

1 INTERVIEW WITH: TRUDE MEYER

2 INTERVIEWERS: Loreen Welk, Judy Welch

3 DATE: 10/28 (Sunday) 1984

4 PLACE: Trude Meyer's home

5 TRANSCRIBER: Victoria Fickel, Orlando, Florida

6 BY: MS. WELK:

7 Q. Now I would like for you to state your name once again.

8 A. My name is Trude Meyer (inaudible) and I'm born in
9 Germany. August 15, 1924. I lived in a farm town near
10 Frankfurt, called For-mal-son. My parents had a big and good
11 business and we owned a lot of land and fields. My father
12 was a butcher, kosher by the way. Non-Jewish people bought
13 there also. We owned a large home. We lived very comfortable
14 with the help of some maid servants, man help at all times.

15 Our family life was very happy. I had two brothers
16 and one sister. Till the year 1934 when Hitler came to power
17 and things changed. The non-Jewish people stopped little-by-
18 little to buy the merchandise from our store. There are left
19 only five Jewish families. So, we had no other choice, but to
20 go to a regular elementary school. Some teachers begin
21 treating us not nice anymore. People started joining the S.S.
22 groups. In the year of 1937, my father passed away of natural
23 causes. By that time, Hitler had gotten more and more
24 followers. Even our good old friends avoided us. We got
25 scared. Some turned against us. My brother and sister and

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1 myself were not allowed or permitted to go to high school
2 nor university. We had to close our business.

3 On Kristallnacht, 1938, November 9th, they, the
4 Nazis, threw stones at our house, but it was not too bad.
5 Very soon after that, they forced us to give up our fields
6 and lands for very little money. We were not permitted to
7 handle our own bank accounts. Only certain amount of spending
8 money was given to my Mother. But, my Mother, nevertheless,
9 did not want to leave. She was afraid we, the children,
10 were too young to work and she would not be able to support
11 us in any other country.

12 We had a chance to go to the United States. By the
13 time she made up her mind, they -- they discontinued entry.

14 Nazi groups passed our house frequently and things
15 kept getting worse. We were given a Star of David which Jews--

16
17 (Very brief discussion between Interviewer and Inter-
18 viewee held -- was inaudible.)

19 A. (CONTINUED)

20 --with written on it too. Wear at all times. Also, we
21 were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk. We had to walk on
22 the street. Hitler began already taking over some countries
23 near the German border like Czechoslovakia. Immediately, he
24 started to send Jewish people from these countries to concen-
25 tration camps. I still remember very well the train loads

1 going through our railroad station. In December 7th, 1941,
2 our turn came. We had only a few days and we were told to
3 leave everything behind except for what they told us to take.

4 Each one had a back-pack. The other items which were
5 sent away before, we never seen again. At the main train
6 station in Frankfurt, we met with thousands of other people
7 from different parts of Germany. From then on, the Nazis
8 were in command.

9 Q. I have a question.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. When they rounded you up, did they tell you where you
12 were going?

13 A. I don't remember that. I really don't. I don't think
14 they told us where we were going.

15 Q. Did you have any idea where?

16 A. Nothing. No. We thought we were going to a working camp
17 or to work for the Army or that's what they told us. That's
18 all I remember. No name.

19 Q. And what were the conditions of the trains that took you?

20 A. I believe it was a regular train, not the _____ train?

21 They took our jewelry, money, etc., whatever was
22 left that would be wore. We had to turn in our silverware,
23 gold and jewelry at earlier times. It was very cold. Snowing,
24 with little food. We were sent to Re-Gal-Lat-E-Yan. To our
25 surprise, we were brought or walked to a ghetto where they had

1 killed most of the Latin and Jewish people a few hours before
2 to make room for us German Jews. I still remember blood
3 in the icy streets. They took my brother, 18 years old, with
4 a lot of other men away from us. He was gone for 9 months
5 and sent back to the ghetto. They were put in a work camp
6 without hardly any food where a lot of people died right
7 away. The rest of my family lived in that room with about
8 20-25 people. Slept on the ground. We ate and wore clothing
9 what the Latin people had left behind.

10 The younger people were assigned work camp and my
11 sister and I were brought every morning to our, sort of a
12 housing project. It was used for Army personnel. Something
13 like a hospital. We had to work for them, clean houses, wash,
14 cook, etc. They gave us food while we were there and also
15 sometimes to take home to the ghetto. But, we were not allowed
16 at any time to bring anything in that against their rules. So,
17 from time to time we had body search and many times with all
18 depends the kind of mood the Nazis were in, they punished the
19 people and sometimes they (inaudible) the people while we
20 were witnessing it. And, we were brought to the galley to
21 see them hanging there.

22 Q. How often did that happen?

23 A. Not too often. But, it happened once in a great while.

24 Q. In the ghetto, after you finished work, did you go back
25 and live with your family? Did you always --

1 A. Yes. Everybody, everybody went to their own living quarters
2 at night with families. Yes. It was pretty much normal at
3 night in the ghetto. Like, you live at home only with so many
4 people in one room it was hard when you had to wash up or
5 lie down at night, you know, until everybody was lying there on
6 the ground like, I don't know how to say it, worms. But, life
7 was bearable nevertheless.

8 The Germans we worked for were sometimes very nice.
9 They felt sorry for us in some ways and the good part was that
10 they were the Army and not the Nazis, who we worked for.

11 One thing I like to mention which I forgot at the
12 very beginning when we came to the ghetto the small children
13 were taken away from the parents. I don't remember what
14 happened to them.

15 The food was rationed, but there was still a rather
16 black market, I would say, going on.

17 Q. What would they do?

18 A. Trade things for something else or I don't know. Maybe
19 it was even clothes. One had nothing to wear, the other
20 one, you know, had a piece of cloths which he didn't need.

21 Q. So, they would trade like food for --

22 A. For clothes or you know, like that.

23 The Nazi commander in charge was a very rude man.
24 Many a times he took people to a cemetary which was in the
25 ghetto and he shot them for little or no reason. He found a

1 reason. It was not a reason for shooting someone.

2 In the year 1943, my sister was sent to a camp and
3 a little later they sent me to another work camp, field work.
4 We lived in barricks and life was bearable, but that was the
5 last time I saw my mother and brothers. About 6 months later,
6 my sister and I met again in a concentration camp (inaudible).
7 The conditions there were terrible. Men and women were --
8 their hair was shaved off and they was separated from each
9 other. We had to sleep on sacks, filthy straw, and there were
10 terrible conditions, and the woman security watched over us
11 were German, ex-German prostitutes. Ex-prisoners, I would say.
12 Which Hitler thought were the right kind of people to watch
13 over us and to treat us right.

14 The food utterly was two slices of bread and one
15 plate of soup a day. We, my sister and I, was again somewhat
16 lucky. We worked for a railroad, a railway, railway. To
17 lay down tracks. But, they, the guards, treated us a little
18 more human. They also gave us food once in a while. And, in
19 this camp, they killed nearly every day our people, most the
20 sick and old.

21 Q. Do you know how they were killed?

22 A. They, as far as I know, our people had to make holes in
23 the ground and they were put into these openings in the ground.

24 Q. So, were they taken --

25 A. Thrown into the ground. That's what I heard. I did not

1 see.

2 Q. Were they taken into the forrest when that was done, or
3 was it done there at the camp?

4 A. No, they were taken away, little further away from the
5 camp. So.

6 Many times we had to stay for hours in the cold for
7 no reason. As time went on, Hitler was losing the war and
8 the Russian Army was taking over the countrysides like
9 (inaudible) and those who were still barely alive were sent
10 by freight train, by freight train to Poland.

11 Q. Okay. Before we go on to the next part. Were there any
12 resistance groups in this camp? Did you know of any kind of
13 resistance that was going on?

14 A. No. We were scared to do anything. Is that what you mean?

15 Q. Could you describe a day of camp? What happened when you
16 woke up? What time you woke up, till when you went to sleep?

17 A. They did everything to make things hard on us. We had to
18 get up very early and we had to do everything under command.

19 Q. Like what?

20 A. Run out -- the first thing in the morning, we had to
21 stay in a line, you know, for hours before they give you
22 anything to eat and they counted us. At night, and in the
23 morning, they counted the people and if anybody would have
24 been missing, they would have treated the whole camp maybe
25 shot us right there and then. Nobody tried.

1 Q. So, in other words --

2 A. To do anything, any tricks, you know. Tried to -- we were
3 so scared to try to do what you were supposed to do. Anything
4 of command.

5 Q. So, after roll call, what happened?

6 A. We went to get a little bit to eat and we went to work
7 and marched in groups. Each one went to wherever they were
8 assigned and to work.

9 Q. How many hours did you work for?

10 A. I believe all day. All day. Same thing, roll call, same
11 thing. Maybe sometimes you had to call out our name.

12 Q. Did you -- were there any friendships made at camp? Did
13 people talk? Were you able to talk while you were in the
14 barracks?

15 A. Yes, I guess. We did. We were able to talk, talk, I guess.
16 They were not inside the barracks at all times, but we were
17 afraid at all times to say anything. We may have whispered
18 to each other. We were too weak to do anything, just kept
19 every hour, every day went the way it was.

20 We all were in different sections from different
21 parts of Germany, like my group, they came all from the
22 vicinity where I was from. But, many things were really
23 normal. I think on Friday night, they had a little service.
24 Also, in the ghetto I'm talking about.

25 Q. You mentioned crematoriums? Where did you first hear about

1 the crematoriums?

2 A. Well, somehow we heard.

3 Q. Through word of mouth, or did --

4 A. Maybe there was some people, Army people we worked for,
5 that somewhere along the line we had a hunch, you know, that they
6 were also killing church people.

7 Q. What were the barracks like? How was it in the barracks?
8 How did people sleep?

9 A. Under terrible conditions. The space between each bunk
10 was very, very small, and I believe there was like sardines
11 lying next to each other. -- There were lice and --

12 Q. It was dirty?

13 A. Dirty? Sure. We had not enough places where we could go
14 and wash up.

15 Q. Were you able to wash up?

16 A. Yes. Yes. I forgot. It wasn't very much.

17 So, coming back to the train they transferred us in.
18 We were in terrible conditions also. They had a bucket in one
19 corner which was used as a toilet and some people, I believe,
20 did not make it. This crew, this work crew, I should say,
21 was mostly around the age of 20 and I believe that that was
22 one reason we were not killed yet. They needed us for work.

23 This time we did some sort of factory work to repair
24 electric cables which the Army used at the front line in
25 fighting (inaudible).

1 And, at first, they put us in an old fortress because the
2 guards weren't there yet and we had to build our own, help
3 build our own barracks.

4 Q. Where was this in Poland? Do you know?

5 A. The name was Thorn - t-r-o-r-n. And, it was again during
6 wintertime and icing and snowing and cold. No way we could
7 get any other food at this time. It was rationed, the food,
8 every day. Maybe one plate of soup. I remember it was cooked
9 from fish bones and a few slices of bread and a lot of people
10 became sick because of the cold and diarrhea and temperature.
11 I had the same sickness once. My sister. And many times
12 people became too weak to walk to the outhouse which was way
13 farther away from the barracks.

14 Q. Did you hear of any medical experiments done on camp
15 inmates?

16 A. Not in this camp. And sometimes, they let us stand in
17 line for hours in the snow for no reason will they made up their
18 mind and let us to go back in again in the barracks. And,
19 sometimes we would pray to God, why he let this happen to us.

20 Q. Did you believe you would survive?

21 A. I can not answer that. I don't know. It's just -- you
22 didn't think any more. You became so -- I don't know, your
23 insides became so strong and you became a strong believer, I
24 guess, that you -- someday it would end. Yes, I think so.
25 Some people give up believing in God, but at all times we

1 didn't but know or what was really going on around the world,
2 how the world was going. There was no newspaper, no radio,
3 but finally in the beginning of 1945 we knew our end was
4 near. Which we didn't know at first was that Hitler was
5 losing the war and we had shooting and airplanes overhead
6 and the Nazi leaders asked us to leave the camp, to march
7 with them. The sick people, they loaded on a truck and those
8 who were too weak to walk, were shot and left behind. My
9 sister did not want to walk anymore either, so a girlfriend,
10 girlfriend, good girlfriend of ours, encouraged here and we
11 dragged here along. I believe we walked one whole day till
12 the evening.

13 The Russians kept coming closer then and we were
14 dragged and that's when the miracle happened. The Nazis asked
15 us to run to a shelter and save our lives and they ran away
16 also in the back now.

17 Q. Did you understand what was going on when they told you
18 this?

19 A. Well, we kind of knew then that that was it. We couldn't
20 believe what our eyes saw was hard to believe. And, we found
21 very soon at the air raid shelter and it was in a small city
22 right in the middle of the city called Rhom-berg. In Polish
23 they call it Bik-Dosh. But, the fighting, it wasn't quite
24 that easy. The fighting got worse during that night because
25 Germans weren't gone yet. And, we saw some houses burning

1 around us and there was some bombing. And, we had to stay
2 in this shelter for, I believe, three to four days.

3 Q. Without any food?

4 A. We had been given, by the Nazis, the day we left in the
5 morning a few loaves of bread which we had to divide among
6 the rest of the people. And I forgot how many people we were.

7 So, besides the bread, we only had, plenty snow outside.

8 So, when you got real hungry, you just took a handful of snow
9 and one time we were able to run across the gunfire outside
10 and knocked on peoples doors and ask for food. So, the German
11 Army came even into the shelter one more time before the Russian
12 left and we got scared. We thought the Nazis are coming back.

13 They did not harm us though in any way. So, our
14 liberation finally came and we were able to find homes which
15 the Germans vacated of. And, also the food they left behind.
16 Some Germans didn't want to be taken over by the Russians, so
17 they just left the homes and their clothes and food. So, we
18 started wearing their clothes and eating their food and -- and
19 many people ate too much in the beginning and they were sick.

20 I had suffered some frostbite while we were in the
21 shelter and I also had part of my big toe frozen off which later
22 on was amputated by two Russian doctors. And, we worked also
23 in that hospital in the -- for the Russians. And, they
24 supplied us with food every day and life kept looking better.

25 So, the war wasn't over yet and I, I believe, it

1 lasted another three to four months and we began to travel
2 by train and to get to the West Germany. First, we stopped
3 in (inaudible) and there were certain organizations formed
4 in the meantime, Jewish organizations. And, they helped us
5 and the German government helped us and we had no problems
6 traveling or getting through. So, we went -- finally we
7 arrived in my home town, my home of birth. In the home,
8 naturally, to find the rest of my family.

9 The people who lived in our home, or our house,
10 had to move out and also our land was returned and put in our
11 name again. Even, some of the furniture which had been sold
12 from the Nazis to some people, they were nice enough to give
13 it back to us. And, I guess it was hard for us to believe
14 that there -- my family hadn't returned. My mother and two
15 brothers were less fortunate. They were sent from the ghetto
16 someplace to be killed. And, we never were able to find out
17 what happened to them. I wrote to the Red Cross and different
18 places we wrote, but we never could find out what happened
19 to them. But, my sister stayed together with me after that
20 first separation. It wasn't easy at times, but we always
21 managed to stay together.

22 So, all I have to add, I guess, the reason why we
23 lived or they let us live was a miracle. Willpower helped and,
24 I guess, good luck.

25 Q. When did you come to the United States?

1 A. I spend one year in Germany after that. And, then my
2 relatives here arranged the papers for us. For my sister and
3 I. And, myself. And, we came here to the United States
4 exactly a year after we got --

5 Q. Did you have a profession when you came here?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Did you go -- learn anything?

8 A. No, I didn't. I was 16 years old when I entered the
9 concentration camp and all this time I wasn't able to learn
10 anything.

11 Q. What did you --

12 A. And, I never had any schooling. I went to school six months
13 to learn the language and then I looked for a job and I worked
14 for -- First, I worked for an office, file clerk. Then, I
15 worked for another office, for Woolworth's, in the main office.
16 Some sort of same kind of work. For five years.

17 Q. And then --

18 A. The language -- I started picking up English. I didn't
19 know no English.

20 Q. Where did you meet your husband? In the United States?

21 A. Right here, in San Francisco. I went -- we went to the
22 same synagogue, and that's where we met.

23 Q. Is he also a Holocaust survivor?

24 A. He went to Shanghai and he was in Shanghai ten years and
25 he had a different kind of experience, but it wasn't -- (inaudible)

1 Q. Do you have any children?

2 A. I have two sons, one is married and one is not married
3 yet, and --

4 Q. Do you share your experiences at all? Do they know about
5 the Holocaust?

6 A. Not everything. They always didn't want to really
7 start to get me excited or I wanted to tell them something,
8 they listened, but they never requested me to. You want to know
9 what?

10 Q. How do you feel the Holocaust has shaped your life?

11 Do you feel that you still have bitter feelings? Do you
12 carry a lot of bitter feelings? What is your --

13 A. No, I don't. I have gone back this summer to Germany.
14 In fact, I was invited from a family, a very well-to-do
15 family. They lived in a sort of fortress like, or castle
16 like, in my home town. They felt they wanted to do something
17 nice to, for us, since we went through all this and they
18 invited us and they paid our way and they received us very
19 well and I had no bitterness towards anybody because most of
20 the people treated us only that way because they were forced
21 by Hitler. If they wouldn't have gone along with Hitler,
22 they would have been put, themselves, in the concentration
23 camps. Which he did. A lot of people were put in concen-
24 tration camps because of religion, religious reasons, Catholic
25 people, people who were nice to Jewish people, and they were

1 actually afraid. So, I'm not blaming anybody. The only
2 people who really did the actual killing, it's hard to
3 explain. But, I don't think -- I still think about certain
4 people who were not informed. I don't blame anybody.

5 Q. Do you feel any anti-semitism in America?

6 A. I can't say that, I guess. I don't think so. Not here
7 in San Francisco.

8 Q. What does Israel mean to you? Does it have any special
9 meaning after your experience?

10 A. Well, you get the feeling when you go to Israel that
11 feeling closer to Jewish people and it's a nice place to
12 visit, but I would never want to live there.

13 Q. Does it make you feel any more secure just to know that
14 there is a place?

15 A. No, I have a strong feeling that it will never happen
16 here in the United States what happened in Germany. Will
17 never happen again. (Inaudible)

18 Q. Well, I want to thank you very much for sharing your
19 story. It's been a pleasure.

20 A. You're welcome.

21
22 (End of tape.)
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GEP Meyer, Trude
A3 Jewish Survivor
born near Frankfurt, Germany

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Q. Well, I want to thank you very much for sharing your

story. It's been a pleasure.

A. You're welcome.

(End of tape.)