

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Interview with: PAULA BALKIN

Reporter/Transcriber: ALAN F. BOWIN, RPR-CM

Date Transcribed: August 4, 1987

* * *

BY THE INTERVIEWER:

Q. You were born? You don't have to answer the age part if you don't want to.

A. It's all right. I'm Paula Balkin. My maiden name was Greenbaum. Came from Leipzig, Germany.

Q. Were you in a ghetto?

A. No, I was sent with a kinder trans -- children's transport, in June of 1939 --

Q. Uh-huh.

A. (Continuing) -- to London, England, to a cousin of my mother's.

Q. Neat. You weren't in any camps at all?

A. No, I was not.

Q. Okay. Where did you go after the war?

A. I came to the States.

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. Uh-huh. And did anyone else in your
3 family survive the war?

4 A. All the children were sent out of
5 Germany.

6 Q. Uh-huh. What about your parents?

7 A. My parents, I'm still looking for my
8 mother. My father was killed in Auschwitz. My
9 mother, I heard the last from, she was taken in a
10 transport from Salonika. She managed to get as far
11 as Salonika.

12 Q. Uh-huh.

13 A. And the last I heard is that she was
14 picked up someplace there.

15 Q. And do you know anything about your
16 father at all?

17 A. He was killed -- he was gassed in
18 Auschwitz, April 23, 1945.

19 Q. How do you know that?

20 A. I traced my parents as much -- and all
21 the family, and I'm still working on it.

22 Q. Uh-huh.

23 A. The responsibility of the -- I was the
24 oldest in the family; I was 15 years old when I
25 left Germany, and I kept an eye on all of them. I

1 Paula Balkin

2 left my papers here. I wrote a paper and I gave it
3 to -- for the archives. And some of my letters,
4 when they were trying to get out, I sent them -- I
5 gave them for the archives, because I think it was
6 worthwhile noting how they -- what they had to go
7 through, some of the things that they expected me
8 to do and which I was, unfortunately, not able to
9 fulfill.

10 Q. Could you tell us some of those things?

11 A. Well, they wanted -- let's start from
12 the beginning. A cousin of my mine came out in
13 November, 1938. She was sent to camp in Norwich.
14 A week later, a family from Norwich, England --

15 Q. Uh-huh.

16 A. (Continuing) -- took her and made a
17 home for her, and she stayed there throughout the
18 war. So she was pretty well taken care of. That
19 was in June of -- November, 1938.

20 I was the next one to leave, which was in
21 June, 1939, and I went to my mother's cousin.

22 Q. Did people -- did they, like, raid your
23 house, the SS People?

24 A. Oh, you're talking -- yes, I saw the
25 Kristallnacht.

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. The what?

3 A. The Kristallnacht.

4 Q. What's that?

5 A. In October, 1938 --

6 Q. Um-hmm.

7 A. (Continuing) -- they smashed as many
8 Jewish businesses as they possibly could, and
9 destroyed the synagogues, took -- interned some of
10 our people.

11 Q. Where did they take them?

12 A. Some of them to camps; some of them
13 were just arrested, never heard from again.

14 Q. Just like shot or something?

15 A. We don't know.

16 Q. I see.

17 A. Some of them, we never heard from
18 again. And some of them were taken into camps for
19 the slightest excuse possible.

20 Q. Um-hmm.

21 A. They -- the torahs were destroyed and
22 kicked and burned, and I was -- I watched a take-
23 over of a -- the Nazis -- one of the Nazis was shot
24 by a socialist, so -- well, it was -- we were able
25 to watch it, so they made her -- our -- the street

1 Paula Balkin

2 we lived on was Lure Strasse (phonetic), and then
3 after he was shot, they named the street Walter
4 Blumer Strasse (phonetic), after this Nazi.

5 And from then on, it was hard going. My --
6 my aunt, my grandmother and some of them were
7 interned, sent to Poland. We managed to get them
8 into the consulate, to the Polish ambassador, as we
9 were of Polish descent, and some of them we never
10 heard from again; some of them managed to get out.

11 I don't know what else to tell you at this
12 point.

13 Q. Well, growing up in England, how did
14 you feel?

15 A. Well, growing up in England, for me it
16 was very tough because I was sent to Cambridge,
17 evacuated to Cambridge with a cousin of two and a
18 half and my youngest cousin, seven months old, and
19 I was in charge of those two. And when they -- as
20 I was a minor, when they -- Refugee Committee heard
21 about it, they took the children from me.

22 And I couldn't find a job. They considered
23 me enemy alien, as I came from Germany.

24 Q. Oh, they, like, hated you?

25 A. Pardon?

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. They hated you?

3 A. No, it was not a matter of hating you,
4 but you automatically were an enemy alien. Unless
5 I -- until I got through the Tribunal.

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. And then I was only able to work in
8 certain areas, but, of course, I wasn't skilled.
9 My sister went to various areas, and we always kept
10 in close touch with one another.

11 And then I was sent to a -- where my cousin
12 stayed, in Norwich. Her sister took us in. And
13 then we were bombed out, totally bombed out, so
14 that we escaped with our lives was a sheer miracle.

15 Q. Where did -- how did you escape?

16 A. That was in London.

17 They -- we were -- managed to crawl out of
18 the debris. So we were lucky in this respect.

19 Q. Like, did you know -- you had no idea
20 the bomb was coming or anything? And it just --

21 A. Well, you got immune to the point that
22 you didn't necessarily always run to the shelter
23 just because there was an attack.

24 Q. Uh-huh.

25 A. You just hoped that everything would

1 Paula Balkin

2 work out all right.

3 Q. All right, well, where did you go after
4 you crawled out of the debris?

5 A. After that, I took a room, I went to
6 the room, I still had a job, I sent my sister to
7 school. She's seven years younger than I am.

8 Q. Uh-huh.

9 A. And then I realized that two of my
10 cousins were not in very good homes, so I made
11 sure that they were taken care of. I moved back
12 to Cambridge, at that time, so I could be near
13 everybody, and I took guardianship of my -- custody
14 of my youngest cousin, who was at the time about
15 four and a half years old, until she came to this
16 country, and I took care of them.

17 Q. When did you move here?

18 A. In '47.

19 Q. Where did you come to?

20 A. I came -- my parents always wanted to
21 come to the States, so -- and the quota were closed
22 when the war started.

23 Q. Uh-huh.

24 A. So I followed it through after the
25 peace was declared.

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. Where did you come?

3 A. I came to Detroit, Michigan.

4 Q. Okay. Nice place. I've never been to
5 Detroit.

6 A. Are you from Washington?

7 Q. I'm really from Massachusetts. I just
8 -- I just moved to Washington two years ago because
9 my dad got a job with Reagan. Hopefully we'll be
10 leaving.

11 A. Are you in a government job?

12 Q. Yeah, my dad is.

13 A. I see.

14 Q. What do you -- do you know any stories
15 of people who've been in camps and things?

16 A. Well, only what I've -- I heard from
17 or read through the various inquiries I made.
18 Because, after the war, I received a letter from
19 a gentile woman from Leipzig who told us where
20 various members of my family went to.

21 Q. Um-hmm. Like, when you were -- what
22 were you, you left when you were 15?

23 A. I -- yes.

24 Q. What was happening at that time? They
25 -- they bombed the city or something? They -- they

1 Paula Balkin

2 raided all the Jewish shops? And how -- how did
3 you feel? Do you -- did you understand what was
4 going on?

5 A. Well, I was afraid.

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. And because so many people I -- one
8 night, I remember the Gestapo came into our house
9 to search the house, and --

10 Q. Why?

11 A. Because you were Jews, and for an
12 excuse, you know, to see if we had any documents
13 that were -- you know, they were looking for
14 excuses to do something to you.

15 Q. Just to (inaudible).

16 A. And we were fearful.

17 Like, one of my uncles, for instance, who had
18 a tailoring establishment --

19 Q. Um-hmm.

20 A. (Continuing) -- and he -- his store was
21 demolished, and he was trying to hide a few bolts
22 of cloth; and his older son, who was approximately
23 four, four and a half at the time, when my uncle
24 said, "No, I don't have anything else to give you,"
25 and he -- he just said, "But I do -- I know where

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Paula Balkin

you have some." You know, so of course he was taken to Sachsenhausen and killed there, in 1940.

Q. How was he killed?

A. I don't know. We never really found out. You -- once they were interned, you don't hear anything anymore.

Q. Ooh, that's so awful.

And when you heard about your father, had -- did you know anything about, like, the gas chambers, living in England?

A. You had heard about it, and you didn't -- I mean, during the war, but, you know, you never feel as if it can happen to you. You always feel it can happen to everybody else excepting to you. And I always lived with hope that I would see my parents, my grandmother, aunts and uncles again, because we were a very close-knit family.

Q. And do you -- do you feel vindictive now?

A. No, I can't say I feel vindictive. I can't -- I have a lot of -- I'm sad more than anything. I'm -- I think I'm too tired to be vindictive, about the whole thing.

Q. Too tired of searching?

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Paula Balkin

A. Of -- no, I've never -- I will never give up searching. I will never give it up because I've -- what I'm doing presently is, is I had saved letters for -- they're from the time that I left home and my parents' home, and I kept them and I carried them with me wherever I went to and I'm trying --

Q. You weren't searched for those?

A. Well, I left in June.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And I was in England. These letters came to England to me, don't forget that.

Q. Yeah.

A. And some of them were censored, yes. But I kept them and now I'm translating them and I'm -- and then I'm going to bind them and give them to all of my children, because I don't want my children ever to forget what happened.

Q. Is that why you came here today?

A. One of the reasons, yes. I couldn't face it at first, and I was willing to forget everything that ever went on. And then I realized that you can't. You can't go back, but you can't -- you mustn't forget, because was -- it's too

1 Paula Balkin

2 important.

3 Q. Okay, I have to see if there's any more
4 questions I should ask.

5 This isn't my question but I'll ask it,
6 anyway. You probably heard that anti-Semitism is
7 on the rise. Do you experience this?

8 A. I haven't personally experienced it,
9 but I know it is on the rise. I think one can --
10 you can tell, you know, with --

11 Q. Uh-huh.

12 A. (Continuing) -- the backlash against
13 Israel and other things that are coming about.

14 Q. Is Israel important to you?

15 A. Extremely.

16 Q. Have you ever been there?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Is it beautiful?

19 A. Lovely.

20 Q. I want to go.

21 A. You've got to go.

22 Q. I want to.

23 A. You've been?

24 Q. No, I want to.

25 A. You have to.

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. And is it -- do you feel like a sense
3 of family in Israel?

4 A. Yes.

5 Are you Jewish?

6 Q. Half.

7 A. Half Jewish.

8 Q. Not very, though. I don't --

9 A. You're not a practicing Jew?

10 Q. No?

11 A. Is this what you're saying?

12 Q. Right.

13 A. You're by your -- you're a Jew by
14 mother or father?

15 Q. Father. And in -- in my family there's
16 lots of problems with religion. It's -- because my
17 mother's Catholic, but not really. She's not prac-
18 ticing at all. She doesn't believe in it at all.

19 A. I see.

20 Q. But it still caused a lot of problems,
21 so they -- they want us to decide.

22 A. I see.

23 Well, I feel Israel is important because
24 Israel gives us Jews -- it does give us a home
25 state, and I think what the Israelis are doing is

1 Paula Balkin

2 important for all of us Jews in the Diaspora.

3 Q. The what?

4 A. In the Diaspora.

5 Q. What's that?

6 A. Where you're spread all over, because
7 we Jews are spread all over.

8 Q. Uh-huh.

9 A. Be it in England, or be it in France,
10 or here. I think what is going on is sad, because
11 I think the media is biased.

12 Q. Uh-huh. Oh, yeah.

13 A. And -- and I think it's sad because
14 what happened in Germany could happen here, also.

15 Q. Yeah. So it's scary?

16 A. And this is what worries me. Yes.

17 Q. I hope I don't have to live through
18 something -- just talking to people --

19 A. I hope it never happens.

20 Q. Uh-huh. It's awful.

21 Let's see. How did you feel about, after the
22 war, you know, how they didn't really -- a lot of
23 countries didn't want Jews, freed Jews, coming in?
24 How did you feel about that, or how do you feel?

25 A. Disgusted.

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. Uh-huh.

3 A. Resentful that humanity should be so
4 uncaring, unfeeling.

5 Q. And do you know people now who have
6 survived lots of camps?

7 A. No. I -- When I came to the States,
8 I wanted to make a life for myself here as an
9 American, and I felt this was more important to
10 me than anything else.

11 Q. So you didn't get in contact with --

12 A. Not with too many. I've always stayed
13 in touch with my family --

14 Q. Uh-huh.

15 A. (Continuing) -- yes, but not with any-
16 oneone else. Otherwise -- not unless I could help
17 it, you know, because I -- I felt I had to estab-
18 lish myself, and that's the way I did it.

19 Q. And do -- and you think it's important
20 to have, like, holocaust remembrance days and
21 things like that?

22 A. Definitely. We must never forget,
23 never.

24 Q. That's what everyone always says.

25 I had -- last year, in psychology, I had a

1 Paula Balkin

2 Jewish teacher and she would bring in pictures. It
3 was so hard for us -- all of us to believe. We
4 just totally rejected it because we couldn't
5 comprehend something like that happened.

6 A. No, it's important.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 Did your sense of values change?

9 A. Well, this is hard to tell --

10 Q. Uh-huh.

11 A. (Continuing) -- because I think we're
12 marked by our experiences. I'm sure we've changed.
13 I hope I've changed.

14 Q. Uh-huh.

15 A. But I hope I've not changed with
16 bitterness. You can't -- not that I have any love
17 for the Germans, but --

18 Q. I'm like half German.

19 A. Pardon?

20 Q. I'm half German. The side of me that's
21 Catholic is German.

22 A. I see.

23 Q. Great.

24 A. So don't -- forgive me. You had
25 nothing to do with it.

1 Paula Balkin

2 Q. No, I know.

3 A. But you lived here.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. How many years? You've always lived
6 here.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. You've been born here, weren't you?

9 Q. Uh-huh. I was born in California.

10 But my grandfather tells us stories of how
11 people used to spit in his face. And he -- he had
12 a nervous breakdown because he felt so guilty about
13 not going and fighting the Germans, because he
14 couldn't go because he had four kids, or something.
15 It's really, you know.

16 Let's see. Do you know what a roll call is?

17 A. A roll call?

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. Sure. Why?

20 Q. I don't know what they are. Like, in
21 the camps, didn't they have it? Isn't that where
22 they --

23 A. I should imagine they had roll calls --

24 Q. Uh-huh.

25 A. (Continuing) -- there, yes. But not

1 Paula Balkin

2 having been in a camp, I --

3 Q. Yeah. I just wanted to know.

4 Let's see. Okay, I guess that's it. If you
5 want to -- do you have anything else to add?

6 A. Okay. Well, I think this is a
7 wonderful thing, what is happening here today.

8 Q. Have you met --

9 A. No, I'm still looking and I'm still
10 searching, and there are lots of people I'm looking
11 for.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. So I hope I meet --

14 Q. I hope you find your brothers.

15 A. I hope so.

16 Q. Find out what happened to them.

17 A. I hope so. I think it's important.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you.

19 A. Good luck to you.

20 Q. Thanks.

21

22

23

24

25