

TRACK 01 – INTRO TO RECORDING

Today is Wednesday, the 15th of April 2015. This recording is of Claudia Cords-Damon, the daughter of Jutta and Helmuth Cords, who were involved in Operation Valkyrie, the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler. It is being made at CedarHouse Sound and Mastering in North Sutton, New Hampshire. This recording is a production of Story Preservation Initiative, copyright, Nexcord's Generation Partnership, LP. All rights reserved.

TRACK 02 – HITLER'S RISE TO POWER

I'm Claudia Damon. I am the daughter of Jutta and Helmuth Cords. My mother was born in 1920, in Berlin. My father, Helmuth, was born in Cologne, in 1919. They were living in, respectively, Berlin and in Cologne at the time that Hitler came to power in 1933. I want to tell the story of my parents and their involvement in the plot to kill Hitler that took place on July 20, 1944. It was probably the twenty-third plot or attempt, none of which worked. They were involved in that one, in particular. Actually, my mother would say it's not so much a story about the plot to kill Hitler, as it is their own love story.

So, in 1930, my mom and her parents moved to Berlin. She was in school, and school was a wonderful place. It wasn't always interesting for Mom, but some of the classes were, and she loved being with the kids and had a lot of friends. The kids were all together. They weren't split into cliques and groups, and everybody was very tolerant and understanding of each other. It was a good experience for her. She was in a small private school that was for girls only.

When Hitler came into power in 1933, there were some—I guess you could call them rumblings of change. Some groups were established, you know—Hitler Youth was established fairly soon after that, and there was a group of girls called BDM, das Bund Deutscher Mädels, the Federation of German Girls. In school, they had to do the Hitler salute every morning. Instead of saying good morning, the kids were required to say Heil

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Hitler, with the Hitler salute. This Federation of German Girls that was formed resulted in splitting the school, the kids, into girls who belonged to it and girls who didn't. Mom came home and said she'd really like to join this group, because some of her friends were joining it, and her parents said no, you can't do that. It's not a good group. So she obeyed them. She wasn't always obedient, but she was then. So there's a different feeling in the school that developed over the next couple of years. The director of the school, one day, just was no longer there, and somebody else came in, who was probably an SS man, and he was very strict about the Hitler salute, and obeying Hitler, and all that stuff.

Then, I think it was in 1935, right after the so-called Race Laws were passed, that one of her teachers gave all the kids in his class a slip of paper to take home to fill out. She brought it home to her parents and said we got this in school and you're supposed to fill it out. They looked at it, they looked at each other very gravely, and they said we'll talk about this later. So, that night at dinner, they told her my grandmother's history. She had been born Jewish, even though she'd been baptized, and, under the laws—the new laws that had been passed—my grandmother was still considered to be Jewish. And, because she had married an Aryan, my grandfather, my mother was a Mischling, which was a person of mixed race, and that my mother was also considered Jewish, because people of mixed "race"—because Judaism is not a race, it's a religion, but Hitler called it a race—mixture people were also considered to be Jewish. What that meant for my mom, they told her, is that she would not be allowed to marry. That was according to the law. She could not continue her education. Mom was fifteen at the time, you know, finishing up her last couple of years of high school, hoping to go to college or university, and she was forbidden from doing that. She was absolutely furious about it. I think my grandparents filled out that form. It would have been much too dangerous not to. At the time, my grandfather still felt very strongly that being an Aryan would give my grandmother enough protection that they would be safe.

In school, they had to swear allegiance to Hitler, and every time that kind of thing was done, my mother and one of her friends, whom she took into her confidence about her background, who also felt that she didn't care for Hitler—it was pretty clear which kids

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did and which kids didn't—they would stand there with their ankles crossed and raise their salute and say that yes, we like Hitler. One of the first forms of resistance. Then, at one point in school, probably around 1935 or maybe 1936, Mom didn't do her homework. The head of the school, this SS man, was furious with her, and he said your punishment will be that you're going to stand in front of my office tomorrow morning for twenty minutes, with your right hand up in the Hitler salute, which was a stupid punishment, no matter who she was saluting. She went home and told her father that, and he was, again, absolutely furious. He called a friend of his, who was a doctor, took Mom down to see this friend, who put a light plaster cast on her arm, as if it were broken, to prevent her having to salute the next day. So Mom went to school with a note from the doctor saying she had this problem with her arm. She gave it to the SS man, the head of the school, and that would have been enough, but my Mom was always brave and sometimes stupid, as she says about herself, and challenging. She said, I'm sorry I can't stand in front of your office to salute for twenty minutes today, would you like me to do it with my left arm? The head of the school got so angry, he just said, no, just go back to your classroom. So that was another little act of resistance, supported by her parents.

I've got to backtrack a little bit. My mother's oldest sister, Inge, and her husband were living in Cologne. My grandmother decided that my mother should go visit her sister for a few days, at some point, just for fun, not for any particular reason. Mom went. You know, twelve years is a big distance apart, and her sister had just had a baby, her first child, and probably didn't know what to do with Mom, who was fourteen or fifteen at the time. So she said, you know, I have a friend who is a little bit older than I am, and she has two young boys, who are a little bit older than you are, and I think we should arrange, basically, a play date for you with them. This was arranged, and Mom went to this house, the Cords family house, and knocked on the door. The maid answered the door and said that she would get the lady of the house. Mom just stood in the entryway, or in the room that she was led to, for a while, until Mrs. Cords came to greet her. She said, let's sit down, and they talked for a minute. Mom sat down in a chair and felt something very fluffy and soft moving under her and jumped up out of the chair. She had sat down on the family dog. That did not make a great impression with my dad's mother. Then the two

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boys came down, my dad and his older brother, and they were immediately so friendly and nice to her that she felt totally put at ease. The boys made music. Mom did what she liked to do, which was to draw. She later did study art and became an artist. That's what they did together. They didn't really play together; it was more like side-by-side playing. I think on that trip to Cologne she might have seen them another time, so that was the first meeting. After that play date in Cologne, they stayed in touch, probably somewhat through Mom's sister, and because the two families liked each other. You know, they remained aware of each other, although they didn't have any kind of close relationship or anything like that, at the time. Later on, my dad told my mom that he had fallen in love with her that very first time he met her. She had no such feelings.

TRACK 03 – THE GERMAN ARMY

At some point in the 1920s, my grandfather's father had been to a men's club meeting where Hitler spoke, and he came home and told my mom's family, this is the most dangerous man I have ever met. There were some Germans who felt that, but probably the majority didn't. Part of that is because, you know, you're in the Weimar Republic, and you have your first experience with democracy, and you're hoping that everything is going to be okay. Everything has been kind of okay for a lot of people. They had no idea that Hitler would be as monstrous as he became, or maybe even as he was, even back in the 1920s and early 1930s. People would join the army or be drafted. There was a required labor service, after finishing high school, for men. Then they would join the army, thinking it was the right thing to do. The fatherland needed an army and was recruiting people to join up, or drafting people, and they did it out of a sense of patriotism. This is what you do for your country. You may not always like the leadership of your country, but it's still your country. I won't say everybody and I can't say if it was the majority or the minority of Germans, but there are a lot of people who kind of rolled with the punches for a while, hoping that, as things seemed to get worse, that the influence of good people and having a number of good people around and involved in the government and speaking out would temper the badness of it all, the evil of it all.

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My dad was one of those people. Unlike my mother's family, my father's family had no Jewish background at all. He was from a family of Protestants from forever. Everybody had to go back and do research on their historical origins, because Hitler demanded it, just like he had through that note that Mom's teacher gave her to take home. My dad's family was a family of Protestants. They were Huguenots who were kicked out of France, hundreds of years ago, when that happened. So there were no issues like that. My dad was in the high school and, at the age of eighteen or nineteen, he completed the high school final exam, the Abitur. Afterwards, you would ordinarily go to college, university. He wanted very much to study chemistry, but he knew that in order to go to the university, because that was the rule at the time, the law at the time, he would have to do his compulsory labor service in the Arbeitdienst. The natural progression, unfortunately, when he finished, was to go into the army. Maybe he wasn't technically drafted, but maybe he was. I'm not really sure of that detail, either, but he went in the army, because he thought it was the right thing to do. Even people like Stauffenberg, who was the leader of the July 20, 1944 plot, was a career military man. A lot of people of that stature also thought it was the right thing to do, to fight for your country, even though in the end they ended up really despising Hitler, and a lot of them despised him earlier. So my dad got into the army that way and felt that, as a young man, sometimes you have to go to war for your country. When Dad went into the army, he went in at the level of a lieutenant, or became a lieutenant fairly quickly, and was sent off to France. He was wounded in France. I think someone shot at him. It was a random thing. I don't think it was in a battle. He was riding a motorcycle, and he ended up falling off his motorcycle and smacked the front of his forehead, right between the eyebrows, and had a concussion for a while. But he recovered from that just fine.

While all of this was going on, while he was in France in the early years, Mom was still in Berlin, and she wasn't allowed to continue her studies, so she found somebody to teach her some art. She took some classes that weren't in a degree program and that weren't in a school situation, where the school had to forbid people who were Jewish from going to school. So she was able to continue on a little bit with what she decided she could do, which would be to study art. She knew she couldn't study formal academic topics,

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because of this prohibition. She had a lot of friends and, all along, even when she was still in the high school part of her career, her parents had said we can't tell anyone about the Jewish part of our family. We want to keep that as secret as possible. We don't want it to get out, because people were starting to talk and make divisions in society and discriminate and be ugly. In the area where they lived, in Berlin, there were some Nazis living in houses nearby. So they just wanted to sort of take a low profile and see if they could survive all this and they asked her not to talk. Well, of course, Mom, being somewhat disobedient and fresh, and wanting to do things her own way, did take some friends into her confidence, because she felt it was really important that her friends wanted to be friends with her, regardless of her label. She didn't want to be friends with somebody who didn't want to be friends with someone just because they were Jewish. And all her friends stood by her, and her friends knew. She was careful whom she said that to. It wasn't just everybody. It was her good friends. She developed a really good, solid, close circle of friends, who saw her and her family through the war in Berlin, through all the difficulties that came later. Some of them were journalists, some of them worked in the Ministry of Interior, in one case. Some of them were social friends and some of them were soldiers, or became soldiers. So she had that circle of friends. To Mom, friendship is just one of the most important things in life, because of how good her friends were to her.

TRACK 04 – JUTTA'S MOVE ABROAD

In early 1938, things had gotten bad enough that Mom's parents wanted her to leave the country. She objected. She really did not want to leave them, because she felt that her mother was in danger, because of the Jewish issue. Her father kept saying that he thought he could protect her, because of his Aryan status, and they had laid low, and they had stopped going out and socializing, and that kind of thing, and kind of disappeared from the social scene. So Mom reluctantly went to Geneva, and she also thought in Geneva she would be able to study French, and that was one of the things that she wouldn't be able to study in Berlin, because of the prohibition on education. She lived in a little home—a woman who rented rooms. My grandparents were able to send her money for most of the

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year, until late fall of 1938. Kristallnacht happened in November 1938, and Mom got a call from her parents. Telephone calls that they had made during 1938, up to that point, they had always agreed they would speak in code, and anything about Hitler would be about “Auntie did this, Auntie did that,” and there was a somewhat eccentric aunt in my mom’s family, so it kind of made sense. So if anybody was listening in, they wouldn’t be able to figure out what they were talking about. People did listen in. You could hear the clicks on the phones. It wasn’t anything as sophisticated as today.

So she got a call from my grandmother, after Kristallnacht, and my grandmother’s voice was shaky, and Mom could detect that she was really afraid, and she said something like, Auntie’s gone mad. She’s crazy. Don’t come home. Something to the effect that we can’t send you any more money, at this point, and that was because there was a prohibition against sending money out of Germany. So there’s Mom in Geneva, with no visible means of support, trying to learn French. She had met, at some of the parties, younger diplomats, because it was an international town and League of Nations was there. She had made contacts, and she asked them about what they thought she could do for work, and they said, well, the only thing I could think of was being a domestic—you know, a nanny or a housecleaner. Mom hated doing housecleaning. She still hates it. So she was talking about this with a couple of English girls whom she met, and they said, oh, don’t be silly. Come with us to England. We’re going to go home and you come with us. You can stay with us. So Mom told her parents that she was going to go to England, and she said she was going on the train and she was going to go through Paris, because she’d never seen Paris, and then she would take the ferry across the channel and go to England. Her parents cautioned her and said do not stop in Paris. Paris had been taken over by the Nazis. But she did, and she stayed there for a couple of days. She saw some sights, and went on to England. She stayed a couple of months, and then she found a job working as a nanny for a family that had a five-year-old boy, who had a house in Yorkshire and a house in Scotland.

She did that for a while, but at some point she got quite homesick and wanted to go home. She went back to Berlin in June of 1939. Her parents said don’t come back, but

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she did, because she was worried about them and wanted to be with them. And then, two months later, Mom went to Switzerland for the christening of her next older sister's second child and ended up staying in Switzerland from August of 1939 until the summer of 1940. So war broke out while Mom was in Switzerland. Her parents didn't want her to come back. While she was in Geneva and London, she was reading newspaper accounts that weren't pure Hitler propaganda and had a pretty good sense of what was going on with the war, and in Germany, and with the Jews, and that was another reason that she really wanted to go home, because she had a real sense of the danger that her parents were in. So she went home in the summer of 1940.

Things were very different in Berlin than when she left. When she left, there were young people in the streets, going out at night. There were students everywhere, because Berlin had a number of universities. When she came back in 1940, that scene had disappeared and there were soldiers everywhere. The young people weren't students anymore, they were soldiers. There were signs on stores—Jews own this store, don't buy anything here. There were marches in the streets and chanting, and that kind of thing. Food was starting to become an issue in 1940. Mom, in particular, had some good friends from school days, who had places out in the country, in the Brandenburg area, in one case, and they were in Silesia, in another case. They were able to go there and get food from time to time, so they had better food than some did, but there were ration cards. Soldiers had more food available to them through their cards than regular people did.

Mom said that Berlin was a much better place to be, during these years, than any of the small towns outside, because anti-Semitism was just rampant in the smaller towns, and betrayals, and that kind of thing, also, but Berlin was a more cosmopolitan city. It was a freer city. It had been the capital of Germany, and it had been quite something before Hitler, and people were more tolerant in Berlin than in the small towns. So they were able to sort of lay low and didn't have as bad an experience as they might have had in southern Germany, where things were much more conservative, or in some of the smaller towns of Germany. Mom had, through her friendships, and through these journalist friends and people who were involved in the government, a lot of contacts, and people

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would tell her that a pogrom against the Jews was about to begin, or some uptick in anti-Semitism, some event was going to happen, and she and her parents would then get in their car and drive away, off into the mountains, sometimes to go skiing. But they would leave Berlin until things calmed down, and then they would come back. She was very lucky that way. I mean, there is so much luck in this story, so much luck. So they avoided these roundups of Jews, to the extent that they were happening, or the big anti-Semitic events, thanks to her friends.

TRACK 05 – HELMUTH’S INTRODUCTION TO WERNER VON HAEFTEN

Among the young men who had been students and who had to join the military was a good friend of Mom’s, Werner von Haeften, and he was involved in the July 20, 1944, plot, as the assistant for Colonel Stauffenberg, who planted the bomb. Werner von Haeften was one of the men who had disappeared from Berlin and was fighting in the military in Africa, which is where I think he met Stauffenberg. They might have been in the same group. They were both seriously wounded there and came back and took a long time to recover.

Mom said it was a very difficult time to find people with whom you could get together to talk about what was going on, what had they heard, what was the news, and what could we do about it. So tea circles started to form. People would meet in small groups and quietly talk, always aware of who might be walking around that particular house. These tea circles were discussions just among the most trusted friends. There were people who were very concerned. There were people who wanted to do something. Actually, the resistance in Germany had so many facets. There were resisters who were Christians. There were resisters who were in the labor movement. There were resisters who were in the military. You can read about this in the history books. There were something like twenty-three plots to kill Hitler, and none of them worked, because every time, it would be planned to the detail, and, at the last minute, Hitler would make a change in his plans and he either wouldn’t show up or he’d be somewhere slightly different than where the person was.

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There was even a young man, Axel von dem Bussche, who might be the first suicide bomber. He was going to model for Hitler some new army uniforms. He had a backpack, and in the backpack was going to be a bomb. But then Hitler, at the last minute, didn't show up, so there was somebody willing to give his life. As things got worse and worse, people were willing to give up their lives for the future of the country.

My dad was sent from France, after he recovered from that wound, to Russia. In 1941, in October, we have a picture of him standing on the banks of the Volga River in Russia. That's how far into Russia his group got. He was there until he was wounded in July of 1943. He was wounded the day after his brother was killed in Russia. His brother was killed about a mile away from Dad, and he didn't know it at the time. Dad was wounded as his artillery group was retreating. He noticed that one other guy that was on a motorcycle, at the back of the group with him, wasn't there anymore. So he went back to see what had happened to him. The guy had fallen into a ditch. He'd been shot. At that point, the Russians were shelling, and a shell came down, landed on the ground, and bounced up through my dad's arm. He got a severe wound and was sent back to Germany to recover. I do want to say one thing—one more form of resistance—my father's commander in the artillery group that he was in, in Russia, was Robert Servatius. Servatius was anti-Hitler. He knew pretty well his group of men, because he wouldn't dare to do this, otherwise—he gave the order that when they were shelling the Russian towns with artillery that they would fire one shot off to the side, or short—"Fire short" is what my dad would say to me—and then they'd wait a little bit, because it gave the Russian people a chance to run away. Then they would have to go about shelling the town, and everything would burn because, otherwise, they would have all been traitors and they would have all been killed. That was another form of resistance within the military.

So Dad came back to Germany for his recovery in 1943. He wrote to my mom and said, I'm here—he was in what we would have called West Germany, somewhere around the Frankfurt area, recovering—and I would love it if you would come to see me. Well, it

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took him about four months to recover from his wounds. Mom went to see him a few times, and, as she had several more visits with him, she told him what had been going on, what had happened in her family, what effect the Race Laws had had on their lives, the food rationing, people who disappeared and went to concentration camps. Originally, concentration camps were to politically realign people, and then they would come back, but then people disappeared and didn't come back. Through her contacts in journalism, she knew a lot of the true story of what was going on. My dad was absolutely appalled. He was so angry, partly because of what was happening to Mom and her family. I think, at some point during those months, they decided they wanted to get married, but they had to keep that secret, because he would have been killed if he'd been engaged to a Jewish person. So, you know, with this personal involvement, and he was just a very compassionate and good, moral human being, he said, I need to do something against Hitler. What can I do? How can I get involved in doing something?

So Mom went back to Berlin. This was in 1943, around Christmas time. She got in touch with Werner von Haeften, who, by that time, was in Berlin, in the Home Replacement Army Headquarters, with Stauffenberg. Werner would come over for dinner now and then, to Mom's family's house. At one point, Mom suggested that maybe my dad would like to work with Werner. Mom knew that Werner was involved in the resistance, because of little comments that he'd make now and then. One time, he showed up for dinner at her house and he was wearing a revolver. He never wore a revolver, and she said, why are you wearing that? You're here for dinner. He said you never know when something might happen. He looked at her in the eyes when he said that, and she knew immediately that he was involved, you know, in something. She had no idea what. So he was a safe person for her to ask, and Werner arranged for my dad to be transferred to Berlin, when he was finally released from his rehabilitation, which was actually either in late May or early June of 1944. Dad was transferred to the office where Werner was working with Colonel Stauffenberg.

People who had extra rooms in their house had to house soldiers. Mom and her parents' house had never been bombed, and they had an extra room. So Werner arranged for Dad

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to be billeted to their house. So everything looked totally above board. Here was some soldier, you know, and he was a captain in the army by then. Every morning the captain in the army would leave the house in his uniform to go to work at the office, and all the neighbors all around them in the houses would see, and never even think—no Jew could be living there, right? Because here is this captain in the army coming out. So that was a way to keep them safe, also.

The friendship with Mom and Werner continued. My dad became a good friend of his, also and certainly, my dad got to work with Stauffenberg. One time, before my dad was able to start working there, so it was probably in earlier May of 1944, Stauffenberg came to my parents' house, because Stauffenberg himself probably needed to make sure that this was somehow—you know, he needed to see these people before somebody came into that circle. I think he came and they shook hands. I mean, there was no conversation much, or anything like that, but Mom immediately felt this emotional reaction that this is a very powerful, remarkable person. My dad later said, too, that Stauffenberg was the most remarkable person he had ever met in his life.

TRACK 06 – THE JULY 20, 1944 PLOT

Right before my dad was billeted to my grandparents' house in late May or early June of 1944, Werner von Haefen came and asked my grandparents whether they would be willing to harbor a man, to hide him, who the resistance was trying to get out of the country. This was a man whose name was Ludwig Gehre. He was involved in the Central Intelligence Office of the Nazi government. He knew the names of all the resisters, all the plotters, because of his job. He had been arrested in March and had managed to escape arrest and had been on the run ever since. Werner von Haefen was trying to find a place for him to hide out, just for a short time, until they could get him out of the country or to another hiding place. So my grandfather said, this is not for me to decide. It is entirely up to my wife, because obviously this was going to be even more dangerous than any other form of resistance that my grandparents had engaged in, up to then. My grandmother said, of course we'll do that. They had a third floor in their house, which is where the

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maid quarters were, and there were two bedrooms up there. Gehre was brought one night and taken up there and told not to leave the room. He was restless. He would go out in the garden and smoke cigarettes, and there were fences and vines and walls around the garden, but any of the Nazis who lived nearby could look into the garden. They could have seen him, if they knew what he looked like. Huge danger. He was there for about two weeks, which was much longer than anybody thought he would be there, before von Haeften was able to get another place for him and take him away. While he was there, I think towards the end of his stay, is the time when my dad was billeted to my grandparents' house, so they overlapped a little bit. Gehre left, and there was a huge sigh of relief, the war continues on, and we get into July of 1944.

So, in July of 1944, my dad was ensconced in this position that he had sought, because he wanted to do something against Hitler. He didn't just happen to be there, it was arranged through Mom and Werner von Haeften, that connection. At some point, in July—there was a plot on July 20th that people know about, because it was the subject of the movie *Valkyrie*, and the operation was called *Valkyrie*. Originally, it was supposed to happen somewhere around July 15th, but for some reason that was canceled. So Dad is in that office. He was not one of the central plotters. He was not involved in the discussions about who was going to do what, when. He was a reliable person, Werner knew that, and Werner would assign him things that had to be done that he could trust my dad to do, as a member of the resistance. At some point in July, it was clear that something was going to be going on. But, you know, people like Stauffenberg and von Haeften didn't even tell my dad the details, because only the smallest group of people could know the details. Only those who really needed to know the details could know, because the danger was so great, if somebody were caught and tortured, that they would give away everybody. So there was a need to protect everybody, as much as possible.

In the middle of July, Dad said to my mother, why don't you and your mother go to Austria and go to the mountains and have a vacation? Get out of Berlin. She complied with what my dad wished, and she took my grandmother, and they went to the mountains in Austria, where they had skied, and stayed in a little mountain inn, with people that they

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had skied with, and got the news every day. On July 20th, the innkeeper came running up to them and said—he was not a Nazi, unlike a lot of the Austrians, he hated Hitler, and he knew that my parents' family did too—he came running and he said, you can't believe what just happened. There was an attempt to kill Hitler. Army officers were involved. They don't know if Hitler is alive or dead. My mother's heart just sank. Later that afternoon, the news came across that Hitler had survived, so the horrible feeling in the pits of their stomachs, of my mother and my grandmother, came back. My grandfather called that night and said Helmuth is not home yet and said a few other things in code, so that my mom understood that he wasn't home yet. He was still at work. She was really worried about what that meant.

What actually happened that night, on July 20th - he was put in charge of the people coming in and out of the Home Army Replacement Headquarters, and he had to allow people in that had the Stauffenberg passport, which was a little yellow card, and make sure that Nazi-type people did not get in or were arrested. Later in the evening, when it was clear that everything was falling apart in the plot and that Hitler hadn't died—well, they knew Hitler hadn't died at 5:00, but they still tried to carry through what they had set up for this takeover of the government and the army. Dad was running back and forth from the gate where he was stationed, and he had people stationed around the other openings to the building, which included places in the walls that had been bombed out, and some of those people turned against the plotters and started letting in some of the Nazis. A huge regiment came later in the evening, and Dad was in charge of a smaller group of fighting men, and he thought, I just can't tell this small group of men to fight this huge army guard battalion. They'll all die. During the evening, afternoon and evening, he was running back and forth, upstairs to the second floor, where the offices were, reporting on who was coming in at the gate, and he'd pick up a little bit of news up there. At some point, Werner von Haeften said, you need to go home. So Dad left and walked—there was no public transportation. It was night. You know, the city was really bombed out. It took him about two hours to walk home.

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He talked with my grandfather about what he should do, and the options were should he escape to the West, or should he go back to work the next day, which would seem like he was innocent. He had been posted at the door. Nobody knew. I mean, really, nobody still knows that my dad was involved in this. The only people that knew were von Haeften and Stauffenberg, and maybe the three others that along with them were killed that night, in the courtyard of the headquarters building. That's how secret everything was. They decided against him escaping to the West, because he'd likely be captured and killed by either the West or the Nazis. So they decided the best thing would be just go to work at the normal time in the morning, pretend he wasn't involved or anything. They spent the evening burning every photograph, every letter, every piece of paper that my dad had that connected him to my mom's family. My mom still has all the letters that he wrote her, because she had hidden them somewhere that he didn't know about. You know, if somebody had searched the house they would have found the connection, but that didn't happen. Then he went and he wrote Mom a goodbye letter at 4:00 AM, then he went to work. He showed up at his post and, in the typical German gentlemanly way of the gentleman military, a man came up and said, I need to bring you down to see so-and-so. Dad got up and they went downstairs, and the man, in essence, said to him, I'm sorry, I hope you don't mind, but I need to arrest you. Those weren't the exact words, but it was something very polite like that. So Dad was arrested and he was sent to prison. I don't think he ever knew what he was charged with, the whole time he was in prison, but there are a number of different things. So he was in prison from July 21st until he got out on April 25th of 1945. Just about nine months.

TRACK 07 – IMPRISONMENT

So Mom and her mother were sitting in Austria wondering about when to go back—when it would be safe to go back. I'm not sure exactly when they did, but fairly soon after that. But while they were there, they heard the news, again because the innkeeper brought it to them, that Werner von Haeften, and Stauffenberg, and Mertz von Quirnheim, and Ludwig Beck, who was a general in the old army, and I think there was another whose name is escaping me, were shot that night, executed. Murdered, really—they weren't even tried—

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in the courtyard of the Bendlerblock, which was the building that was the headquarters of that Home Replacement Army. In the following weeks, they arrested everybody, basically, in the Home Replacement Army offices. There were some people who were definitely pro-Nazi, and some of those actually had come down to kind of—I don't want to say taunt my dad, because that's too strong a word—but while he was guarding there, they came down to smoke cigarettes and said, so, what are you doing here? What's your job? Who are you letting in? Who are you keeping out? Dad was very evasive, because he was trying to stay alive and protect himself and protect the others, and keep it from anyone that he was involved in any of this, because he wanted to live. That was a vow that he and Mom had made to each other—that they wanted to come out of this alive. It was very clear who the people were that were pro-Hitler, and the other people that were a little bit, like, wishy-washy - a lot of them got arrested. Then they went out and arrested—like, for Stauffenberg, they arrested his wife. It was a situation called *Zippenhaft*. *Zippen* are relatives and *haft* is arrest, and they arrested all the relatives, all the families of these men who mostly didn't know anything. And the children were separated from the parents – from their mothers. It was mostly men who were involved in these plots. Some of them were lucky to find each other after the war. There were a few situations where people didn't find each other again. Mothers would be sent to a prison. The children were sent somewhere else. Sometimes the names of the children were even changed. They executed thousands of people.

So at some point in late July, maybe early August my mother and my grandmother came home from Austria. Then it was all in the news, people being tried in the People's Court. The carpeting in the courtroom was blood red. The judges wore blood red robes – the judge, I should say. Freisler was the judge at that time. He would berate and yell and scream at the men who were being tried. They would keep their voices down and explain what they did and why they did it because they wanted it to be known by whoever was in the courtroom watching. They were good people and they knew they were going to be condemned to death anyway.

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So this was all going on and it was in the news all the time. They [my mother, grandmother, and grandfather] were also concerned somewhat about what might happen to them because Dad had been billeted to their house and he had been arrested. So they continued to try to get food. Mom would go out to these two friends, one north and one east of Berlin, and whose parents lived on these sort of farm-y places that grew vegetables and eggs. She would take the train out and come back. The bombing happened at night so during the day you could do this. I don't think she did that very often. Again, everybody was having trouble with food.

She stayed in touch with her close circle of friends, the journalist people in particular. She learned a lot about what was going on from them. And, at night, my grandfather continued to do what he had done all along, which is pull down all the shades in the house, make a circumambulation around the house to make sure no one was watching. They had room-darkening shades because they had to have that because during bombing raids where there was a light a bomb would drop. They would turn on the radio and listen to BBC news. Very furtive. I don't think the radio was ever on for very long but at least they got a sense that Germany is really losing this war.

One trip out into the countryside, on October 1st of 1944, Mom went to her friend's in Silesia for food and spent the night and went back to Berlin the next day. It was later in the day and she could see – the train stopped because there was bombing of Berlin and Mom could see this just incredible lightshow from all the flak. Eventually the train went into Berlin. Mom got out at the train station and had that two hour walk home. She could smell burning wood. There was dust in the air. The city was just total rubble. So, she went home and there was no light on. It was late enough, so she didn't think much of that. She opened the door and called out. There was no answer. She went upstairs to my grandparent's room and the bed wasn't made. It was like they had just gotten up out of bed. She immediately knew what that meant, that they had been arrested.

The Gestapo would come and arrest people between two o'clock in the morning and five o'clock in the morning. Her arrangement with her mother had been that her mother

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would drop a little slip of paper underneath an Oriental rug next to her bed if they were arrested so that Mom would know. That wasn't there. But it was obvious to Mom what had happened. So she gathered up a few things. Nothing else had been taken. There was no vandalism. Nothing had been rifled through. She knew that this meant that they'd be looking for her. She hid out for a couple of weeks and during that two-week period she found out where her parents were in prison. She hired a lawyer who was anti-Hitler and he found where my grandmother was and took my mom to the door of that prison, the entrance gate. Mom could look in. She didn't see her at that time but she saw a friend of her mother's walking around and thought, OK, at least she is here with someone that she knows. Then they went to the prison where my grandfather was. That was named Tegel. I think they brought a package for him, which he accepted. They also tried to bring a package to her mother at some point – she just wouldn't take anything. She wouldn't accept anything. Her strategy for dealing with her imprisonment was that she did not speak. She pretended she was mute. She never spoke. She didn't react when spoken to. She never accepted a package from anybody. She just sort of became a turtle in her shell and it might be how she survived.

Mom told her close circle of friends where to go in the countryside to get some food from these other friends, how not to incriminate these other friends, and where everybody was in prison. They helped her hide some of the things from the house that were valuable. When all of that was done - Mom had arranged this whole network – oh, and she also figured out that she could probably have visits from a doctor or get medication from a doctor while she was in prison and get some news that way, herself. It wouldn't endanger any of her friends who would have to come to prison because it would be a doctor. So she made a contact with this doctor and it was arranged for allergy shots or pain shots that were placebos and that kind of thing. There was a prescription for Mom to have twelve of these.

When all that was arranged she went down to Prinz Albrecht Strasse, which was the Gestapo headquarters and walked up the stairs. She describes as walking up the stairs and going through the door and suddenly everything felt calm. All the nervousness and

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the paranoia and fear was all gone and she felt incredibly strong and powerful. She walked in there and met with somebody and wanted to know, what have you done with my parents? The reaction was, why do you think we have your parents? She said, well, I know they were arrested. I could tell and I want to know where they are. She was led into a room and met with another man who was a really cruel person who interrogated her a few times. She was never tortured. She was arrested on the spot, which she knew would happen. But she didn't want to live if my parents didn't live and if my dad didn't live. She wanted to be with them. She knew that they'd be looking for her anyway and she couldn't escape. So, she walked into the mouth of the lion.

TRACK 08 – RELEASE FROM PRISON

Mom was arrested on probably October 14th or so of 1944. She had an interrogation very soon afterwards and didn't admit to anything. They tried to insult her, call her names, and harass her verbally. She just didn't respond. She's tough. Then the next interrogation was, I think, in November or December. For that one, they said, we have someone here that you're going to be very interested in seeing. They opened the door and crawling in on the floor, dragging himself because he couldn't even walk anymore, was Ludwig Gehre, the man that they had hid in June of 1944 for two weeks. He had obviously been tortured and beaten.

I should backtrack a little bit. He was arrested in November of 1944. He was hiding somewhere else at that point, and he was so frantic. His wife had had a baby. He arranged a visit to see her, somewhere on a street corner, and she showed up. At the same time as she was approaching him, he saw somebody else who he knew approaching them, and he was sure that this person that he knew was there to give him away. He thought, I'm not going to get arrested. So he took out his pistol and shot his wife dead and tried to kill himself, but he wounded one eye, blind in one eye, and then he was arrested. So that's how he got into prison. He had been tortured when Mom saw him, but she still admitted nothing. They asked her about him staying at their house, and she said, we did have

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someone billeted to our house—and they, indeed, had had somebody even before my dad was billeted there. A soldier was living there. She said he was wounded in the war. It could have been true of my dad, but she was talking about this other guy, because she never wanted to admit a connection with Dad, either. They got nothing out of her and sent her back to her room.

Mom, through these injections that her doctor sent, the placebo injections, made a connection with a medic. His name was Frosch, which meant frog. He would give her the injections, and, at some point, she felt she could trust him. She gave him little notes that he would pass out to some of her friends. He would have time off from prison and go out and visit people for her. At one point, he came back and gave her the terrible news that her mother had been moved from prison to a concentration camp, Ravensbrueck, which is sixty miles or so north of Berlin. But he said the good news is she's in the political prison section. Dad was scheduled for a trial in the People's Court—you know, the blood-red court. The night before the trial, the prison he was in, which was the Moabit prison, it wasn't bombed, but there was bomb damage, and his little glass window broke. He was standing up on a chair looking out the window to see the bombing, because there were armaments factories nearby. The Allies generally tried not to bomb the prisons, because they knew the good people were there, and there were going to need to be some good people after the war. He got these glass splinters in his face. Well, facial wounds bleed terribly, so they took him and other people who had been in damaged cells out of that prison and put them in another prison. He ended up being in the same prison where my grandfather was, Tegel. But, because the moving was so fast, they couldn't do the paperwork, so they lost track of them for a little while. He might have been tried somewhat later than that, but by that time, Gehre had been arrested, and he was wanted for further questioning in the Gehre case, because Gehre probably had been tortured and mentioned where he had lived. So my dad was never tried.

Things started really falling apart for the Nazis in 1945. Then, at some point, my grandmother got out of the concentration camp. I think it was April 11th of 1945. She was called in by a matron to the commandant, and he gave her a release paper, which we

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still have a copy of, saying you're free to go. Nobody knows how this happened. She left the camp and stood outside on the street, and a car with two SS men comes up and says, we're going to Berlin, do you need a ride? So, still not speaking—you know, she just slightly nodded her head and they grabbed her and put her in the back of the car and took her to Berlin. They got to Berlin and they said, this is how far we're going and you need to get out now. So she got out and, lucky her, she was within blocks of her best friend's house and went there.

Within a few days, Frosch came to see my mom again, for another shot in the prison of her medication of some sort, and—oh, no, she had to go to a dentist. Mom had to go to a dentist because the prison food was basically some kind of very watery gruel and bread, and her gums were really bothering her. So she had a dentist appointment. Frosch came to pick her up and arranged with some really sweet old guard to take her over there. She walked into the dentist's office and there was my grandmother. Frosch had arranged for this. So they had this amazing reunion. This is a few days after April 11th. Then a week or so after that, Mom got out of prison, because everybody could hear the Russians shooting and they were getting close. The people in her prison told the guards, if they find you here with us in prison, they're going to kill you. You should let us go. They stomped their feet and made a lot of noise and, eventually, that worked and they were all let go. She worked her way home—well, to this best friend of my grandmother's house, which is where they had agreed to meet.

They were there for a few days and worried about their men, you know, what was going to happen to them, and the door opens and there is my grandfather. He had been the last person to be tried in the People's Court, he and another man. They had been taken to Plotzensee, which was the execution spot, where people were hung from meat hooks so they died slowly. Within twenty minutes of his arrival, the Russians came, shot all the guards, and liberated the prisoners.

My grandfather is in the northeastern part of Berlin, with no idea where he is. He's never been there before. And he's walking on the streets and he heard a woman's voice say,

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Herr Sorge, Herr Sorge, what are you doing here? He turned around and it was the woman who worked in the little corner grocery store where they shopped a lot, in their neighborhood in Western Berlin. She took him and fed him for a week. She had access to food. So when he showed up, Mom said that he looked like he was just coming off the golf course, he looked so healthy. Then, five minutes later, the door opens and my dad showed up. He had gotten out of prison a few days earlier and went with one of the other men in the prison to an apartment that he had on one of the main thoroughfares in Berlin, and took off the uniform, borrowed some of that other man's clothes, so he could walk safely through Berlin, because the Russians were killing any man that looked like he could have been in the Army—old, young, whatever—and he made his way home. Then their post-war life in Berlin began, which had more adventures for them. But you can imagine how incredibly moving it was that they were all there.

TRACK 09 –MARRIAGE AND MOVE FROM BERLIN

In April of 1945, they all got together and they eventually were able to move back to the house that my grandparents had, which had been used as a listening post by the Nazis and then occupied by the Russians. Mom and Dad went there first, because they figured it might need some cleaning up. They got in there and there were human feces everywhere. It was like somebody had just wanted to spite the Germans, whose house that was. They were smeared on shelves, on the floor, I mean, you name it. They didn't have water. There wasn't running water the day that they went. They got water restored a few days later and, eventually, the two of them cleaned it up. They could just laugh about it, because it was so not an obstacle, compared to what they had gone through. People in the neighborhood would go into empty houses and take clothes and shoes. Mom saw people walking around in the neighborhood with some of her dresses on and some of her shoes on, but she never said anything. Then Dad found some work to do with some other people who were involved in the Resistance, who he knew, working in the administration of Berlin. Their area was first occupied by the Russians, but, eventually, it became the American zone. So he had a little bit of a job. He found an old car abandoned in the Grunewald, which is the forest's park, I guess—park-like forest across the street from

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where my grandparents' house was. He was very mechanical and he was able to fix the car. He found some tires from some other car and made a running car. Gas was either nonexistent or very expensive, so they didn't use it much. They mostly relied on bicycles. There is a great story of him riding a bicycle home from some errand that he was on and three Russian soldiers, who were—you know, they were probably kids, who were thirteen, fourteen years old, with guns, stopped him and demanded his bicycle. I mean, any transportation was in high demand. He got them to lay off his bicycle by showing them all the tricks he could do on the bicycle, so they let him go. I remember him telling me this story and talking about the feeling he had as he rode away from them. Are they going to shoot me in the back and take my bicycle?

Then they wanted to get married. They finally could realize this dream and they set June 3rd as the date. My dad got so sick with flu or cold, fever, some infection or something. He's very, very thin and probably didn't have much resistance. So they had to postpone it for another week, but they got married on June 10th, in the little church that had not much of a roof left, in Dahlem, where they lived. He was still not feeling up to snuff, but they really wanted to get married. They were the first people to get married after the war, at least in that part of Berlin, if not the whole city. They had a little party. There wasn't much food, but my grandmother got out the little duckling pudding molds that she used to make puddings in for my Mom and made—you know, the mother duck and couple little baby ducks of some kind of pudding. My dad loved pudding. So that was the wedding cake. It was a small group. It was maybe ten or twelve people. Everybody brought whatever they had to eat, and that's what they had. They had a party out in the garden. Mom had a piece of old lace from her grandmother's curtain, or something, that she pinned into her hair and wore the same dress that she wore when she walked into the prison, because it was sort of official looking, when she had to go for the official part of the marriage, and then she came home for the reception and changed into a silk dress that had belonged to her sister, who died. So they got married and lived happily ever after. Not ever after, but until my dad died. They worked out how to leave Berlin. They wanted to leave Berlin. Dad wanted to go study chemistry. They left Berlin, I think, in September or so. They packed up some of their stuff and put some other things into storage, sold the

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house, and the four of them left for West Germany. My grandfather got a job as an engineer at Blaupunkt, in Hildesheim. He found a place to live there. My dad and mom toured the university cities and chose to live in Heidelberg, which is where I was born. He studied chemistry. Mom always says, we all made it—that's how our story is different from so many others.