my experiences but I think I might have told you about I am planning now that I'm becoming computer literate or at least somewhat computer literate to write my story for my children, I mean not only the Hitler years, but in general my background of my parents, etc. And I plan to get that under way rather quickly.

Q We would like it, of course, for you to make a copy.

A I'm not sure that it's going to be for general publication. I think I -- I don't know. At the moment it's just a thought but I think that I would like to keep it fairly private and, you know, I don't know. Perhaps. We'll see. It hasn't been done yet. So now you wanted to know about how I happened to be allowed to leave England in late '43, November 17, 1943 I left England. But before I was able to do that because it as, of course, wartime and I was -- I had no country -- what was that called? Stateless. Um, it was important -- it was absolutely necessary for my mother or for one of my parents, my mother spoke English but I was more courageous of the two, to attend a Senate Subcommittee hearing in Washington D.C. and I believe that took place in August of '43. She had to appear there and state why she wanted me to take what was really a rather dangerous trip at the time.

The Atlantic was mined, of course, and there was a certain amount of risk involved, and she explained to the Senate body -- I don't know how many men there were -- but it was only men at the time, that it was dangerous for me to be in London, that London was being bombed and that she felt she wanted me to be with the family to be re-united that we had been apart for very close to the time it was four and-a-half years and she really wanted me to be here. It was possible because the troop ships, the American troop ships that went to England at the time returned empty. I mean they were stripped of all normal cruising accommodations but she -- but they did take passengers back to the United States so I was, finally was given permission to undertake this trip and to be exact it was ten days before I arrived here in New York and, um, immediately experienced culture shock because England had been blacked out for, since September of 1939, and you arrive in New York and the lights are blazing all over the place as Broadway and it was just overwhelming. It was just wonderful. And I spent some time, a couple of weeks with my aunt and uncle.

My father had a number of siblings who lived in New York and a number of cousins and I spent two weeks there and then took a train ride from New York to South Bend, Indiana where I visited a childhood friend and from there to Cleveland, Ohio, where my mother had a sister and family. And then I came across the country

in wintertime to San Francisco and I'm mentioning wintertime because all along the way there was snow. I mean high, high snow. And we arrived in San Francisco at the Oakland mall, got off the train and there was my brother, my then sixteen-year-old brother, and my mother and father, and it was, of course, quite overwhelming and we took the ferry across and I told somebody about that yesterday, in fact, now that the freeway's going to be torn down* because the view of the ferry building which was at the time a fairly imposing building was out over all the sky without all the skyscrapers behind it which are now there, it was such a wonderful experience and I arrived on December 24.

The sun was shining just brilliantly. It was just -- it was gorgeous. It was a beautiful day and my brother drove me through Golden Gate Park and everything was green and the contrast of coming across country in the bare winter, trees all bare, and here to see the lush green and the flowers and the trees was just wonderful.

And I arrived, it was Friday. And it was a holiday weekend, of course, and so the next morning my parents took me to a synagogue here which is now no longer in existence. The one in Fillmore and Geary, Beth Israel. And that proved to be, in a way, a catharsis because I started to cry. I didn't stop. I think I mentioned it before. I didn't stop for three

days. My mother put me to bed and all I did was cry. It was just the emotions of seeing my parents again, being out of wartime England. Um, it was just overwhelming. That I remember very well. It was a very strong memory.

So then when that was over I, being young and resilient, I, um, I felt pretty well quickly. My parents had friends their own age and, of course, they had children of my own age and of course I was invited to a New Year's Eve party and met refugee young people. And I did get a job. I had worked in England as an office clerk. And, um, met a lot of people that -- who are still at this time my friends so that was very good for me. Enjoyed that very much. So life began here.

Um, the FBI checked up on me periodically because I was an enemy alien. I wasn't an enemy alien and I wasn't a friendly alien. I don't know what I was. But they did check up a number of times. In fact, they went to my aunt's house in New York before I arrived and, um, so they were pretty much on top of whatever activity I might have undertaken. So that's -- I think it took about two or three years and that ended. Of course, the war was over then, too, so what else would you like me to talk about in this vein?

Q I want you to stay on the same -- on the same track and bring us gradually to date with your life but, first, talk a little bit about how you found out about the FBI and did they confront you personally?

A No. As far as I remember, as far as I recall they did not. However, they did go to, um, my employer or the personnel manager and probably asked some very routine questions. There was certainly nothing in my past or present at the time that would indicate me to be a threat. Um, but they did do that, yeah. I know. Um, I don't believe they ever came to my home. I don't recall that at all. I don't think they did.

Q Had they questioned anyone about your brother as well?

A No. My brother was eleven years old when he came here. He had been, um, at that time living here for, let's see, this was in late '43. My brother left Germany in early '38 so it was almost five yaers later. Almost six years later. Um, no. I don't believe so. I don't believe they did. But I don't know. But, you know, he was a child. I was nineteen by that time so it was a different story so it was interesting. Um, it was interesting for me to hear the stories in New York this past November. So many of the children who were in the same position as I was who never ever saw their parents again, majority, 80 percent of those there did not ever see their parents again. And I think I mentioned before that the more I think about this meeting the more I think about the tremendous sacrifice the parents made. For many years I think I was not the only one. I felt that it was I who had this terrific hardship leaving

parents, leaving familiar surroundings and this was brought out by others, too, in the small talk sessions we had. And we came to realize even at this later stage in our lives, um, what it meant for parents to take their children to the train station and say goodbye to them and really not know whether they were ever going to see them again, the chances were that they were not going to and this was, of course, proved.

Did I mention at all what happened when I left Germany on the train station with my -- my silver candle sticks? I probably did.

Well, I won't go into it again. That, too, is a very clear memory. Um, I was extremely fortunate. I had a -- I was in a -- in a good home, pleasantly furnished, well furnished. We certainly had enough food. I was never treated as an outsider. I was really taken in. I had a guardian who was separated from her husband. She was then, I thought, an elderly lady of about 50. I since changed my mind about the aging process. She was wonderful to me. She was very nice and her family was, too. And I think I did tell you that her daughter-in-law and son who lived two houses down the street, um, really were totally responsible for my learning to speak English. Because my guardian did not speak English well at all. She lived in London for 40 plus years so she came as a young child. She never really learned to speak English and she fractured the language terribly. I think I did tell you that she was

illiterate, and that presented some interesting problems but nothing that I didn't overcome. And now that I think about it from a different viewpoint, um, I think she was remarkable. I think she handled herself beautifully and, um, she was certainly very, very good to me. So she did come to visit us twice after I was married.

So -- so I told you about nine or ten months in the air raid shelter, I think, did I not?

During the war, the son that I was just talking about built an air raid shelter. He had three small children. They had a live-in mate which, of course, is not unusual and it was his mother and I. There were eight of us and, um, about 5:00 in the evening as it was getting dark we'd all march ourselves into the air raid shelter. Maybe it was a little bit later. I think we probably had supper inside of our respective houses and, um, and it had bunks, and, you know, these shelters were perhaps six by eight or ten, even, I don't know. They were pretty small for eight people to sleep in every night. But I don't remember this as being detrimental. I think we had fun. We were laughing. The children were read stories. Um, I don't remember it being a terrible hardship. I do remember lying in my bunk occasionally and hearing a bomb drop and, of course, the scene was at the time if you heard it, it was far away, far enough away not to do any

damage but if it was, if it was going to be a direct hit then, of course, you wouldn't hear it quite so readily but you would know about it rather quickly. Or I'd know about it.

Um, I think that left, left me with some residue even though I didn't realize it and although I don't think of it as being a terribly unpleasant experience, I find myself very uncomfortable someone stands too close to me, number one, or if, at the breakfast table all the dishes, I have a rather large kitchen table, all the dishes are right in front of me and I feel like going like this (indicating a sweeping hand motion) and clearing the table because I can't stand to have me in front of it and this was once explained to me, I think, that is directly attributable to that confined time in my life.

We did this every night without fail for -- I think for nine or ten months and then it sort of, you get used to anything and then you just go in when there's an air raid but for -- for a fairly prolonged period we did it every, every single night.

And, of course, carried our gas masks. We never used them as far as I know but when I spoke to my cousin, Israel, one of my cousins in Israel a couple of weeks ago she said something about the gas masks. And she said, "You also carried them; didn't you?" Yes, I did. I didn't remember that or think about it because, first of all, I don't remember ever having put it on

because of an air raid and, secondly, when you're young you take this in stride. You don't really dwell on it. You don't think what it could be and why it is that you're wearing it or at least maybe I was stupid at the time. I don't know. But in any case I did not -- it had no particular negative memory for me. But I'm sure it had, all these things do take their toll in some way or other. And this business of needing space is definitely one.

So anyway I left England and I came to the states and I had a wonderful few years. I met a lot of people. I dated a lot. It was war time. There were a lot of sailors. I made up for lost time. I didn't date very much in England. My guardian was extremely protective and so it was fun. And the war was over and I met my husband in October of 1946 on his twenty-fifth birthday. We got engaged on my twenty-second birthday in December and were married on March 30, 1947. So my husband is not German. He was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. And my parents liked him immediately and I think his parents liked me also. I think my father-in-law doubts about his marrying a German Jew. He had some negative remembrance of being in Germany. He was Russian. I was Polish. But I really truly loved them and I really think they thought a lot of me so we worked it out quite well.

I get along very well with the rest of my

husband's family. His parents are dead but he has two brothers and a sister. I'm very close to his sister in particular.

We had three children. The eldest was born in '49, a son, Jeff. Um, the next one was two years later. My daughter, Karen. And in 1951, '54, um, another little girl, Debbie, was born. And they're all well. They live here in the general area. My daughter Debbie married an Australian and lived in Australia for eight years and moved back last August. That is wonderful. She and her family are here. She has three little boys. My other daughter has two little boys and another little one on the way. We don't know the sex as yet. And then we had another child in -- oh, my goodness -- '67. He'll be 24 tomorrow. And he has -- that's Marty. He's now in his second year of law school and a delight. We're very fortunate. Our children are close, feel close to each other. Their spouses feel close to each other and Marti isn't married as yet. One left. But he's not living at home either. He's at school. And that just about things as up to date. I don't know what else you would like to know.

Perhaps you'd like to know how my husband came to be in the business he's in. It's an interesting story.

Q Five or six seconds. Okay.

A The reason that I want to talk about my husband's -- how he happened to be in the business he's

in is that it was directly connected to my father. Um, my parents are -- now backtracking a little -- my parents came here in 1940. I believe I told you how they came from Russia and Japan very late date. Um, my mother immediately, um, found work as a domestic. She -- they were each given \$10 on arrival in the states in Seattle and that certainly wasn't enough to set up housekeeping even in those days so they were told to find an apartment rather quickly and I'm not sure -- they lived with another family for a little while. My brother was immediately turned over to them. They were not here for more than 24 hours and they had to take him into their what was then their rented room really and I don't believe that my parents had a great deal of financial help because my mother always said that she didn't want it if - she would take anything that was given, a chair or a table or dishes or whatever, but not money. And so she found work immediately and that wasn't so with my father who spoke no English who was really petrified to even get on a bus. Excuse me.

A bus driver who wore a uniform number one, which was scary, and, number two, he didn't have the nickel car fare to spare and he didn't know where to go and he was afraid if the bus driver were to ask him "Where do you need to get off?" or "Where do you want to get off?" he wouldn't know how to answer him. And so he'd looked for work and he's walked all the way down

town from -- actually there, first, the room they lived in -- this was long before I came -- was right here between 14th and 15th and Clement so they lived with another German couple who became their friends later as time went on.

Anyway, my father did find a job in an upholsterer's place on 18th and Geary, 15th, whatever. And this man gave him a job sorting nails, different size nails, and my father was so upset at night, it was such a demeaning job, and even though he wanted the \$5 a week which was then offered him, he found it so upsetting that my mother used to tell me he'd lie at night and cry because he just -- to sort nails all day long, it was just -- it was just a terrible thing for him. So my mother made him quit after a week or two. And then he decided he'd go downtown and he walked into this office furniture store on Mission street, on Mission and 14th and did get a job as general clean up person but that was a \$25 a week and I do have the little slip, the first payment slip which my mother kept. And he was really happy. First of all, he had been in the furniture business all his life. Either that or in textiles. He was in the manufacturing business in Germany until the business was taken away from him and so that was much more to his liking even though it was an extremely menial job but in very short order he became a warehouseman and from warehouseman he became a salesman. By that time his English had much

improved and he never spoke English perfectly but he was very well able to make himself understood and he dealt with customers in such a way that many years after he died people would still come in and ask for the little German man whose name they couldn't remember but who they remembered as being extremely efficient and helpful.

And, um, at a point later, I don't remember what year that was, '50, '55 or so, he became sales manager so, um, I mean this was a one-man business but they had around ten or twelve employees and it was definitely a step upward for him and they were all very proud of him, of course.

Well, my husband in the meantime had gone into business with a Hungarian man who had the money and my husband has the knowhow so they became partners in a home furniture business. And after eight years my husband said, "This isn't going anywhere. We're never going to get out of the same kind of business that we're in now. We're not expanding. We're just standing still. This isn't for me." So they dissolved their partnership quite amicably actually. And so my husband was, for a few months, was sort of looking into other things and one day on a Friday my father called and said that his boss wanted to sell the business and why didn't my husband and my father buy it. Well, neither one of them had any money. He immediately said "How am I going to

do that? I don't have any money. I don't know anything about this business." "Well, just come in and talk to him." So he did. On that Friday afternoon. And by Monday morning he took over the business. They liquidated a lot of the assets.

It's an office furniture, office interiors business, liquidated much of the stock and the owner gave my husband at a very high percentage time to pay it off so, you know, they scrounged together a few thousand dollars and he and my father went into business together and to this day my husband is still head of that business. So -- which is nice. It has enabled us to put our kids through college. It has enabled us to live quite comfortably and I'm very proud of the fact that that -- that's how it worked out. Particularly part of the fact that my father had the foresight to see that this was a possibility and that he wanted his son-in-law to have a crack at it.

That is the story. So what else do you want to know?

Q What in the course of your normal day-to-day life makes you reflect on the events of your past?

A I'm not sure that there is a conscious reflection at all. I think that subconsciously probably there's a lot. My personality is such -- which is nice. It has enabled us to put our kids through college. It has enabled us to live quite comfortably. And I'm very proud of the fact that that's how it worked out.

Particularly the fact that my father had the foresight to see that this was a possibility and that he wanted his son-in-law to have a crack at it. That is the story. So what else do you want to know?

Q What in the course of your normal day-to-day life makes you reflect on the events of your past?

A I'm not sure that there is a conscious reflection at all. I think that subconsciously probably there's a lot. Um, my personality is such that I like to see the better part of a human being. I will make excuses for somebody where someone else will not. I'm sure that there is a conscious -- I don't know. I think it takes things quite seriously and despite my nonperformance last week I'm usually very much on time and I take appointments seriously and I, um, um, I'm conscientious in general. If I take on a job I will do it to the very best of my ability. Um, I will say no if I feel that I can't or don't want to do something. I will say no if I feel that I can't or I don't want to do something. And be quite up front about it. I won't take on a job and then say I'm not going to do it but I will say no, this doesn't interest me or I don't have time for or whatever. Once I take it on I do it. So that's always been somewhat communicated in different ways.

In a small way, I prefer to deal with individuals rather than in large groups or to be, to go

to a lot of meetings, that isn't my style at all. And less now that I'm older than I was when I was younger. But I did start in, when I had two very young children, the second one was only three months old, started a community nursery school which is still in operation today 40 years later. So I'm proud of that. That took a lot of doing. I wasn't the only one, of course. Many of us. But it was probably one of three who got it started and stopped mothers on the street and said, "How would you like a cooperative nursery school in this area?" And we found a place to be housed and we found a way to deal with the Social Services Committee of the City which has to license these establishments and, um, dealt with the codes of the time. You know, X number of square feet per child and that sort of thing, so I think it's been, over the years, I've done a bit of that. And I've enjoyed it. Made lots of friends doing it.

So that's -- I don't know how does one know how, um, one's early years shape the future? You can't -- don't really know. I have not thought about my early years as much in the past fifty-some years as I have in the last two years though and I think that I have found to be a fact with a lot of people in this position, that it either has taken this long to either think about it consciously and to talk about it. I think it was extremely difficult for most of us to talk about it at all. So which is one of the reasons that I wanted to write it down.

Um, you know that I think is true of most people. Have you found that to be so? Have you in your research?

Q It's been a common statement that, um, that people have waited some number of years before they allowed it to the surface and allowed themselves to articulate it at least publically.

A I think it's sort of phenomenal that all of a sudden there are these meetings of -- of people who never new each other who, of course, have a very common ground. Um, I mean in New York I -- I mentioned this a number of times now I knew absolutely no one. Absolutely no one. Not for one second did I feel that I'm out of place. What am I doing here? Um, why am I here 3,000 miles away from home, away from my husband. I did not think of that at all. The only -- one time after this, people get into small groups, all pre-arranged and all extremely well done, and after one of those, it seemed to be a really intimate and a heavy kind of a session. I went back to my room. I should have gone to the common meeting room where they were going to discuss what all had come up, I mean touched on salient points and I decided I just couldn't do that. I needed to get back to my room and be by myself for a little bit. And I missed my husband. I would have liked to have been able to discuss it with him at that time. But at no time did I feel that I shouldn't have

come, that what am I doing here by myself among all these strangers because I didn't feel strange to any of them.

We all have this common bond. We had -- we all left under similar circumstances. We all left our families behind, went into a strange land, and, um, perhaps all felt a bit guilty because we were singled out to live when so many of our friends were not. I don't know what it is. But there was, I think there was this, there is this bond of one of the men who was instrumental in, um, getting this meeting under way in November, last November, called me last night. Quite coincidentally, he's in San Francisco right now. He's from New York. He said "Perhaps you'll remember me. I introduced a couple of the speakers." Well, frankly, if you don't know the people, you don't focus on their -- either name or face particularly. You listen to what they have to say and, um, I really don't know him but he said just at the last minute before he came here on a bus trip he decided to take the list along to see if there was anyone in San Francisco and, um, well, he knew that I was in San Francisco and a couple of people in the East Bay, and he thought I would -- he would call and he had no particular intention to meet with me. And I, um, I told him I would like him to come to my house for dinner and then decided he wanted to sightsee a little bit so after he's finished with his business

dealing meet him on Friday. But I mean I have no trouble talking to this man. I have no idea what he looks like. Um, he's a bit younger than I. We established that. That's another thing. No one thought anything of asking another person "How old are you? Where can you go?" But we were all were within a range, you know, sort of a probably a ten-year span or so. Sometimes a little more. There was one man, and I think I mentioned him before, also, who was put into the arms of an accompanying adult at a train station. He was two years old, never met his parents again, and so he was the other extreme. Um, I think, the -- I think you had to be younger than seventeen to be considered for the transports at all. And, um, I was on the upper side there. I was fourteen. Um, but I said to this fellow last night, "Now how old are you?", perfect stranger. He said, "I'm 59." "Well, I'm older than you." He was seven when he left. But there is this, um, this bond that when -- I didn't think existed until I went there. I mean immediately there was a comon -- common ground for all of us.

So and he told me there were 255 kinder at that meeting plus spouses which was a good amount of people there. I had underestimated. It was a good feeling. I corresponded with a couple of people. One couple gave me a ride to New York which was wonderful. Um, and they -- we've been in touch. And -- and another man who lives in Michigan was talking to someone -- I

overheard him mention where he was from, and when he finished his conversation I went up to him and told him that I had overheard this and that my father came from a small place very close by, he almost hugged me. He was so pleased. And I just had a letter from him this week also. Um, I got him in touch with a cousin in New York who lived close by also and they evidently had a nice conversation on the phone. So, um, a lot of this sort of thing transpired there and, um, I feel very good about it. So now I'm looking forward to a reunion of my high school also in Catskills in the same weekend in November of this year and there I shall know a lot of people, a number of them. And that will be nice. So but it's really funny how all of a sudden these things are coming together after all of these many years. I guess we all feel an urgency to do it now before it gets too late. I can't think of another thing, Judith.

Q I'd like to ask you a little bit about your relationship with your brother. Both because you had a rather unusual childhood and that you were separated siblings. Um, and yet have this -- this common and also unusual thread in your past being child transports, what was your relationship like with your brother, um, while you were children and young adults and what's it like today? What do you talk about?

A Well, when we're children I'm sure the relationship was fairly close because I was the older of

the two. Um, but when we were separated at a very young age and, um, did not see each other again until he was sixteen, sixteen, I guess, sixteen or seventeen. My arithmetic all of a sudden is not too great. Yeah, he was almost seventeen. And he was in high school so he had just had another year of high school before, um, he graduated and then he went to Los Angeles to go to a photography school and very shortly after that was, um, graduated, and this was, of course, was pretty much toward the end of the war. And was sent to Japan and, um, while he was in Japan he had an opportunity to be a photographer for the Stars and Stripes, which is an Army newspaper. And became interested in journalism. And so when he came back here, um, by that time the war was over officially, he, um, let me see, where did he go to? I'm trying to think. I think he went to photography school after his service. That was it. He was drafted, right. He, um, went into the service shortly after his eighteenth birthday, I guess. I don't remember exactly. And when he came back he had had this exposure to the Stars and Stripes and was very interested in becoming a news photographer and went to Los Angeles for that purpose.

And then he, um, after he finished that course he came back to San Francisco very briefly and, um, got a job on a Hollister newspaper. And from there he got a job with the Associated Press here in San Francisco and was with them for a while and then had a chance to be

transferred to Kent City, Missouri, more so than San Francisco is actually. And after so -- oh, a good number of years there, probably two or fourteen years there, he was transferred to Washington D.C. where he still is with the AP and so our time together was extremely limited. We really didn't live under one roof for very long.

I think, um, the year that he was in high school was about the only year as, you know, semi-adults, um, and after that he had gone away. Our relationship was pretty good.

We don't see each other that often. I spent five days with him in Washington and with him and his wife last november. Um, I don't think it's as close as it would be had we had our lives parallel to all, you know, throughout the years. Certainly that didn't happen. But I think we're relatively close. And he even said he'll come to this reunion in November. He didn't want to come to the kinder transport reunion but he will come to this one because he also went to that school very briefly about a year or so, a year and-a-half, and, um, I think that was difficult. I really do. I think it was difficult for my parents to arrive on these shores and immediately not only have to fend for themselves but also fend for a teenager who was not too anxious to have them speak German, of ocourse, um, who was American. There was a culture shock for him, I

think, and I think it was that for my parents, too. Um, our relationship was pretty good, I think. So I think there were a lot of stories that unfolded this way because of the separation.

I mean I think you find, um, the separation of families, the pulling apart of families at a young age was very difficult. So I don't know how he feels about it. He does not talk about it. And, um, I think he would just as soon forget it. And which is interesting because he's, as I said, he's a reporter. He's traveled with all of the presidential hopefuls over the years. He was assigned to Harry Truman while he was president and knew Harry Truman very well and has many, many good things to say about him. Because at the time, of course, he was in Kansas City and covered Harry Truman before he left for Washington and when he came back. He had some very funny stories, too. Um, but he has, he has covered all of the space shots which is now what he's sort of does most. He also writes a column which is syndicated, unfortunately not in this part of the country, at least not in San Francisco, but in many other areas and the name of the column is "Over Fifty" so he does that. He's a good writer and, um, he's been successful. So he wrote a book on Callie, The Vietnam War. Very interesting man. That's for sure. Very.

And his son is a reporter. His stepson but he modeled himself totally after my brother and is a reporter at the San Jose Mercury News. So what else?

Q I would ask you to describe yourself as a child. What kind of a child were you?

A Serious. Although I had a lot of fun, too, but I think I've always been quite serious. And for very likely it was because at a very young age our lives were turned upside down long before Hitler's final moves, final solution, he, you know, so methodically stripped men of their dignity, of their businesses and I think that probably had an effect on me. Um, my father lost his business. We moved into -- into an area that was not as nearly as nice as the one that I remembered in early, very early stage of my life. And I think my parents had to struggle a lot. Um, they never discussed it with us. I don't really remember them ever saying "We can't do this or that or the other because..." but we knew and, you know, there's so many other people who were in the same boat so I guess, you know, one's peers did not do anything so differently. Um, I think I was quite serious.

One regret I have I always wanted to learn to play piano. My mother played quite well. I regret that the piano was moved out of our apartment, I guess, for payment of something or other. I remember my mother crying. It was her piano when she grew up and although she was the youngest of nine children, the piano was given to her when my grandparents gave up their home, and I remember very well how upset my mother was when

that piano left the house. Um, I took lessons from the son of a friend for a very short time but that was really not a very formal thing. And I took lessons again as an adult when my three children were pretty well on their way but then I had another baby and that sort of took care of them. I could do it now and my husband keeps saying, "Why don't you?" I don't know. I'm not going to be a Myra Hess ever, you don't do Myra Hess.

I heard Myra Hess in London during the war and she was very short, plump lady. This big, with tiny, tiny hands. And her fingers were all over that keyboard. She was the most -- one of the most fantastic pianos I ever heard and I heard a lot of them so that is one fond memory of the war, war years. Hearing her.

Um, that's one real regret I have. I love music and I wish I could be a player. But all my children took lessons. And they all say now why did you let me quit after they made my life miserable, after X numbers of years and now they're all ready to take lessons again. So that's that. You have something else on your mind, I know.

Q In that connection we only have one last question to ask you and that is what would you like people in general, strangers and people closest to you, to learn from your story to take with them into their own lives as your last comment?

A That's a heavy duty question. I have never

given it any thought. I can't speak of people. I can speak of my children. I and my grandsons, um, I would like them to have a down-to-earth value system. I would like them to be able to roll with the punches because that's very important in life, and, um, to know who they are. That's about -- about all I can think of. I don't think you can learn anything from my own story. I would hope that they learn something about the close relationship that they have with me at this time. And if I -- if I can judge from the experiences of their parents, um, and uncles and the relationship they had with their grandparents both my mother and my parents and my in-laws, I can't hope for anything more than that. I hope they feel about my husband and me as my children do about their grandparents because it really has been a very stabilizing difference in their lives. And that's all one can hope for. So I think so far we're doing okay. But then they're little yet. I don't know whether that's going to see them through their lives but they have parents who have pretty, um, pretty straight forward value systems, too. So that's about all -- I guess some of it is going to come through the genes, right?

Q I just have one more question. I'm wondering how you managed to keep in touch with your parents during the separation?

A I didn't for a long time at all. I, um, I see

from September '39, of course, all communication was closed down with Germany. I expected my parents actually to come through England to pick me up on the way out of Germany. They thought they had an affidavit at the time and they weren't but nothing was finalized yet; in fact, they did not have it. Um, it was September I went to England in March. In September war broke out and the only way I heard from them or, it was through my brother, but you must remember that he was eleven years old, and eleven-year olds are not known to do a lot of writing or, I mean he would write once in a while, he would write to my parents, and they would write back and tell him to send their letter to me. But then, um, I guess that lasted a few months.

And then in May I had heard that they were going to leave Germany on May 10 and go to Holland because their -- what was then called the lift which is just a container with their belongings had been sent to Holland already. By that time they did have an affidavit, um, and the day that they were supposed to leave Holland was invaded, May 10, 1940, and then I didn't know if they were in Holland. I don't know if they were still in Germany. I knew nothing. There was no communication at all. That was very difficult. Um, I don't remember hearing from them very much. It was extremely infrequent and letters would take so long and by then at that time you heard a lot of the terrible stories that were coming out of Germany. I mean for a

long time nobody knew what was going on and, you know, but then it was this, these, there were these rumors and, um, finally in October I think it was October 12, it was my mother's birthday, I had a telegram from Seattle that my parents had arrived in Seattle. That was a very happy day. Very. They were literally among the very last to leave Germany. And, in fact, this morning at 6:00 in the morning when I was still looking for that stupid album that I can't find, I found quite by accident my father's pasport and it is interesting because it has the Japanese characters in it and it has the Russian characters in it so, and I wasn't aware that I had it. I didn't have my mother's. I must have taken all that stuff when my mother died ten years ago. Um, and I have, I brought it with me in case you wanted to see it. Um, that was a long time and i didn't know and at the time my -- I had relatives in what was then Palestine. My mother's brother and wife and, um, the -- I remember they sent me money becuase they thought I could help put myu parents out and I don't remember how I thought I could do that and I don't remember at what time. I can't place the time frame there at all. I know that my mother had given me, um, a little ring that my grandmother had given her on her fourteenth birthday and my mother gave me that same ring on my fourteenth birthday and she also gave me her engagement ring. And I sold both in order to, um, get monmey to help my

parents out and I don't know what happened to that. A son-in-law of my guardian who was Germany lived in England for a number of years but, um, German Jew, tried to get the -- get the money to someone. You know, I must, again, see, I was fifteen years old at the time. It's very difficult for a fifteen-year old to know what's happening and how to go about doing these things. I don't have one now so I didn't see them for a very long time. And, in fact, I believe I mentioned that on the earlier tape the fact that we were separated and not, so I didn't know what had --- what was happening, one from the other, um, made me very reluctant to move very far away once I got here. My husband wanted to go to Chicago to go to school there and I said I just -- I couldn't do it. I had only been here three and-a-half years when we were married and this came up very shortly after that I just couldn't leave my parents again and I didn't recognize that at the time. I recognize it now that that's the reason that I just did not want to leave her. And I never did. I never moved out of the City. So I guess in that way our lives were shaped differently. You know, the reluctance to leave, I guess. I don't know. That's it.

Q I have another question. You mentioned a high school reunion.

A Uh-huh.

Q Was that after high school in Germany?

A Yes, indeed. I brought a book which was given

to me quite by chance, um, about three weeks ago I visited a friend here who had injured herself and, um, she also is from Frankfurt but she's older than I and she did not go to this school. But the time it was time for me to go to high school at age ten which is the time, you know, for the schooling in Germany, so high school, I had no opposition. I had to go to a Jewish school. I could no longer go to a secular school. And this school actually had a wonderful reputation. It was founded in 1780 something.

And anyway to go back to my friend, she said she had been to Germany last year. Um, she had been invited, you know, Germany invites people to come and host them and do all these wonderful things benefitting someone, and so she got on the mailing list and this book was sent to her and she said, "I didn't go to the Philistine but you did, didn't you?" I said, "Yes, I did." And she said, "How would you like to have this book?" And I said, um, "Yes, I certainly would." And I started looking through it and there's a picture of me in the book. So I was pleased to have it. I brought it along also to show you. So, um, it was a good school and, um, it is very sad to read about it. It really is. It was founded in, was it 17th, 18th century and folded in 1942. Sad. Under sad, sad circumstances so -- yeah.

Q Could you tell us a little bit about your life as a young student in that Jewish high school that you

were how old in life?

A You know, things that come to the fore are not the school years. I went to the school for four yers but the day that the synagogues burned and which was the day that the teacher said, "Go straight home. Don't linger on the street. Go straight home." Middle of the day they let us go early in the morning. Early in the morning. Um, I can't remember -- I actually have my report cards and I was so -- so student. Over and over again the comments on the bottom indicate that I could have done a great deal better if I trusted myself a little more but the trusting myself a little more came very much later in my life. I'm much more assured of myself now.

But many a time I sat in that classroom and knew the answers and was afraid to raise my hand. So that's about all I remember about that.

Um, I made some good friends. I think I told Judith that, um, there are three women in particular whom I meet periodically, the first time we met when I was -- when we were all fifty. The year we were all fifty. Um, we always called each other and on our birthdays. I said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we all got together this year?" Well, every one thought it was a wonderful idea. So we met in New Orleans. Just the four of us, and we had a long weekend. It was over Washington's birthday and I'm not sure that we cried more or we laughed more and we did both and nothing

else. We had an absolutely wonderful weekend. It was -- we caught up with each other. We all knew each other. Again, we all knew each other's families; we all knew each other's siblings. We, our lives had taken different paths in a way but we were very comfortable with each other. I mean there was no -- not a second when there was any hesitation and who is this person, we haven't seen you for so many years and, um, it was just wonderful and we have done that twice since.

The next time we met, um, five years later. And we went to Colorado Springs we always choose places where no one has to make a bed and no one has to worry about making dinner or be concerned about family obligations. We're away from home and we can concentrate on just being together and it's worked out very well. And we didn't meet again for ten years. Well, altogether we didn't meet for ten years but, um, one friend lives in the easy bay and I see her quite often and the others in New York and I've seen her over the years many many times apart but the one in Texas we didn't see. So before this reunion in the Catskills we decided they didn't go, I was the only one, I and my friend in El Cerrito, the only ones who were in the children transport and she had injured herself and couldn't go, um, but the three of us met in Boston this time for four days and had a wonderful time so and they're both, they're all coming to this reunion because

this all -- all of us went to that school in November, all being well, so that is a very positive memory. I meet good friends and have maintained a friendship. So it's so wonderful to be with these women because we have a lot of good friends here. Um, over the years, of course, but again, you don't have to explain yourself. you know, your life started out the same way and it's just it's wonderful to have friends like that. And it's never any hesitation where we're going to talk about now. You know, we just manage very well. That's about it.

Q I wanted to go back to the years you came. Beyond the years of the Holocaust. Beyond the segregation do you recall any instances of extreme acts of antisemitism about the acts?

A I know that my brother was, um, picked on as a Jewish little boy. And I remember feeling that very keenly. Um, I'm not sure that I ever experienced any direct antisemitism. Well, I experienced it, of course, I mean directed toward me but very likely it was because I was in a Jewish school in 1934. When I was 35 I think I started -- that's entirely possible. Um, I had no non-Jewish friends at that point. I know that. And my parents who had had non-Jewish friends in the past also no longer got together with them. Although there was one couple and I think I touched on that last time who, um, they were not really very close personal friend but they were business friends and these people, the woman

in particular, used to go out at night at great risk to herself and put food in front of my parent's door. This was much after I left. And we -- I did see her and her husband, actually met her son and daughter-in-law, with whom I did not feel comfortable. I felt very comfortable with the old couple. I did not feel comfortable with the young couple at all. Very, um, give some very strange answers.

Of course, we talked about it. We talked about the years as if there was anything in the school books at all. This was in 1972. It was after they came, when Israel ventured into Germany mostly to see my grandparents' graves because of the graves, and that was sort of an aborted trip as far as I was concerned because I felt very uncomfortable. I didn't see half the things that I thought I might want to see and, um, couldn't wait to get out of Germany but, anyway, we did see these people. We had supper with them in a vira stuba so and the old lady, I'm referring to her as an old lady because by that time she was close to eighty, I think, um, which is so many years away from me, right, so, um, she said "When the Jews left Germany, culture went with them." I have never forgotten that. It's a very interesting statement.

She spoke German, of course. Um, and she spoke in the most glowing terms of my parents and how she felt that she was responsible for them. And she

knew the danger involved to her but she felt that it had to be done. She had to help these people who needed her help. Very nice.

The young woman, to go back to that, I said "Is there anything in your textbooks at all?" She said no but, you know, it was only a few years. Took my clue from that one.

So we, the next morning we were on our way. We cut our trips short. We found the cemeteries for the family only because my husband insisted. I was ready to give up. The cemeteries in the small places were tiny and they were tucked away somewhere and progress has encroached on the area, and it was demolished. We did -- finally we went to Grossgaro and went to the city Hall and they told us approximately where we could find the cemetery. It was behind a playfield and then as an afterthought said, "Well, Herr so and so is in charge of it" so we found her son had just had surgery. He was a Jewish man. Did I mention that before, too? I'm sorry. Are you going to edit this, I hope? Good. A Jewish man who came out of a concentration camp and I'm not sure whether he married his wife before or after but she was not Jewish but as determined to replace the stones in their proper sequence on the cemetery as he was and they saw to it the cemetery was built up again to the best of their ability. They were in German fashion very precise graphs where one could find who was buried where and they followed those. And she was very apologetic

because the one, um, stone, a huge stone which they could not repair, or replace because it was smashed to smithereens, was that of the Jewish war dead, the first World War, and one of my mother's brothers was one of them. And but she took me back to her house and shows me a picture and, in fact, I made a picture of the picture. It didn't come out that well. But it's just to show it to my mother and, um, I presume they're dead now and I don't know what's happened to the cemetery since but I was glad to be able to tell my mother that things were pretty well in order. My father's been dead -- I couldn't wait to get out of there. It's terrible so I'm sorry now. I should have gone to see the school. They had a demonstration there and we were advised not to go downtown and so we didn't. I won't go back. That's it.

Any other questions? No. I can't imagine what the matter could be.

Q Well, I missed the first half. I don't want to go back.

A Yeah. As I said, I have no idea as I'm talking. I seem to recall having said it before but -- (showing picture).

MAN: Okay, Trude, can you tell us what's in this picture here?

A This is elementary school in 1935.

Q Okay. Who is in this, please?

A This is my class. Elementary school.

Q Uh-huh.

A And just before it was time for us to go onto high school.

Q Uh-huh.

A We were about ten years old at the time.

Q And what town is this again?

A Frankfurt alein.

Q And if you could use this pencil and point where you are in that photo that would be great.

A Oh. Well, that's going to be a problem. Let's see. Um, I can't see. Can I pick it up and put it back or can I look over here?

Q You are this person here, is that correct?

A That's right.

Q Okay. That person right there?

A Yeah. I'll show you the one of the girls who -- who I meet periodically. It's sos hiny I can't see it. This one here in the corner. So it would be this one here. She lives in Texas.

Q All right. very good. Okay. Tell us who this is, please?

A This is one of mymother's brothers.

Q All right.

A Who immigrated to Palestine in 1934.

Q What was his name?

A Bertron Selig, S-e-l-i-g.

Q Who is this, please?

A This is my father Albert Rosenthal.

Q Okay.

A Who, um, was injured in the first World War and was reoperating there.

Q Okay. What year was that photo taken would you guess?

A Early 1917.

Q Frankfurt?

A No. No. I don't know where it was taken. Sorry.

Q Who is this, please?

A This is my mother Melanie Selig Rosenthal. Who is actually a passport picture. She was born in 1893. Died in 1980 in San Francisco.

Q And what year do you guess this was taken?

A Um, 1939, '40.

Q Tell us about this, please.

A This is my family. My mother and father. My brother Harry. Um, and I. It was taken just before he was still to leave for America. Probably in late 1937. He left in February of 1938.

This is my uncle Alfred Selig who served his country well in the first World War, was released from concentration camp because he has served well and then later on was exterminated at Auschwitz among with his wife and two children.

Q Who is this, please?

A This is a picture of me with two of my guardian's grandchildren. This was shortly after I arrived in England probably in the summer of 1939.

This is a picture of me on the left. The two little boys in the back were my uncles' two boys who were killed in Auschwitz. This is in Nuremburg in 1938, I believe.

Q Tell us about this, please.

A Um, this was the --near the house with my mother was born. The man on the left is her brother Fiedel who died right after returning from the war of influenza. My mother was extremely upset about that. She was extremely fond of this brother. This was in 1918. 1918. This is my grandmother whose name was Rosemarie Selig. My mother's mother with her then older son, Alfred. He's the one, again, who was killed by the fascists. And this was probably taken in 19 -- either '17 or '18.

Q And this one, please?

A This is a picture of my mother, the right, my grandmother in the center, and my uncle Alfred on the left. And it was taken in April of 1921. Before my mother and father became engaged to be married.

Q This is --

A This is a passport picture which was chosen by my guardian to pick me to live with her. I was fourteen.

Q And that as when she had to go --

A That's what she had. That's it. This is my father's passport. Um, the name is Reveal, of course, was added. He had to write that on. And that actually is what brings me back to a story which I might not have told you. When my mother's passport appeared at right they had omitted the E at the end of her name. Her name was Mani and she was so afraid of making noises about it that to the end of her days she spelled it M-a-n-i-e that she didn't want the Nazis to to have any reason to hold her back. When she died she decided to put her -- the original spelling on her tombstone. Did I mention that before?

Q No.

A You keep me longer I'll probably come up with some more.

This is a picture, this is a family picture, my grandfather, who is 81 years old when I was born.

Q He is kneeling in the center?

A He's sitting actually.

Q Sitting in the center and you're on the right side of the photo with the little girl?

A Yeah. I'm the little girl. This is my mother.

Q Back row, second from the right?

A Right. And my father next to her.

Q Uh-huh.

A My uncle, the tall man actually.

Q Back left.

A My sister's husband. Oh, that's my brother, right.

Q The little baby in the middle?

A Yes. Yes. This was April 1929.

Q All right. Tell us about this.

A This is a portion of my class at Philastine in Frankfurt, Germany. It's -- that's me sort of smack in the middle.

Q You are which person? Which two again? Sorry.

A Um, this one right -- right here.

Q Okay. So this is you right there?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. And this is from --

A From Philanthropin.

Q And this is from this book from your high school. Okay.

Tell us about this photo, please.

A Um, this is a picture taken in San Francisco of my mother and father, my brother and myself. And probably was in the late fifties.

Q This, please?

A Um, this is my mother and what is the date on that? 1915.

Q What is marked in. Yeah. June 15th.

A And with her brother Freidel who died of influenza at the end of the war.

This is my mother and my younger brother at

age -- between two and three.

(Tape goes to black.)

-oOo-

*(Historical Note: October 17, 1989 at 5:04 p.m. San Francisco had an earthquake where a portion of the Nimitz freeway in Oakland collapsed and damage occurred to the freeway going into San Francisco's Chinatown which passes by the Ferry Building.)