Ruth Hockley, 1/28/78

Q. When and where were you born.

A. I was born in Magdeburg in 1924.

Q. Where did you start school.

A. In 1930.

Q. Could you describe your school days.

A. No, not really anymore. It was a very progressive school, according to today’s standards, like it is today. It was an experimental school in Germany. And in 1933, we left Germany for France.

Q. Do you remember this time between 1930 and 1933 when you were in school.

A. No. I only remember that the S.A. used to stand in front of my parents’ store and wouldn’t let people in. My parents decided that’s it. They don’t want to take this and we left Germany. Otherwise, I have no recollection of anything - hardship or otherwise.

Q. While you were going to school, did you have many non-Jewish friends.

A. Yes. I did. It really didn’t make any difference. I was aware of being Jewish. I had a Jewish upbringing but I had just as many non-Jewish as Jewish friends.

Q. Can you remember any change in the attitude of your non-Jewish friends.

A. No. Not at that age. It’s too young at that point. When you are seven or eight, you don’t feel that.

Q. When you say the S.A. stood in front of your parents’ business, what type of business were they in.

A. My father was a wholesale and retail tobacconist, you know, cigars, cigarettes.

Q. When you saw the S.A. standing there, what kind of impression did you have.

A. I really can’t say.

Q. Do you remember any discussions about the situation at home.

A. Well, we all hoped that it wouldn’t last but my father didn’t want to take a chance on waiting so we left Germany and went to Paris.

Q. How did you feel about leaving.

A. I don’t think it bothered me too much. I think it was exciting in a way.

Q. Did you know why you were leaving.

A. Oh yes. That I was fully aware of.

Q. When you went to Paris, how long did you stay there.

A. A year and a half.

Q. Did your father have business connections there.

A. Well, this is the first disappointment. You know in France, at that time you could only establish your own business. You couldn’t get a working permit. So he went into business with three other people and unfortunately, one of them was a crook and all the money was gone before the business got started like happened to many refugees there. It was rather an interesting life because the refugee community lived as such - it was quite different from the way it was here in America. You lived somewhere and you ate somewhere else - everybody together - everybody was in the same boat and you met some interesting people at the time. Even as a child, I realized that.

Q. Did you go to school in Paris.

A. Yes, I went to school, quite a well known school, and I went without knowing any French at the time but as a child, I picked it up rather fast.

Q. Did you go to school with other German refugee children.

A. No. No. I was the only one in my class. It was quite interesting and I enjoyed France. I enjoyed staying there and during the summer, my parents sent me to a camp run by the Salvation Army where I stood out like a sore thumb because I was the only refugee. My French wasn’t too good yet but I survived it.

Q. Were you made to feel as a refugee.

A. Yes. Not as a refugee but rather as somebody different. Children are pretty cruel when it comes to that but I enjoyed living in France and I was sorry when we left.

Q. Why did your parents decide to go back to Germany - it was 1935.

A. Well, my grandparents were still living in Germany and some of the other family members and they all wrote it cannot last and it’s not so bad. So we went back. My father originally wanted to go to America right then and there but mother wasn’t so much in favor so we went back.

Q. Did you go back to Magdeburg.

A. No, we went back to Berlin.

Q. Was your father able to reestablish a business in Berlin.

A. No. He became a salesman for a cigar manufacturer and everything was more or less all right for the first couple of years but then...You know, I went right away to a restricted jewish school and that’s where I stayed.

Q. Was that by choice at the time or already mandated.

A. The children that were at that time already in non-Jewishschool, they could stay but it was already a border line thing and it was advisable to start right away. The Jewish schools were being established.

Q. Did your family belong to a congregation in Berlin.

A. Yes. That’s where I went to school. They had a school at the same time.

Q. What type of congregation was it.

A. It was considered liberal. It had an organ and it had a choir but it was not reform. It was I would say a little bit like the Tabernacle.

Q. When you were in this school, were you able to make any non-Jewish friends from the neighborhood or

A. At that point, it was a strictly Jewish community and from that school which was like grammar school, I went to a middle school which was also Jewish.

Q. Did you feel in any way restricted in those years.

A. Yes, to a certain extent.

Q. How so.

A. Well, because you only lived with Jewish people. You were aware of it. From 1935 to 1938 was only three years and it went very fast. You couldn’t go to certain places anymore and you felt quite restricted already. Certain cafe houses you could only go - I mean you made sure you only went to certain places.

Q. Did you ever try to go to a movie or anyplace which displayed a sign...

A. A sign. No. Ii wouldn’t go. But in 1935 and 1936, there were no signs yet. It started I think late 1937 and 1938. Then it was mandatory. But up to that point, there were not many signs - not in Berlin.

Q. Do you remember your parents discussing emigration again during those years.

A. Oh yes. Only we were not so fortunate. Whatever we tried, to come to America, you had to have an affidavit and it was not very easy. Naturally, you tried to dig up whoever we had - remote family but somehow it didn’t work. And then we tried Chile and we tried whatever there was and I was supposed to go with a children’s transport to Switzerland. My luggage went but I didn’t. At the last minute, I guess it was revoked.

Q. Did you know about these plans to go on a childrens' transport.

A. Oh Yes. I mean children at that time were not children. They became adults very fast.

Q. You were only 13 years old, how did you feel about leaving everyone and going on a childrens' transport.

A. Well, since I had family in Switzerland and I knew the country, it was not such a - hoping for my parents to be able to follow. It was a common thing to be done so you really didn’t question.

Q. When you say the common thing, did you notice many children around you leaving.

A. Oh yes. In the school you didn’t learn much anymore at that point. The thing you learned was geography and what country is the best country to emigrate to and what are the possibilities to establish a business or make money and these kind of things. What kind of people are there and how do they respond to the Jewish people - these were the uppermost things of interest and languages. Outside of that, the interest was not too great in anything. We were taught everything but somehow your mind was occupied with other things.

Q. Was there a great deal of discussion among your friends who had already decided to go to wherever as to what life would be like.

A. We really didn’t anticipate anything. You couldn’t envision it but it was the normal thing to talk about emigration and hoping to get out, where and how. On the other hand, you tried to live as normal a life as a child will.

Q. When you went out into the streets, did you ever have any contact with the SS or...

A. No. Since we came to Berlin rather late, we only had Jewish friends but people who used to live there still had their non-Jewish friends who little by little fell by the wayside. Some were afraid, some changed their mind. Some betrayed them, some stuck to them. But all in all, it was strictly a Jewish...

Q. Did your parents participate in Kulturbund activities.

A. Yes. Not as active members but as an audience to go to the shows. That was the only thing there was of interest and a couple of movies until 1938 when it was all over.

Q. When you lived in Magdeburg, did your parents also attend the cultural affairs offered.

A. Oh yes. But not Jewish ones. Whatever there was, concerts, operas.

Q. Do you remember your parents thinking that this was a hardship - being restricted.

A. Well, I think events happened so fast that you were not really thinking about the past - rather about the future. There was always the fear of being arrested or sent to a concentration camp and it was a life that was not quite real. You lived a suspended kind of a life - you lived from day to day. You really didn’t think back because everyday, there were new rules and new regulations and you lived for that - not of that but with it.

Q. How did your father fare in his job.

A. He traveled still and after a while he couldn’t travel anymore. So then, like most men, they tried to make a living somehow within Berlin and it was a very difficult thing and then you lived on your money that you had.

Q. Did his company...

A. It was a Jewish company originally and then it was Arisiert and that was the end of it.

Q. What happened to your family on Kristallnacht.

A. Well, actually we didn’t know too much about it until the next morning when I wanted to go to school or I rather went to school with my girlfriend and we saw all the stores smashed - all the windows and then we were sent home and we realized what happened. If I remember correctly, we didn’t have a radio anymore because Jews were not allowed to have phonographs, no radios, no pets and certainly no jewelry or silver. That had to be declared or rather you could keep one set of forks and knives per person and that was it. But the biggest hardship was that you couldn’t have a radio. You had no communication with the outside world. You couldn’t hear what England would say or anybody else. I guess that was the purpose of it and all right, you bought newspapers but they only reported whatever they wanted to but word of mouth got around very fast and you found out the horrors that were happening and they were arresting people. Even before that, they arrested, I think it was before, they arrested all Jewish men of Polish or Russian descent and I had a lot of friends and when they were sent back to Poland, the families could after a while join them but you never heard from them anymore. So we all became prepared for what might happen.

Q. Was your father arrested.

A. No. We were fortunate - he didn’t get hurt in any way and from that moment on, you tried even harder to get out and for us, it was impossible. Whatever we tried, you know some people were lucky and got out and others didn’t. Like we were supposed to be on this one ship that was returned.

Q. St. Louis?

A. Yes, but luckily we were not on it.

Q. I don’t know that you remember this, but how did your father go about finding ways to emigrate.

A. I think it was an effort that was done by friends together. Nobody did it on their own - you couldn’t. You discussed and talked and tried and there was an organization - Hilfsverein - they tried to help but...Then in 1938, the Jewish schools got closed.

Q. Were you allowed to go back to school after Kristallnacht.

A. No. Then they were closed. So without school and I was rather young - there was still a Jewish fashion school around so I went to that and that closed after six months. For a young girl to hang around the house and not to do anything is not very good so through non-Jewish friends, there was a dressmaker who was willing to take me in against little money and she taught me the business a little. You know it was not official - it couldn’t be. Since I wasn’t looking too Jewish and she wasn’t afraid and she was - the girls who were working for her were all right so I was occupied for another six months and then I couldn’t go - once you had to wear the yellow star, that was the end of it.

Q. When you mention the yellow star, you were about 15, how did you feel when you were given...

A. Well, I think that was one of the worst things that could happen because it took your dignity away to be marked and I don’t know if anybody told you that they had to be sewn on with such small stitches that you could not put a pencil between the stitches. Because somehow when people are in trouble you find all kinds of tricks to make things a little easier. Sometimes you sewed it on with large stitches - there was a reason you wanted to visit an old non-Jewish friend or something - you just pulled out a thread in order to remove it quickly but they were aware of all these tricks. Or you placed it - you know they had to be placed at a certain spot inches were given - so that you couldn’t hide it with a pocketbook or with a package or anything.

Q. Do you remember sewing it on.

A. Oh yes. Do you want to see it? As a matter of fact, we saved it when we went underground, we put it inside our coat lining so that we would have it afterwards.

Q. Do you remember going out with it the first time.

A. I really don’t. I think there were more important things that bothered you. It certainly wasn’t a comfortable feeling. At that time my father had to go and work - forced labor in an ammunition factory and I was fortunate enough because I was able to sew to be able to go to a shoe factory instead of - you know by choice, where I knew people. We had a Jewish division. It was originally a Jewish company and the sons were half Jewish so they could manipulate this thing and they had a Jewish division and I worked there after some trial and error so life was a little easier. At that point I had to travel by subway and only people who worked were allowed to use public transportation and you were not allowed to sit down so in the subway I was leaning against one of those fire hydrants which they all had - half sitting and half leaning and I fell asleep. It was six o’clock in the morning so they made a big stink about it - that a Jewish girl would dare to sit down. These were the harrassments that you went through.

Q. Were you subjected to any physical harrassments while you were working.

A. This was actually the only one which I went through personally.

Q. You mentioned a Jewish division. How did this work.

A. You had to be partitioned off like lepers.

Q. Were you under constant supervision.

A. Yes. But this was a factory with its workers from years back when it was still Jewish so the attitude of the workers there and the top management was pro-Jewish. They tried to protect us as long as possible. So there was no problem there but they couldn’t sustain themselves anymore and they closed up. And I was lucky again and got to a mattress factory. I learned to make inner spring mattresses from A to Z and again the owner was very pro-Jewish - rather the son in law whereas the old man was a Nazi and this son in law helped the Jewish people in his Jewish division with food and with all kinds of things.

Q. Who got you these jobs both in the shoe factory and the mattress factory.

A. Well the shoe factory I - because I knew the owners and they requested me. The other thing I got because I was able to sew and they - I mean the German employment office or whatever you want to call it - of course tried to get as many skilled workers to certain areas so I was lucky that I did have a skill.

Q. You mentioned that your father had to go to this munitions factory...

A. Yes. It was forced labor and he worked the night shift. When he came home I left.

Q. Was he subjected to difficult conditions in this factory.

A. Yes. They threatened the men continuously that if anything went wrong they would be arrested and shipped to a concentration camp. I believe the psychological warfare on men was worse than on women and on adults naturally, more than on children. But for men it was worse because their pride and their ego was completely taken away from them and I think men suffered much more than women did. Also they can take less. They may be physically the stronger sex but mentally they are not.

Q. In this sense of pride and ego being taken away, did this have an effect on your father.

A. Oh yes. My father suffered terribly from then on I would say. And when we had the opportunity to go underground, it was us women who were the stronger ones and who forced the issue at all times and also during the underground period, he was the one who at one point almost couldn’t take it anymore and he said well, I almost rather give myself up than living hidden away like this continuously. But we managed to carry him through in that respect and we all made it.

Q. How did this opportunity to move underground present itself.

A. Well, actually it presented itself through me. In this shoe factory, after they closed up, a few months later, they tried to open up - the non-Jewish owner who was a Nazi, and in order to - there was somebody who repaired shoes for me so he met me there and tried to open up a Jewish division again. And one thing led to another and he took sort of a fancy to me and felt he wanted to help me and therefore got deeper into this kind of a thing than he ever anticipated. Because I said if anybody helps me, it is either all or none (all of us). And through him we met a man who was really a marvelous man - he was the general manager of Leiser shoes and he was a White Russian who grew up as the biggest Jew hater because White Russians are brought up this way. He was a psychiatrist and when he studied in Poland, in Warsaw, he met a lot of Jewish people for the first time in his life and he realized that they are not any different than other people and he made it his business to get to know them and later on in his life, most of his friends were Jews. When these times arrived, he made it his business of help many - by money or personal deed - as possible. He helped us and seven other people. I mean we were in his own home later on and other people he helped just with money.

A. Is that when you went underground, when you went to his home.

A. No. He arranged - well, it’s difficult to say. First, when the word came that he was able to find hiding place for us, we had to disappear until this was all established. We lived in the basement of our own apartment building and with all the sirens going and being that it was a luftschutzkellar or shelter, it was not very easy. We couldn’t smoke because the smoke went up through the pipes and somebody complained. I mean the super was in on this. He got paid off. I mean there were still in Berlin especially a lot of people who were willing to help - some strictly out of conviction and others did it for money as well as conviction. They certainly had to want to help -whether they did it for monetary gain or not but they wanted to help.

Q. Going back to your working for a moment while you were in the shoe factory or the mattress factory and your father in the munitions factory, were you paid.

A. Yes. But like - maybe by today’s standards it would be like 25 cents a day. You can’t call it payment.

Q. Were you able to use money that was yours - like ...

A. Yes. You had to pay because you had to buy food and Jewish people were only allowed to go to the stores between 4 and 5 in the afternoon. Your ration cards were marked that you were Jewish - you couldn’t buy certain things and of course, there were certain things which you bought on the black market - like everybody, that always exists.

To get back to an earlier period just for a minute. What is interesting to me in retrospect is that young people in spite of all the hardships - somehow somebody managed to retain a phonograph and young people got together and you danced - I mean you made it so low that nobody could hear it - you still danced - you still had some kind of fun. It seems that nature cannot be repressed completely, in spite of everything.

Q. Were you in fear when you did this.

A. Oh yes. We were constantly in fear. There is always somebody. Also, a non-Jewish person who had a radio and you tried to hear England or any other foreign country but it had to be so low - you hardly heard it. The volume couldn’t be any louder because maybe somebody would denounce you.

Q. Now this was still while you were in your apartment.

A. Yes.

Q. When you moved to the basement, do you remember watching your mother. What were your impressions of her.

A. I would say she rose to the occasion. My mother always has been a business woman - a very strong person. It was a light in all the darkness - trying to save yourself. I mean you always hoped that the war would end or rather that the Allies would defeat Germany. So we always said how much longer can it go. You figured a month, two months, six months but nobody could - we lived underground for two and a half years.

Q. When did you move down to the basement.

A. In early 1942.

Q. Between Kristallnacht and 1942 were you able to pursue any possibilities for emigration or was this finished.

A. No. One tried but there wasn’t much success. Still, people were able to get out between 1938 and 1939 but we were not fortunate enough. And once the war broke out, it was finished.

Q. How long did you live in the basement.

A. Only for two or three weeks.

Q. You mentioned it was an air-raid shelter, when it was used as such, what did you do.

A. Well, they had a Jewish air-raid shelter and a non-Jewish air-raid shelter so we had to quickly move into the Jewish air-raid shelter.

Q. At this point, were they already taking people to...

A. Yes. That is why we had to vacate the apartment - not to be caught there. Because somehow, I don’t remember how we found out, we were on the list to be picked up and that’s why we had to get out fast. They wouldn’t come into the shelter - that wasn’t done that way. During an air raid, nothing moves so we were relatively safe.

Q. What about at your father’s job.

A. At that point, we just stopped going.

Q. Just one thought occurs to me, at the time you must have seen many Nazi parades or displays of military strength...

A. Not really. We didn’t see any. We saw them, while you were still able to go to the movies, we saw them in the movies but you did not see it in the street. Jewish people certainly did not go where the parades were and you were not allowed to go because you would have to raise your hand and say Heil Hitler which you wouldn’t do. So, at least I did not see any.

Q. How did this man from Leiser help you after you were in the basement of your apartment.

A. Well, they arranged that I was going to a friend of his - to her house and my parents were supposed to go somewhere else. They went there. We were picked up in their car and somebody else picked up the little luggage that we had and the only thing is this man that I knew there, he got cold feet and he got scared through this whole thing and tried to get my parents denounced. They almost got caught in that apartment where they were but they ran away. They got away and they fell - it was a winter night and there was snow like here in New York and they fell and tore up their clothes but somehow they managed to get where I was and at that point the general manager of Leiser took over and since he knew how being a psychiatrist he knew how to cope with people scared this other fellow so much and said Listen you are just as much involved in it now and you will always be, so if you do anything, you are caught just as much as they are. But we couldn’t stay with this young lady in her house - not the three of us for a long time and I must say they were so nice the best food, the best of everything, they served. It was like we were their honored guests. But he was able to get us on the outskirts of Berlin to a woman who was a known communist and certainly willing to help especially if it was for money. She needed it. She was a worker’s widow and her son was in the Army and always in danger because he was known to be the son of a Communist and we stayed at her house for about three months until she got - actually in her apartment, she lived with her daughter in law - until she got into a fight with the daughter in law and wanted her apartment back. Then, this Dr. Tietjens, that was his name, had almost no choice but - he had a choice, but he had made it his business - and we came to his own estate so to speak which was outside Berlin. But before we got there he had to throw out his - he was a trainer for horses, that was his avocation - and he had to throw out his trainer there because he was a Nazi and had to prepare his wife which he did. His wife came from - she was a von something she was a very nice woman. We had a very good relationship there. They had an apartment for us in their house upstairs and the kitchen was stocked with food when we arrived there and we stayed there for two and a half years until we were liberated by the Russians. But unfortunately during this time, this man died but his widow continued regardless of all the hardships and whatever happened because she had a son out of her first marriage who was a known Nazi and when Berlin really got bombed, he said I’m coming to you. After all, you’re my mother. Again, somehow she was able to persuade him not to say anything and he knew about us. But the life was not easy - to be cooped up in one room with kitchen and bathroom - three adults at that time adult people and especially for my father, it was very difficult. I mean my mother and I, we did sewing, cooking, baking, what have you, we could occupy ourselves but what could a man do - cooped up. You can’t play cards all the time.

Q. And not by yourself.

A. No. But these people who ran the farm, actually - these two farmers - a couple, they came up during the day and they talked to us and he played cards with my father but that wasn’t enough. So, this Dr. Tietjens let him do some research about racing from racing books and so on. Everything helped but it was not easy.

Q. You put your trust in quite a number of people through this...

A. You had to. You had to. You really had no choice. It was either or. But at that point, once a person committed themselves to help somebody, they put themselves in terrible danger. Whether they get paid for their work or not, once they get caught, there is no difference.

Q. Was you family able to pay...

A. No. At that point, we had no money, none whatsoever. So this Dr. Tietjens did everything for us - fed us, clothed us and sheltered us and also paid off whoever had to be paid off including the mayor of that little town because he wanted to send people there to stay who got bombed out in Berlin - not knowing that we were there. But he got paid off just to leave that area alone, to leave that building alone - where he lived.

Q. How old was Dr. Tietjens.

A. Well, when you are young, everybody looks old. He was only 50 when he died, unfortunately.

Q. You mentioned that he was a psychiatrist. Why was he working at Leiser.

A. He gave lectures at the University about how to improve sales from a psychological point of view and many years before, the owner of Leiser went and listened to that lecture and he was so impressed with him that he said this is the man who can reeducate our sales force and that’s what he did and then he grew up within that company and since he was very friendly with all the Leiser people - they were personal friends - and when they had to be taken over by gentiles, again it was a friend who pro forma took over and it was the owner of a company, his name was Bahner which was LBO stockings and that was all one friendly family and they were also involved in everything. This was why he was always involved with Jewish people and that’s how he became general manager of Leiser.

Q. You mentioned that it was very difficult for your father, but it must have been very difficult for you too. You were a young girl.

A. It was very difficult but if you can occupy yourself, it helps.

Q. But was the cooking and baking enough.

A. The sewing. It was easier for me. It was much easier for me as well as for my mother than it was for my father.

Q. Did you ever have any contact with any young people.

A. No. None whatsoever.

Q. Were you in any way restricted in that apartment.

A. Well, only when there was an air raid. It was darkened enough at night so that no light would go through but this was a building, a villa that was on a little hill and nobody could really look in. It was totally isolated. And I would say that in those two and one half years, we went outside maybe four or five times. In the late evening, there was a forest right behind the building where we walked a little bit but that was the extent of it.

Q. How were you able to keep your morale going.

A. I think with the hope that it is going to end soon.

Q. Were you able to get news.

A. Yes. I mean they had a radio and you listened and with every air raid on Berlin you hoped the war would end soon. You said to yourself, how much longer can it last.

Q. When Dr. Tietjens died, were you at all fearful...

A. Yes. At that point, we were very much afraid. Not that she wouldn’t continue but whether she could cope with it. But she did.

Q. Did you make any plans in the event that she couldn’t.

A. No. We were totally helpless. Whatever would happen, would happen. You couldn’t make plans and you couldn’t even think further than the next day.

Q. Did you know what was going on in other places.

A. No. At that point, you didn’t.

Q. Was all your news given to you by these people.

A. Yes. Or we went downstairs at night and we listened all together. We were not restricted if nobody else was in the house, not to go downstairs.

Q. When the Russians came to liberate you...

A. It was a big event.

Q. It was I suppose what you had hoped for...

A. Well, it was a little bit different than we expected it to be. We were in a bunker at the time - a shelter, an outside shelter on the estate naturally with a lot of people from the surrounding area - it was a huge thing.

Q. Why were you in this shelter.

A. Because there was danger of artillery shooting - once the war was there right there in town - you had to take shelter, you couldn’t stay. Of course, then when you heard, all of a sudden there was silence and someone of the men went outside and said well, it’s over finished! Then we ripped our coats open and took out our stars. We figured that’s the only way to differentiate ourselves from the rest of the population.

Q. What do you mean you took out your stars.

A. You know we had them sewn into our coat linings and we pinned them onto our coats to make sure we would be recognized. Of course, those people, they were all in shock not realizing they had harbored or were living sort of with Jews.

Q. What was the reaction when they saw you take out the stars.

A. I would say strictly shock but I think they were happy at that point because they figured it would be their salvation. This estate was outside of this village and we had to walk into town and at that moment, the German airplanes were still going. There was still shooting going on. Then our first surprise was that the Russian soldiers wanted to grab all the women and we tried to explain to them that we were Jewish but it’s not so good to communicate when you don’t know any Russian. But then luckily it was the headquarters there and at that point, most officers were Jewish-Russian officers. And of course, there was a big celebration. They made my father mayor of the town and we were able to save everything for these people who had helped us - you know their property getting destroyed or being taken away by the Russians.

Q. How did you manage to ward off these Russian soldiers.

A. It wasn’t easy. My mother got hit over the head in trying to protect me. My father got hit over the head. I spent a lot of time in closets. And we were once discussing it with one officer who spoke some German. He was not Jewish and we asked why do you want these women who are not willing? Aren’t you married? He said yes, I’m married. My wife is all the way away - we write letters but what are letters? The Russians were like children in a way because they raped the women and then gave them food. It was unique. There was no viciousness - they just wanted women.

Q. Did they react the same way towards the German women as towards the Jewish women.

A. They left us alone then after a while. But they didn’t care, old, young, ugly, beautiful. it didn’t make any difference. But once all the shooting was over, we were able to go back to our estate there and then the Jewish officers came and couldn’t understand that my father couldn’t drink vodka like water and one of them told us that if you ever intend to go to America, Berlin will be divided into various sects and we should manage to get into the American sector fast. So once the shooting was over in Berlin, they drove us into Berlin and we registered and we were supposed to meet them again at a certain point to get back. But somehow that go fouled up and we had to walk back - about 35 miles. It was a July summer day and it was terrible because you were afraid to stop anywhere to ask for food or water because you didn’t know whom would you face but we managed to get back.

Q. When you say the Russians came to the estate, did they set up headquarters.

A. No. Not at the estate but they came in the evening and in their off hours. After all, they were so happy to find Jewish people and somebody who helped them. It was a big event for them too. Naturally, at that point, things in Russia were a little bit different too and they tried to persuade us to go to Russia - it is so great and so beautiful. What a future I personally would have but we said no, thanks. Our family is in America and that’s where we want to go.

Q. Was this common for the Russian officers to be Jewish at that time.

A. I understand at that point, yes.

Q. When you walked the 35 miles back from Berlin did you confront any Germans.

A. No. We just didn’t take a chance, we didn’t take a chance.

Q. When you went back to the American sector...

A. Then a few weeks later, at that point you knew what was going on and then we just moved back to Berlin and these people, (Tietjens) they gave us money to live - after all we had nothing. And as a matter of fact, for our new apartment there, she gave us a beautiful oriental rug. So, they did more than just helping us. They became our friends throughout those years.

Q. When you did move into this apartment in Berlin, you must have come into contact with many Germans...

A. Yes. It was peculiar attitude. You felt almost that you didn’t belong anymore. You felt totally isolated. Certainly you didn’t recognize the town anymore - it was bombed and what have you. But also you felt like they were total strangers - people that you knew before, faces that you had seen. You felt completely removed. Naturally distrust for but the main reaction was that you just didn’t belong. You couldn’t wait to get out.

Q. How did they react towards you.

A. Of course, they showed great happiness and well, we never were like that and I’m so happy for you to survive. We all know better.

Q. Did you rent this apartment.

A. Yes.

Q. And the landlord was non-Jewish. Did you have any trouble.

A. No. There was no trouble. You had to go first to the city hall and register and you had to be given an apartment - you know there were no empty apartments. Many buildings were bombed out so people moved together but we had first priority at that point.

Q. Did you deal with any agency at that point.

A. It was strictly the mayor’s office, city hall and then the American Army. That’s whom we contacted and they had set up a chaplain’s office, a Rabbi, who gathered whatever jews were left in each sector. This was their job. And then we were told we had to register somewhere to immigrate to America. It so happened that we got visa number 2, 3 and 4. No. 1 was a baby that was adopted by an American officer.

Q. So then you made plans to go...

A. Oh yes. At that point, nothing could have been done for me to stay in Germany for anything.

Q. What was the morale like in Berlin among the Germans.

A. I would say they were glad the war was over and trying to build a life again but I really had no contact with them. I was absolutely not interested whatsoever. We lived our own life and we got to know quite a few American soldiers and they sent mail to our... that was the first contact we ever made again through soldiers with our family here as well as in Switzerland to notify them that we are alive.

Q. Who of your family...

A. My mother’s brother and various cousins.

Q. During the liberation and your moving from the Russian zone to the American zone, how did your father get on with the Russians and then...

A. Very well. At that point, he was relieved and he then started feeling like a human being again and had great hopes, once we get to America, it’s all going to be different and then he had another disappointment. He found that it wasn’t easy when he got here either.

Q. How old was your father.

A. We came in 1946. We came with the first ship - D. P. s hip - the Marine Flasher which was the first ship. I looked for the clipping before but I couldn’t find it.

Q. Was that an Army transport ship.

A. It was a liberty ship.

Q. What was the mood of the passengers on the ship.

A. Well, it was jubilation. Now, we come to the promised land. Some promise! But, we had already our disappointments before. You were, you know, the UNRRA, did all the transportation and what have you so you took first a train to Bremerhaven and you were put into a camp building by the UNRRA. That camp was manned by English soldiers so whatever possessions you had, you brought certain things - linens or personal things - they took away again. That was the first disappointment. I mean you got robbed left and right - it was unbelievable what they did.

Q. I’m not quite sure I understand. By whom did you get...

A. The English soldiers. They rifled through your possessions - okay, whether you had guns or what have you. I mean there’s all kinds of - spies could come along. Okay, there’s nothing wrong with that but not to take away the few possessions that you had. So that was the first disappointment - the reality of life again.

Q. Who did you meet in this camp. Were most of the people German - Jews?

A. No. It was a mixture. I would say that most were - in my group let’s put it this way - were German Jews. They were camp survivors and some other people who lived underground. As a matter of fact when everything was over, I met a former girlfriend of mine who I went to school with who had also lived underground all by herself. But she had rather a rough time and almost got denounced by another former friend but she survived and we were all on the same boat.

Q. You mentioned before we started talking that there were instances of people being denounced, did you know of them personally.

A. Afterwards we heard. Not during that time because we were hidden away but we later heard about it. I would say that in Berlin and the surrounding area about 1000 people lived underground which is a very small percentage and yet considering the danger that was involved, it is quite an amount of people. Relatively few people had it as good as we had it though. We were really fortunate in our misfortune.

Q. Did you realize that at the time.

A. Yes. I think we did because they tried to make it as comfortable for us as they possibly could under the circumstances.

Q. You mentioned before that Mrs. Tietjens’ son was a Nazi. Was there ever a question of his reporting you.

A. No. he was basically a coward even though he was about 6’3” tall but he was a coward. He was an artist and he made caricatures for the Voelkischer Beobachter and he was really only told about us after he had lived there for a few days. And it was put to him in such a way - well, you are caught up in the same thing. If you denounce us today, you are just as guilty. You participated in it.

Q. In this camp in Bremerhaven, how did the British treat you.

A. They treated us like prisoners really. I mean there was no friendliness or anything. They treated us like prisoners of war or whatever you - like a bad element that gets shipped out.

Q. What kind of conditions were there in this camp.

A. I would consider them Army conditions. The women slept together, showered together and it was an army camp or something of that sort. But then it was only - we were there maybe a week if that long so you could bear it.

Q. When you came to the U.S. did you come directly to New York.

A. Yes.

Q. Did you uncle meet you.

A. Yes. He met us at the pier.

Q. Where did you go that first day.

A. Well, let me backtrack just a minute. This was the first ship that arrived and they made a whole lot of fuss with it. There were newspaper reporters on board and when we came to Ellis Island, the immigration people came on board and there was a lot of talk and when we arrived, I believe, there were a lot of speeches being made and if I recollect, I think Mrs. Roosevelt was there - that was on Ellis Island but we were on board. So there was a big fanfare being done for us. When we arrived, there was some kind of security and then my aunt and uncle, my uncle had married in the meantime, they took us by taxi to their house which was on 90th St. and Central Park West.

Q. How did you feel about all the fanfare and excitement.

A. Well, we felt elated to be here but we wanted to get it over with - start some kind of normal life again - to start fresh. And especially I - I felt I wanted to live now. I was 21 which wasn’t easy because there were so many years where other people, normal people the age, you know, the teens, where you really have a carefree life, more or less - that was lost for me. I must say this was one thing I always regretted. I always felt that loss of a carefree kind of life - or normal boy-girl relationship and whatever else goes with it.

Q. During all those growing up years, you really didn’t have any contact with other girls or boys your own age.

A. Very little and you grow up very fast. You become an adult - I was an adult when I was thirteen. Not only I - so was every child at the time. You had no choice.

Q. What were your first impressions of New York when you went...

A. Very disappointing.

Q. In what way.

A. In a physical way, very disappointing.

Q. What had you imagined or anticipated.

A. Well, from the movies. I mean Berlin was actually a very beautiful city - clean, nice buildings. When we arrived and we arrived here at the harbor on 11th Avenue, it hasn’t changed much in all these years - you saw those brownstone houses - tenement buildings - we couldn’t believe it. And when we saw Broadway, it also wasn’t as we had expected it to be. But I mean those are outside things. I think it took two years to get used to New York and to see anything that you liked within the city.

Q. After you went to your aunt and uncle’s house, how did you manage to earn a living.

A. Well, my uncle offered me to go back to school and I wanted to but I just couldn’t see myself sitting down - there was just too much to catch up with. I just wanted to become independent and earn money since we had none. Somebody found a job for me and my parents - I don’t remember exactly - I think my mother found a job somewhere and that was the big disappointment for my father - that he was not able to establish himself as he wanted to. My uncle was a manufacturer and after a while, they became sort of contractors for him and it was a little better then. But still it was my mother who was the dominant factor because it had to do with hands - it was women’s work and my father did some bookkeeping and he did the delivering back and forth but it was not the thing that he anticipated or expected to do.

Q. Was this first job that he got with your uncle.

A. Yes. I believe so.

Q. Did you all know English when you came here.

A. Yes. I did and my parents also to a certain degree.

Q. Your father had come over very hopeful. How did he anticipate getting the capital to...

A. He had been selling all his life and he thought he would try to sell anything but it didn’t work out quite that easily. They were not waiting for him - especially, he was not a youngster - he was already in his 60’s.

Q. Did he go to any organizations.

A. For help, no. That wasn’t really necessary but another disappointment was, we arrived on May 27, 1946, and the Jewish holidays were somewhere in September and coming from Europe we knew - seats in a temple were no problem. I mean you become a member and that’s it. But not that you had to buy seats. And my uncle belonged to Habonim at the time and so he said well, we’ll buy you a ticket. So my father said, you are not going to buy any tickets for us. They should be glad if they give us tickets. But whoever was the Rabbi, I think it was Hahn, there was no such thing. They said they don’t give away tickets and my uncle subsequently gave back his membership and never continued. The only temple in all of New York or in that area in New York that was glad to give tickets for High Holidays was Stephen S. Wise congregation. That was another disappointment.

Q. How long did you stay with your aunt and uncle.

A. We stayed for almost a year in their apartment.

Q. What kind of work did your mother find at that time.

A. Within that year, she made lampshades, she worked for somebody but then they became contractors. They also did alteration work - as long as they had a loft and some sewing machines and my mother was very handy and they went to a dress shop and picked up alteration work and things like this but they also worked for my uncle who had a hairnet factory - they were knotting hairnets and employed a few women from the neighborhood.

Q. How did you father feel about your mother working.

A. Well, my mother worked always in business together with him so that was no problem and she comes from a business family. The biggest problem was that he was not the head of the household so to speak.

Q. Well, in what ways did that make itself manifest.

A. I could see he was depressed about it and I would say it broke his heart.

Q. What kind of job did you get.

A. Well, since I had learned the fashion business already, I tried to get back into it and I started as a sample hand and worked myself up to be a designer.

Q. How did you find your first job.

A. The very first job was working in a stock room fixing up things so that was just a job to get some money and then I took a newspaper and went from place to place and it was not easy to find a first job because everybody would ask what was your experience in this country. Finally, I came to somebody and it was a younger man and he asked me the same question and I was tired of it at that point and so I said If nobody gives me a chance to work, I will never have any experience. So he said all right, you got the job.

Q. How did you make contact with other young people your age.

A. That was very difficult, because by the time I got here, my age group was already married or established. I somehow found some of my old school friends again but it was very difficult - through introduction and - but it was an effort - it was not easy.

Q. Did you join any organizations.

A. Not really. I joined because our dentist said - why don’t you learn how to play tennis. So I joined the New World Club tennis group and ever since, I play tennis. But that was very difficult.

Q. Did you look to join mostly a German jewish refugee crowd.

A. I did not look for it - no, I really didn’t but it came by itself. With the exception of one friend I had made in Berlin - an American soldier and through his family I met some other Americans but little by little it fell by the wayside because within your job, you were busy and you came home and you had to worry about your own family. it was not like it is today where a young girl keeps the money all to herself and also my parents tried to do some manufacturing and after my work, I went to their place and I continued there. So it was two jobs for a certain length of time.

Q. Was this manufacturing in the hairnet...

A. No, in novelty items, beachwear and halters like they are coming back with but I enjoyed also a ski club but that was several years later.

Q. Did you date any American boys other than the soldier that you met in Berlin.

A. Yes, they were all people I had met in Berlin, all young soldiers that came back to New York but I would say there was a gap because I was really not quite ready - I didn’t know how to handle it.

Q. Maybe if you would have come over as a fifteen year old and gone to school here, the transition might have been easier...

A. Exactly. My friends that came over here several years earlier and went maybe just only to high school - they were totally integrated already in the American life. I remember I was here maybe two years and I went on my first vacation - it was a Labor Day week end with a former school friend of mine. Well, it was just - I didn’t belong. I absolutely didn’t belong. It happened to be my birthday over that week end and they made a big fuss - you know, a birthday cake - but I just didn’t belong. I didn’t know how to cope with young people.

Q. What made you feel that you didn’t belong.

A. I just didn’t know how to handle it. I didn’t know what to say. Their interests were not my interest. There was no past to talk about and I was also too serious - just to talk and talk - I mean today, it has changed over the years but in those days, I just didn’t know how to. This is in retrospect. At the time, I did not notice it so much only I didn’t make friends easily. I couldn’t make new friends.

Q. When you dated these American soldiers in Berlin or here, did your parents have any feelings about this.

A. They were happy to see me getting back into a normal kind of life.

Q. But would they have preferred you to go out with German Jewish boys.

A. No. My parents never had these kind of feelings. We also never had the feelings of Eastern Jews or Western Jews or something like this. That never entered our feelings.

Q. When you first started working, did you ever feel embarrassed about speaking German...

A. No. Because we made a habit of not speaking German - neither did my parents. Strangely enough, as poor as their English was, we never communicated in German. Not even at home. I mean we do speak German like most people who speak other languages, you lapse from one to the other but generally speaking, we speak English.

Q. Did you feel a desire to become Americanized.

A. Yes. I didn’t want to have anything to do with Germany anymore. I have been back to where my grandparents lived near the Swiss border, in southern Germany, to go to the cemetery and I just couldn’t get out of there fast enough. I feel very badly being there. I distrust everybody and yet my mind tells me that today's generation - they have nothing to do with it. They are very nice people, on the contrary, after all, they are Israel’s greatest allies. But I don’t feel comfortable - I wouldn’t go back to Berlin - Yes, I - on one hand, I would like to show it to my son and say this is where I lived. He has been to Mannheim which is where my husband was from but I just feel very uncomfortable.

Q. Was this a small town that you visited - where your mother c ame fr om.

A. Yes, it was called Geiling and at one point it had a larger Jewish community than non-Jewish community. It wa a well known village within the Jewish community.

Q. In connection with feelings about Germany, how do you feel about the Wiedergutmachung.

A. I take whatever is coming to me. I feel I must give them credit for it - that they keep it up the way they do yet I feel whatever every Jew can get out of them - they can never make up for whatever hardship and loss one had. For the people who died, there is nothing - no money can make up for it. And it is taken advantage of by some people, some people get richer than they ever were in their life but it’s all part and parcel of it. I mean there will come a day when nothing will be paid anymore.

Q. In looking back, what do you think was the greatest adjustment that you had to make when you came here.

A. I think personal relationships - this was the most difficult thing.

Q. In what way - personal relationships.

A. Having friends or having - I have always tried to recapture the lost years but you really can’t. That was a difficult point because my interests at that point were different from my contemporaries because for them, that was already past.

Q. You called them lost years, what do you think you lost the most.

A. Carefreeness, happiness, companionship, a normal life.

Q. Companionship of...

A. Of my peers.

Q. What do you think was your parents’ greatest adjustment when they came.

A. The disappointment of not being able to earn the kind of money they had expected and of course, later on, the restitution money helped and today, for my mother it is a different kind of a life. But those were very difficult years and yet when we heard other people who emigrated here in 1936,7,8 - how difficult they had it to make ends meet - we didn’t because at that point the livelihood that you earned was already more in line with what your daily costs were. But we didn’t feel sorry for them - I still don’t because we said you should be grateful you were here - you were safe - even if you just had bread and water. And if a whole community has the same hardships - you really don’t feel it. If one person is poor and has nothing and everybody around them has everything, then you feel bad. But if everybody is in the same boat, it isn’t that terrible.

Q. Today, do you feel yourself more a part of the American mainstream or more a part of the German Jewish community in New York.

A. I would say I am in a very difficult position. I dislike my own people to a large extent. I feel more comfortable in the American community and yet most of my friends are European.

Q. Why do you say you dislike...

A. Because there are many people who cling to their old ways or feel superior to a certain extent. I would say I feel also superior because I feel European whether German, French or what have you - upbringing is different and you have something that the average American hasn’t got. But outside of that, I feel uncomfortable in so called refugee circles. I feel I have graduated from that - I don’t like to speak German too much or talk about Germany. Vacationing - that’s a different story. But I’m betwixt and between. To a large extent, I feel more comfortable with Americans.

Q. Do you work with mostly Americans.

A. Only Americans.

Q. Do you feel there is a difference - I guess there is a difference between being brought up as a European and as an American but how do you think that difference manifests itself.

A. Values in life. From the point of view of earning a living or looking at your work or your livelihood, we do have different values. We don’t say give me and then I show you. We say we’ll show you and then we’d like to be reimbursed properly. If not, good-bye.

Q. Do you notice a difference in your working habits as compared to your American colleagues.

A. Yes. There are always exceptions but on the whole, yes.

Q. In what way.

A. I would say Europeans are more ambitious, more hardworking, more sincere and try to give the best - try to give a dollar for a dollar and not to take advantage of a given situation.

Q. When you first started to work, how did you get used to the American attitudes.

A. I think pretty fast because I think I tried to block out everything else and there was only one way to go - I wanted to make a success of myself.

Q. Have you always worked since you arrived.

A. Yes. I started four weeks after I arrived and I worked ever since.

Q. Basically, you worked in an American Jewish dominated industry.

You mentioned before that most of your friends are still German Jewish, why do you think this is so,.

A. I didn’t have too many friends until I got married and most of our friends were my husband’s friends and they were European. He was quite a bit older than me and felt closer to the old established -

Q. In terms of recreation, you mentioned that you went on a skiing...

A. Yes, but not so fast. About three or four years had gone by already.

Q. What did you do for recreation.

A. It was strictly family. In summer, we went picnicking. It was all family oriented.

Q. Did they go to the cultural events in New York.

A. Well, my uncle did but he had a little different attitude - what you haven’t earned, you can’t spend but in those days, we did not spend much money - we didn’t have it. You had to build a little nest egg first.

Q. Did your parents feel that loss.

A. Yes. Especially my father because he was always - he enjoyed life and he enjoyed giving and he enjoyed to be able to buy my mother the best there is and once he couldn’t do that anymore - it was not easy for him.

Q. Was he still living when the restitution came.

A. It started but the fruit of it came really after he passed away - that was unfortunate.

Q. How do you feel when you see Jewish successes in American politics like Kissinger, Koch, Javits. Do you like to see that.

A. Yes. Because I don’t believe in hiding because whatever will happen, happens whether you are in a prominent position or not. And there are the anti-semites regardless of what you do or don’t do. So I don’t believe in hiding and saying that you shouldn’t put yourself into that kind of a position.

Q. As far as your son is concerned, do you think you were a different parent than most of the parents of his friends.

A. Yes. I would say so.

Q. In what way.

A. I guess in values - in what is important in life or how to establish yourself or how to make a success of yourself. But I don’t think that has to do with my experiences of living underground or being under Hitler. I think this has to do with European values, upbringing. he feels very much the difference in that between himself and his peers.

Q. Have you ever told him the story of living underground and emigrating.

A. Oh yes.

Q. What was his reaction.

A. He was very interested in it but I think it has reached a point where he really does not want to hear about it anymore, as conversation anyway.

Q. How does your mother relate to your son in terms of his life as an American boy.

A. Very well. My mother is very Americanized. She had later on, after my father passed away, made quite a success of her business. She became a contractor for making beach bags and pillows - throw pillows - and met a customer - rather he can never get over it how she with her poor English took it upon herself to knock on any door and sell herself, so to speak. She adjusted very well.

Q. Did that disturb your father that she was successful.

A. Yes. it did disturb him. He felt he couldn’t do it and it bothered him very much. The opportunity, somehow in the line they were in, somehow it was more for a woman to do because she was the expert in it where he wasn’t. Whatever bookkeeping or money transaction had to be done, that was his part but in order to sell her labor, it was her. He couldn’t understand if somebody asked can you make this.