

Interviewee: Lore Hepner

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Interviewer: Ilana Soloveichik

Lore Eva Hepner Halbershtam was born on July 23, 1929, in Berlin. Lore, the youngest sister of two brothers, left Berlin at age 9. Her childhood was happy. Her father was a lawyer in the Courts of Appeal of Berlin, and they lived well. Until 1936 life was normal. Sundays were spent at her maternal grandparents' house. The grandparents were more observant than Lore's family. They did not deny being Jewish but did not observe anything. Paternal grandfather lived with Lore and her family. Lore went to a public school but her parents were requested to take her out because she committed two sins. The first one happened when the children were parading in public, and they had to keep their right arm raised. After a while, Lore got tired and she lifted her left arm instead. The second occurred when writing a composition at the age of 6. She wrote about the funeral of a high Nazi officer and misspelled a word in such a way that it read that Hitler (picture) hung over the coffin. Since the school "could not guarantee her physical safety", after these incidents, the parents had to remove her. They sent her to a famous Hebrew school. It was called the Dr. Leonore Goldschmidt Schule. She employed only professors like her, who had been separated from their schools upon the advent of the Nazis; the students had been expelled as well. Lore would go to school in the snow in a sleigh pulled by her brothers going on skis. The school was highly intellectual and cultured. Later, Dr. Goldschmidt emigrated to England, taking with her

as many students as she could. She opened a school there, in the outskirts of London.

Life was good for the family until November 10, 1938. On the way to school Lore saw the destroyed Jewish stores, with broken glasses and saw the smoke rising from a nearby synagogue that had been burned. Judaism finally seeped into Lore's consciousness. The male teachers had already been rounded up at the school, and the atmosphere was gloomy. School closed and students were sent home. At home, mother had been informed that father had been taken away from his office. Mother and two brothers went to search for him, leaving Lore with her grandmother. Brown shirts appeared looking for the father too. Father was rounded up with the other Jewish males and eventually shipped to the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen. The family moved to the grandparents' apartment. The only solution became apparent: to leave Germany. Mother began her search for visas in the embassies and consulates. She found visas from Cuba for her nuclear family. Obtaining the visa was important because showing it to the authorities in the concentration camp, guaranteed the release of the prisoner. Father came back, after 6 weeks, a broken and emaciated man. Lore was afraid of him, and hid away from him upon his return. After two hours she was found by her brother inside the washing machine. It took three weeks for Lore to find the strength to see him. His legs had been frozen from standing barefoot in the snow and emotionally he was in a deep depression that lasted all his life.

Parents decided to get the children out of Germany soon. Uncle lived in Holland. They were put in a kinder transport to Holland. Lore considered it an adventure. Maternal grandparents were also supposed to go to Holland. The children lived near Rotterdam, in a camp set up

especially for them. Lore suffered there, and was often sickly. The children stayed there for 3 months. Parents managed to leave Germany in May of 1939.

When the camp closed, all the refugee children were transferred to a huge school. Lore found out later that none of those children survived the war. She and her brothers were lucky. The ship to Cuba was to be boarded in Liverpool, and the parents' efforts to stay in England proved futile. The only tickets left were in first class. The ship was called the *Orduña*. The pleasant journey. (Grandparents stayed in Holland. Paternal grandmother stayed with a son in Germany, but died of starvation by the Nazis, with other elders, in 1942. The son managed to recover his mother's body, and bury her in a cemetery. The son had been married to a non-Jew, and survived.

Arrival in Habana. They were not allowed to disembark. It was the day after the arrival of the *St. Louis*. There were all together 75 people. The captain decided to continue to Valparaiso and then go back to Europe. He thought that, if he crossed another ship of the same company going to Europe, he would transfer the passengers to that one, in order to get rid of the passengers earlier. (He was afraid not to have enough food in the ship.) Lore heard her father say that if they had to go back, he would throw himself to the sea. Another ship passed by, the *Orbita*, and the passengers were indeed transferred to it, baggage and all, in the high seas.

Travelling in first class in the *Ordone* they had met several important people one of them had witnessed the transfer of the refugees in the high seas, and could not get over the horrible impression he received witnessing it. Upon arriving in Valparaiso, Chile, he requested a visa for

the Hepner family from the president. It was a first class visa, without conditions.

Family did not have any money. A cousin of the mother in the US provided the family with financial assistance for a few years.

Arrival in Chile. The family stayed in the Victoria Hotel, near customs. Travelling from Valparaiso to Santiago to pension Levi. Moving to the pension Singer. Schooling. Correspondence with Holland, and the relatives there, was slow and meager. Life in Chile.