

HVT-267

F., Ursula 1921-

Ursula F. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-267) interviewed Alex Cherney, June 6, 1997.

3 copies: 1SVHS first camera; 1SVHS second camera; 1VHS copy.

Summary: Ursula was born on June 2, 1921 in Berlin. She and her sister were brought up in an assimilated Jewish home. Ursula's father worked in a bank and had permission to go to the stock exchange. His income allowed the family to live very comfortably. He was very observant and made the family go to synagogue. Ursula's mother, however, was not religious. Ursula went to elementary school and then went to a private school. In 1935 she was expelled from school for being Jewish and subsequently went to a Jewish private school.

Ursula describes in detail how the family's life changed after the Nazi's rise to power. In 1934, her father's permission to go to the stock exchange was revoked and the family began experiencing financial hardship. She remembers living in constant fear, particularly when the "Brown Shirts" marched through the streets. She witnessed rising antisemitism and discrimination. One of her very good friends refused to be close to her because she thought of Jews as poisonous.

After Ursula graduated, her parents sent her to a commercial college. Ursula tried hard to find a job, but she was regularly turned down because she was Jewish. Eventually she found a job in an Italian travel agency. The director general told her not to reveal her Jewish identity to anybody else in the company and he paid her from his own pocket. Ursula worked at the travel agency from March 1938 until Kristallnacht in November. During that time, many friends of the family left Germany. Ursula's father, however, was still convinced that nothing bad would ever happen.

Ursula witnessed Kristallnacht in Berlin. She remembers how Jews were humiliated, Jewish stores destroyed and synagogues burned. Soon after the pogrom, the Gestapo came to the family's home to arrest Ursula's father. He was not there, so they threatened the entire family with deportation unless he presented himself at their headquarters. During the next few days, Ursula regularly went to the police jail on the Alexanderplatz to inquire about her father's well-being. One day she was told that he had been transferred to Sachsenhausen. Ursula's mother asked her to travel to Sachsenhausen to try to gain information about her father. Ursula travelled to Sachsenhausen and asked a camp guard to bring her to the commander. The guard was apparently so astonished by this naivety that he just sent her home.

When Ursula's father was finally released, he was a physical and mental wreck. He had obviously been tortured and he often woke up screaming in the middle of the night. Ursula's father was told that he had to leave Germany within six weeks, otherwise he would be shot. Ursula made arrangements for her parents to travel to Shanghai. She planned to accept an invitation from her pen pal's family in England. On May 19, 1939, two weeks before her eighteenth birthday, she boarded a children's transport to England. Ursula's guarantors lived in Chester, north England. They were very affluent and took excellent care of her.

When the war started, Ursula went for a first aid course and then moved to Birmingham where she trained as a nurse. Ursula was interned for one year on the Isle of Man. She did not suffer any hardship there and accepts the rationale that the British Government gave for the internment of Germans. Ursula met her husband-to-be, David, on the Isle of Man. After they were both released, Ursula got a monitoring job at the BBC. She and David married in 1943.

Ursula, David and their first son, who was born in 1948, came to Canada in 1951. David worked as a graphic designer and Ursula worked at the Montreal Neurological Hospital and later at the Royal Victoria Hospital as an administrative assistant. In 1954, their second son was born. Ursula's parents and sisters moved to the United States after the end of the war.