Interview with Arthur Plaut March 23, 1978

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born on the 24th of November 1901, in Frankenau, Hesse, near Kassel.

Did you grow up in Frankenau?

A: Yes. I did.

Q: What type of business was your father in?

A: My father was a merchant, had hardware and material for building, building

material.

Q: Did you go to school in Frankenau?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Can you tell me a little about your education?

A: Well, I went to a regular Jewish school; we had our own school with a Jewish

teacher. It was very small—maybe 20 people so we had a lot to do. The teacher

watched us very closely. Most people went on to a Gymnasium but my father had

eight children—he couldn’t send them all to the Gymnasium so he sent his oldest

son to Marburg. My brother lived here until he passed away a few years ago. I

myself had to stay in that school until I was ready—he sent me away, my father,

to learn a trade. So I went to Hildesheim and learned the textile trade. I was there for four years and from there I went to different places; always in the textile line and I got nice jobs. The last one, I was manager of a store in the Rhineland in Westphalen for 12 years and then I married and I moved to Thuringen. I met my wife through my business, buying, I was buying goods in a big concern and the parents of my wife used to belong to the same concern. My wife happened to be there with her mother and we met there and then after a time, we married and I became a partner of that store.

Q: Let me just go back for a moment. You mentioned that you were an apprentice in the textile line. What made you decide to do that?

A: I thought I would make a good living in textiles and I liked it.

Q: While you were in this line, were most of your customers Jewish or non-Jewish?

A: Non-Jewish.

Q: While you were in school and during your early years as an apprentice, did you feel well accepted as a German?

A: Yes, yes. I had no trouble until later.

Q: You moved to Thuringen after you met your wife. How did things change for you after Hitler came to power in 1933?

A: Little by little we started to feel it. Certain customers didn’t come anymore. The business was in the hand of the family for over 90 years. They used to live in a little village and they got permission to move to Themar and open a store 90 years before. It was well known there and had a good reputation. We did a good business there and even in Hitler’s time, we did a good business, unfortunately because we would have left before that. Once, as a matter of fact, they put a sign up in front of the business *kauf nich bei Juden* (don’t buy by Jews)and I went to Weimar, to the Nazi government in Weimar, to complain and they took it off for a few weeks and then they started again.

Q: When was this?

A: I think in 1937.

Q: Between 1933 and 1937, 8, did you notice a marked difference in the customers’ reactions?

A: Yes. Certain type people who worked for the government or worked for the city didn’t come anymore or they sent their maids to buy things from us.

Q: What types of things did you sell?

A: All kinds of textiles.

Mrs: Ready made things for children, for ladies and men. Also piece goods and upholstery fabrics, everything.

A: We had some trouble with the salesmen.

Q: The salesmen were Jewish?

A: Yes. And they were beginning to have trouble selling.

Q: When the business began to fall off, did you ever speak about emigrating?

A: Yes. We talked about it because some of my brothers and sisters left already. One of my sisters left in 1934 and we had no connection with America, with any people in America, other than one cousin of my mother whom we didn’t know. My older sister found the address and wrote to them and in 1934 they gave her an affidavit and then one sister let the others come, one after the other. And I was the last one.

Q: During the time 1933 – 1938, did you ever see Nazi parades in Themar?

A: Yes, plenty. Especially in the last year. There were some young people who marched through the town every day, every morning, in front of our business and were singing *wen das Juden blut vum messer sprtizt* (when Jewish blood from knives squirts). That we heard every morning and then we were afraid. We tried to get rid of our business.

Q: How did you try to do this?

A: From mouth to mouth. We told people – salesmen. We told them we want to sell our place—find somebody. We thought we had found somebody, we sold it and they guy was not too bad. He was a Nazi. He promised to pay us and we had an agreement. He had to have the permission and he put the money in the bank and we never got the money. In this agreement was a clause that we had to pay 10% to the Nazi government of our selling price. He deposited the price at a certain bank and when we came there, they said, “I’m sorry we can’t give you any money because it is already confiscated” (*beschlagnamed*). So we only got a little money so we could live. Then the order came that we had to move out of our apartment- it was on top of the store and we had to move to a little apartment in the back and there we waited for our emigration.

Q: Were you satisfied with the deal?

A: We got very little but it didn’t matter because we didn’t get it anyway.

Q: When you say the money was confiscated, in general, if one had a bank account, was this already a *sperrkonto* (money was confiscated).

A: Yes. I haven’t heard that expression in years and years.

Q: Who gave you this money on which you were supposed to live?

A: The bank.

Q: Until 1938, were you afraid of physical violence?

A: The last year, yes. Not before. It was a little town-Themar in Thuringen and we knew everybody. Our family had been there for many years.

Mrs: I grew up there.

Some children, some rowdies, were not too nice. Otherwise, we had no trouble until Kristallnacht. They didn’t burn the synagogue because they couldn’t. Otherwise the whole neighborhood would have burned down.

Q: You mentioned that it was a small town and you knew most of the people there

and had known them for many years. Did you notice a change in their attitude towards you?

Mrs: Oh, yes.

Q: How so?

Mrs: They looked away. We had three stores. One store we sold years before and then the second store we sold in 1938. My father died in 1933 and he was wounded in the first World War so they had a little respect. I mean we were very well known

all over. Our daughter was born in 1935 and my mother was always in business

and I was handling the one store in Hindburghaus and I gave it up and I came

back to the main store. Then after we sold the business, my daughter was a few

years old and all the employees were crazy about the child, so my mother went

one day with my daughter for a walk. So she saw a former employee who was

always very friendly and good and she knitted things for my daughter and her

sister had been with us for maybe 15 years. Anyhow, she passed my mother and

didn’t say hello so my daughter said, “Grandma, wasn’t that Friedel?” My

mother said yes. “But Grandma, she didn’t say hello to us. Why didn’t she say

hello?” So my mother said because we are Jews. My daughter said “what were

we before?” Three years old.

Did you feel that Hitler wouldn’t last long?

Mrs: We thought so. We thought that in the beginning because it was a very

established place and it was so long in the family and the people said, “Oh, we

have nothing against you.”

A: You know there were 60 million Germans—everybody said, “we don’t mean

you…you are alright.” But they meant us.

Q: Did you belong to a congregation in Themar?

A: Yes. We had a congregation and we had a Jewish teacher.

Q: Was there ever any conversation either by the Rabbi from the pulpit or amongst

your Jewish friends about what should we do or how should we handle this?

Mrs: It was—there were many people who were there and were long established there

and we always said let him come to power first, then we’ll see how long it will

last. But then it was too late. Some people, the young ones got out like us—we

were lucky but I lost my mother.

Q: Did you see signs *Juden Unerswuenscht* (Jews not wanted) or *Juden verboten*

(Jews forbidden)?

A: Oh yes.

Q: How did you manage to go shopping?

Mrs: Until 1938, everything was alright but after everything was sold, we had to move

into this apartment in the back. My husband left in 1939 for England and my

mother, my daughter and myself were still in this town so we decided that we

couldn’t stay there so we arranged to move to Berlin.

Q: Before we come to that, how close to Kristallnacht did you sell the business?

Mrs: It was in the Kristallnacht. The Kristallnacht was the 9th of November and there

was a big sign in the window of our store *geschlossen fur ubernahmen* (closed for

takeover) and that sign really saved the store. We didn’t really own it anymore, it

was in transfer. But they took my husband during the night to the concentration

camp

and from that time on, it was unbelievable.

Q: During that night, when they came to your door, it must have been a very

frightening experience.

Mrs: I had my nightgown on and my daughter on my arm. And my mother was yelling

out “Help! Help! Help!” It was on the *Marktplatz* (market place). We didn’t

know what it was—we thought it was just against us. We didn’t know it was for

all the Jews. But then we saw—then a few other Jewish women came to us and

told us they took all the men. They took from 13 years to 85 years—they took

them all.

A: When they picked me up that night, certain things you never forget. My mother-

in-law said to my wife *“hald einmal das kind”* (hold one time the child) and the

next day, when I was gone, our little girl told everybody, “you know my father said *wir behalten das kind”* (we kept the child) She didn’t understand that. They

took me away and I was in Buchenwald a short time only—thank God.

Q: On that night, how did you protect your daughter? What did you say to her?

Mrs: It was so frightening. I don’t know exactly what I said. One thing we used to

do—we never had a bed next to a window, never. We were always afraid

somebody would throw a stone.

Q: When you were in the street, did people insult or say things to you?

Mrs: They looked away. Some were ashamed, some felt terrible and some were very

friendly. For instance, we picked up the mail in the post office so some friends

would also pick up the mail and they would pretend to be reading a paper and

they would tell us something. We had another store next to us and when she

wanted to talk to us, she would call the cat—the name of the cat—and my mother

would know that one of us should go and find out what she wanted to tell us.

Q: Did anyone warn you about Kristallnacht?

A: No.

Mrs: There were always the newspapers where there were articles like the *Voelkisher*

*Beobachter* and the *Sturmer*—there were local papers.

A: A neighborhood paper. I was in there once. They put me in too: Arthur Plaut;

fresh importier (imported) von Kastrup –type polizei (police) president Isadore

Weiss.

Mrs: He was from Berlin.

A: I was that type they said. Before Hitler, there was a Jewish police president in Berlin—Weiss. So they called me Isadore Weiss.

Q: What was the intent of calling you Isadore Weiss?

A: That people should know that I’m a Jew—what kind of guy I am.

Q: On Kristallnacht, when they took you, did they give you any explanation?

A: No. They told me. They put us in a local prison—all of the men including the boys and they didn’t tell us.

Q: What was the mood of the men in the prison?

A: Afraid—for their lives. One guy, an elderly guy who didn’t know—he was senile—he kept saying, “what are you doing to me? Get away from me.” And we sort of kept him down because we were afraid that we would be in trouble. Otherwise, we kept quiet and the next day they took us out on the market place—all of us and hundreds of people—all of our former friends—were looking at us. In their hearts, they were anti-Semites anyway. Employees that we did business with for years, always very friendly, they were the worst.

Mrs: And they owed us a lot of money, some of them.

A: They got rid of us and they didn’t have to pay us.

Q: While all this was going on at the market place, it’s hard to ask what thought were running through your mind 40 years later but it must have felt terrible.

A: To be honest, I didn’t think I was coming back. I felt like if you are on the street and there is a hole and you fall into it and there is no end to it—like a bottomless feeling. I was nothing anymore—everything was gone. And then we came to Buchenwald and the reception wasn’t too nice. They were hitting and I tried to be in the center—nothing happened to me.

Q: From the night they picked you up through the next day on the market place, were they local Nazis who were guarding you?

A: Yes.

Q: Was there anybody who you knew personally?

A: Yes. We knew everybody in town.

Q: Didn’t anybody say anything?

A: No. We knew they wanted to get rid of us and we were afraid.

Q: How did you get to Buchenwald?

Mrs: They put them all in a truck.

Q: You said that the reception was not so nice.

A: Yes. They hit many people. I was lucky, I kept in the center. The outside people got hit but nothing happened to me. Then we were *eingetrachen* (inducted). They gave me a uniform—striped uniform, and I saw one of my brothers there. That night, people walked around—is there anybody from Frankfurt, is there anybody from Frankenau? —that was my hometown and I said yes. And it was a gentile man—a *bible vorscher* (Jehovah’s Witness). He remembered me and he said don’t worry, I’ll see what I can do for you. He supplied me with underwear, which he stole from somewhere.

Q: What happened to your clothes?

A: They took them away and I got it back when I was released.

Q: Where did you sleep that night and from then on?

A: On boards, like bunkers without anything. It was an open barracks and it was very cold and this guy supplied me with stockings and things so I was lucky.

Q: What did they give you to eat?

A: Soup. A kind of a soup, which was nothing. We didn’t get much.

Q: What was the daily routine like?

A: We marched. One thing—I was thirsty and we collected the rainwater in our caps or hats and were drinking that. I haven’t talked about it. I wanted to forget about it.

Q: You said you marched. What else filled up your days there?

A: We didn’t work. Some people—one department—had to work. They carried stones from one place to another and worked on the streets but fortunately I didn’t have to work.

Q: Did they have something like a roll call—*appell*?

A: Yes. Sometimes we had to stand for hours and hours. One man from our town, from Themar, he was sick, he had some trouble with his legs and couldn’t stand so we kept him, one of my friends and I, we stood on each side of him and we kept him up. Otherwise, they would have taken him away.

Q: Were there men taken away?

A: Yes. They took people away—some people they just lost their nerves and they took them away and we never saw them again.

Q: Was there barbed wire surrounding the camp?

A: Yes. And I heard people crying at night, yelling Help! Help! And then all of a sudden it stopped. The whole camp was surrounded by wire and towers with soldiers with guns who watched what was going on. But I was lucky; I was only there three weeks. I met a man, a Jewish man who was our accountant, and they let him go. So I asked him please do me a favor, go to Themar, see my wife and my mother-in-law and try to get me out of here.

Q: During the time you were in Buchenwald, were you able to contact your wife?

A: I sent one letter, yes.

Mrs: I never got a letter. That’s the first time I know of a letter.

A: When I tried to get out of Buchenwald through this man, through this Jewish accountant.

Mrs: We were in touch with him.

A: He got in touch with my wife. But the commander of the camp sent a letter to the Burgemeister of our town, should we release Arthur Plaut because he claims he wants to finish his transactions for the takeover of his business. So the Burgemeister wrote back, *lassen sie ihn ruich noch dort, er brauch noch tzimlich viel erholung.* (Leave him there yet, he needs quite a lot of recovery.) He wanted to get rid of me. This guy used to be one of our customers and, in fact, owed us a lot of money.

Q: This must have been a very shocking experience for all of you. What was the mood like among the men?

A: We were depressed, most of us. Some young people, they kind of entertained each other and kept up their spirits but they elderly people were worried and depressed and didn’t know what had happened to them and they were just waiting to get out.

Q: Were there rumors around as to how one could get out?

A: Yes. There were always rumors—President Roosevelt will help us to get out of here. President Roosevelt didn’t know a thing about it—maybe he knew. That helped us a little bit that somebody in foreign countries would know about us and would help us. One told the other but there was nothing behind it.

Q: What helped you to keep up your morale?

A: Just hope. And our families. One day we were very sick, most of the people in the camp. They gave us something to eat, which we couldn’t stomach and most of us were sick for two or three days, diarrheA:

Q: Speaking of that, what kind of bathroom facilities were there?

A: None at all. None at all. If you want to know, there were some holes and some large cans (*fassen*).

Q: What happened when the dysentery spread through the camp?

A: We were afraid we all would die because there were no doctors—I never saw a doctor but thank goodness, after two days or so, we got over that.

Q: That’s also a very humiliating kind…

A: Terrible. You felt like animals, not human beings.

Q: How did you finally get released?

A: Through my family. They told the people…

Mrs: That accountant helped us and we told the officials that we wanted to finish with the transaction of the business and we needed him.

So one day they called my name, a few times they called what I thought was my name but it wasn’t and I was running. Two and a half weeks I was there and they let me go but they told me to leave Germany as soon as I had taken care of my business.

Q: When they called your name or what you thought was your name, did you know that meant your release?

A: Everyday there were a few names, some names and one day they called the name Arthur Plaut and I ran there and it turned out to be a Plaut with a B, not with a P, another Arthur Plaut and I went home (laughs) if that’s what you call it. I went to my place and I was so disappointed.

Mrs: But when he was released, there were a few others from our town also.

Q: Did they give you any instructions when they released you?

A: They told me as soon as I finished my business matters, I should leave the country.

Q: Did they tell you anything about not talking about what had happened?

A: Yes. They told me not to talk about it and then they let me go and the release from Buchenwald (I still have it) and I had to report to the local police in Themar so that they could keep track of me…

Mrs: And they shaved off all your hair.

A: Yes. When I first came in after a day.

Q: Did you not talk about Buchenwald when you came home?

A: Not in Germany. I kept my mouth shut. I didn’t want any trouble anymore. I only spoke about it openly when I came to England.

Q: They had intimidated you enough?

A: Oh, yes. I only told my close family, my wife and my mother-in-law and a few friends.

Q: I just want to ask your wife about what happened to her after you were taken away on Kristallnacht? After the SS had come and taken your husband, what happened to you?

Mrs: Well, we thought it was the end. We were hysterical because we didn’t know what was going on. We thought it was only us because we were on the Marktplaz; the other Jewish people did not live close by. We lived above our store, which was on this Martplatz. But then, after my mother was yelling Help! Help! Help! Another Jewish woman came and said her husband was taken, too, and then we knew that they were all taken. We had all kinds of thoughts about how to help them get out.

Q: Did you know where they were?

Mrs: Well, we knew they were in prison and the next day they came to the *Marktplatz* and you should have seen the people around and we saw them behind the curtain and we were all frightened. So this man who wanted to take over the business, he pressed us to take over and we said we can’t, we have to wait and then later, this Jewish accountant who used to live in Gotha and who was also in Buchenwald and then when he was released he called us right away and I met him—not in Themar but nearby.

Q: When the men were taken away from the *Marktplatz* did you know where they were going?

Mrs: We really didn’t know. We guessed to a concentration camp and we had heard of Buchenwald.

Q: Was that a word you were familiar with?

Mrs: Not familiar really. We only heard about it.

Q: What kinds of things did you do initially after your husband was taken away?

Mrs: Oh, because it was not only my husband, the next day I had a call from my mother-in-law, we should come to Frankenau, her husband was taken, and an uncle and a brother—a lot of people. We were besides ourselves and we tried to get out of Germany so I had a brother who was that time not home. He was in Frankfurt to learn a trade, *Hachsharra*, in order to emigrate and my brother did everything to transfer some money to Israel so that we all could go. My brother was in Frankfurt and he was fortunate—he kept on traveling all over—by train, by bus, walking and they didn’t get him. So when everything calmed down, we heard from him and one day, I met him with this accountant, not in Themar. When my brother came to our house in Themar and my husband was gone, he had to go also to the Burgermeister to say that he was there (*angemelted* registered). So my brother never wore a hat and when he came to the mayor’s office, he left his hat on and the Mayor asked him why he didn’t take his hat off. He said okay and he took his hat off and they all looked—he had hair.

Q: When this accountant called you, were you afraid to meet him?

Mrs: No. I wanted to help my husband and I think we met in Erfurt and he said he would try to help me get Arthur out. In fact, he had made the contract for the store to sell. In the meantime, my brother had gone to Berlin to try to do whatever he could to get out of Germany and for us, too. We wanted to go to Israel, all of us, and we would have transferred whatever money was allowed. But nothing ever materialized. We got a number and that was all.

Q: When had you applied for a visa to come here?

Mrs: That was done as soon as the others got here. My mother-in-law then applied and another sister of my husband and us. I had no family here (in the US). My brother meantime couldn’t go to Israel but he got the permit to go to England. He left in January 1939, for England and then tried to let us come to England, too, and wait in England till we could go to AmericA: We had a number to come to America but it would take time. My brother left for England, I think it was February, and we said, “First the men, let the men go out first.” So my husband left in August 1939 for England.

Q: How was your brother able to get your husband to England?

Mrs: He got some papers for him and he was not allowed to work but his brother, who was in America, sent some money at the request of my brother—a guarantee of support for England. Then both men, my brother and my husband, looked to get us out, too—for help in a household—as a domestic and it didn’t work.

Q: Let me go back for a moment, when your husband first came back to Themar from Buchenwald, what kind of impression did you get?

Mrs: He lost a lot of weight and he looked without hair, you can imagine—now I am used to it—now I can laugh about it but we were all very excited.

A: I just wanted to add that you couldn’t live in Themar anymore, in that little town. You had to move to Berlin.

Mrs: That was after you left for England. When my husband came home from Buchenwald, we tried everything—my brother moved also from Themar and we had to move into another apartment in the back of our house. Everything was settled, and the new owner moved in. The contract had said that he wouldn’t move into our apartment until we left Germany but he didn’t go by this—he did what he wanted and so we had to move out into this small back apartment. We couldn’t move anywhere else—who would take us?

Q: When you were released from Buchenwald, how did you get back to Themar?

A: We were three fellows from Themar who came together—we took a train home.

Mrs: But you called from someplace.

A: Yes, I called to let them know that I’m out of the camp and on my way home. We went in a little, that I never forget, we went into a little *gastwirtschaft*—a little restaurant in a village and they were prepared for us. They had hundreds of rolls with sausage and cheese which you could buy if you had a little money and I never in my life had a better piece of bread than that night.

Q: Did you get your clothes and your money back?

A: Yes, I did. I didn’t have much but they gave us back everything—my suit and my coat, and the little bit of money I had on me when I came.

Q: How did they receive you at this *gastwirtschaft*?

A: Nice. They had what you call *rachmones* (compassion) with us—they knew. And from there, we went home by train. I called from that place on the way home. And the first thing I did when I came home was I took a bath.

Mrs: But you know, we used to have cars and we had to sell the cars, too. There was a deadline by which time you couldn’t own a car anymore.

A: We had to see it and someone tried to swindle us out of the car. We had to go to the court and as a Jew, that time. We couldn’t get a Jewish lawyer, there was one in Gotha who was a *rechtsconsular* (someone to advise about rights)—he came to Themar.

Q: What made you decide to go to court over this?

Mrs: There was a deadline to sell the car—no Jew could have a car anymore so we had a car and there was one man coming from out of town and he said he wants the car for a certain price and he will tell us when he will pick it up—let’s for instance say Tuesday, and he would let us know and pick up the car. We shouldn’t sell it. So, it was all right but we didn’t know the guy. The next day a young man from our town came who was not a Nazi and he said—he knew me since we had gone to school together—he would like the car. So Arthur and I sold the car but if the man doesn’t come by Wednesday, call us up and you come back. So the man didn’t come Wednesday and didn’t come Thursday and so we sold this man the car. Then, he came back that guy, and he sued us. He said we had no right to sell the car—he bought the car. We told him that he was supposed to be here on Wednesday and he said you’re a liar.

Q: Were you afraid of him?

A: Yes, we were afraid.

Mrs: So he took us to court. That was the first time we were in court. So we had no lawyer. There was one lawyer in Thurigen from Gotha so we told him the story and he didn’t…

A: Let me interrupt a minute. While we were ordered to go to court, I got an ideA: I told a friend, a gentile friend, to please find something out about this fellow who wants to sue us—they call it in German *eine auskunftei*—information. The guy did and after three days he told me the guy was a gangster and if he could he would see the gravestone of his parents. So we went to court and he said he bought the car, don’t believe that Jew. Then I took my letter and gave it to the judge who knew us also and he didn’t say a word. When he read the letter, he said to the other guy, get out of here. Dismissed. Case dismissed, as they say in AmericA: So that was the end of it.

Mrs: We were lucky.

A: The guy said who believes a Jew? What a Jew says is not true. But the letter helped me.

Q: How did the judge act?

A: He didn’t saw a word. He just said get out of there. The letter was written by a non-Jew, by a reliable firm.

Mrs: He was very well known like Dunn and Bradstreet: Schimmelphennig. It was very well known.

Q: When you came back from Buchenwald, were you anxious about what would happen to you?

A: Yes, we were because we had no hold, we didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know will we find a place somewhere else—in America or somewhere? We didn’t know.

Q: Your number wasn’t ready yet for America?

A: No.

Mrs: We got in contact with our relatives in Argentina and all over and they sent papers but it didn’t help.

Q: What do you mean it didn’t help?

Mrs: They sent papers to help to get us out but it wasn’t enough.

Q: How did your brother get the guarantee to help your husband get to England?

Mrs: This was done through his family.

A: My family in AmericA:

Q: So your brother was in contact with your husband’s family in America?

Mrs: Yes. When my husband left in August 1939, he tried everything to get us out. We saw that we couldn’t stay in that small place anymore so we went to Berlin.

Q: On the day you left Germany, for England, that must have been a very difficult day for you.

A: I can’t describe that. One thing I know, when I went down the steps where the house was and the family for so many years, I took the mezuzah down. (cries)

Q: Did you leave by train?

A Yes. I went to France first, to Paris. My wife had a cousin there and I was there for one week and then I went to England and in England I had the reception from a few relatives over there.

Q: Someone once told me they couldn’t watch Fiddler on the Roof because when the daughter leaves her family for Siberia, it was too painful for this woman to watch having gone through this herself. When you left, did you think you would ever see each other again?

A: I still had hope. I was young and I had hope. I thought I could try to do everything that would get them out as soon as possible and when I went to England, I had my brother-in-law there—my wife’s brother and so we did everything. We went to the Blumsbery House every second day and I tried to get them out that way. I tried to write to my wife all over the world.

Mrs: The war had broken out and the mail had to come via all other places.

A: The war broke out and then it was out—you couldn’t come anymore. Now how to get in touch with my family in Germany? So I wrote to Holland but Holland was taken over. So I wrote to Switzerland, Bulgaria—my wife had a girlfriend in BulgariA: I wrote to her and she sent the letter to Germany. That we had some contact.

Q: You did get the mail?

Mrs: Yes. In Berlin. We moved to Berlin.

Q: On the day that your husband left, how did you protect your daughter?

Mrs: What can I say? She couldn’t leave with him—she was too small. He couldn’t care for her. So, the only thing is we moved to Berlin and I learned a trade there. She could go to the kindergarten. We could only get furnished rooms and my mother was with us.

Q: You left everything in Themar?

Mrs: Our lift was sent already—it was gone. It was sent to Holland. And the few things, which we had moved into the back apartment, we left there.

Q: Who gave you the advice to move to Berlin?

Mrs: Ourselves. We didn’t want. Look, you get up in the morning, you live in the back. Every morning, you know what we did, we were afraid then. We put some wooden boards at night on the windows where we slept so that in case somebody would throw a stone. So my mother said we can’t live like this, we can’t live like this. So I went to Berlin and found some accommodations and then we moved to Berlin.

Q: How did you manage with money?

A: My mother got some money and we got some money and to help people, we could send them some money.

Q: When you say you got some money…

Mrs: The bank gave us some money—a set amount. And then in Berlin we went to the *Luftschutzkellar* (air raid shelter) and as I said my daughter went to the kindergarten. At least, there she had some Jewish people. In Themar, she wouldn’t have anybody. And I learned a trade—I learned making corsets.

Q: Where were you able to learn this?

Mrs: There was a school—a Jewish school.

Q: How did you find out about it?

Mrs: That you find out. If I wouldn’t have gone to school—that prevented me from having to go to work. Jewish people had to go to work at a certain age and I was a young woman. So there came people from Frankfurt and all over and as long as I could manage, I stayed at that school.

Q: Was it an organization, which ran the school?

Mrs: (To Arthur) Do you still have those papers, it’s in there? I’m not sure anymore. It was private and I paid for it. Then when my daughter was old enough, she went for three months to school—Jewish public school. She started in April and we got out in August.

Q: Did you notice a difference between Nazi strength in Berlin? Did you feel safer in Berlin than in Themar?

Mrs: I tell you we felt safer because we didn’t know anybody—*untergetauft* (submerged). But you had to wear a Jewish star then.

Q: You didn’t wear it, did you?

Mrs: Oh, yes.

Q: When you came to Berlin did you register?

Mrs: Yes, we registered.

Q: When the rule came out that you had to wear a star, how did you get it?

Mrs: I’m mixed up now. I didn’t wear a star—it was my mother. I remember now, my daughter used to wear a *Mogen David* (star of David)—that’s what mixed me up. My mother and my daughter didn’t look Jewish at all—I had that big nose. So, they went shopping after the time. You could only go certain times. When we came here, my daughter would say “*an dan I put my Mogen David nach innen”.*

(I put my Star of David inside)

Q: When you went shopping during those times, were you free to buy anything you wanted?

Mrs: Well, what you could get. You couldn’t get everything and you had the stamps, too, for food.

Q: Was the money, which they gave you to live on a reasonable amount—could you make it?

Mrs: It was—but if you wanted to buy a coat or you needed something else, you had to write and try to get some more money released.

Q: You mean get permission?

Mrs: Yes, then they gave you a little more.

Q: What kept you going during that time in Berlin after your husband had left for England?

Mrs: Well, we were young and I had hopes of following him or going to the States. When the war broke out, I knew that was finished—England, so I got in touch with everybody in the United States and then I went to the *Hilfverein* (help organization) about the papers and then my family sent some money for the trip and my mother couldn’t make it—she had different papers. When I finally got the visa, we didn’t have any transportation. So I went to the *Hilfverein* again and they got us the transportation—we went over Portugal to the United States—my daughter and myself.

Q: Did the Nazis make it difficult for you to leave?

Mrs: Well, we had to have a lot of documents. You had to have your taxes paid, and the Jewish *abgabe* (what the Jews had to give up to the Germans) and all kinds of things which we did before we left our hometown. And the silver and everything, we had to give away. There was nothing left, everything that we had in the way of silver or gold, we had to give away.

Q: Did you have to clear it with Themar that you paid everything before they gave you the papers in Berlin?

Mrs: Yes, we had to show it.

A: I still have it—the President of the Jewish congregation had to give me a paper that I paid my Jewish *kultus-steuern* (taxes) and, of course, the *Juden abgaben.*

Mrs: They wouldn’t let you go out without paying for everything.

Q: During this time, were you still able to keep contact with each other?

Mrs: Still though the same way—Holland, Switzerland, Bulgaria and the United States. In the meantime, my in-laws came here and his sisters and brothers.

Q: On the day you left Berlin, you…

Mrs: On the day I left Berlin, I left my mother behind. And that same day, it came out that no one over 45 could leave the country—that same day. We were all collected in one room and then we were taken to the *Luftschutzkellar* and…

Q: *Luftschutkellar* is for air raid?

Mrs: Yes, but it was a *sammelplatz* (gathering place) and then we came in a wagon, a train and the train was closed and *kein fenster darf auf gemacht sein* (no window is allowed to be open) and the shades were all drawn until we came out of Germany. Then we could open the windows. Then we came through Spain and they had nothing in Spain—they were so poor. Then Portugal.

Q: Who arranged this transportation?

Mrs: That was the *Hilfsverein* but we paid for it. This *warein zugdas waren die ganzen leute—*our visa would have expired maybe three weeks later. So we were two weeks in Lisbon and then we came to the United States.

Q: The arrangement to come from Lisbon to the United States was also done?

Mrs: By the *Hilfsverein.* The money was sent and they arranged it.

Q: What did you do for money along the way?

Mrs: On the boat we got food but on the train, we got our first meal on the border in Portugal. We took some food along from Berlin.

Q: Was it hard for your daughter to leave?

Mrs: My daughter was heartbroken to leave my mother behind. (cries-we had to stop for a few minutes)

Q: When you first came to the United States, who met you at the boat?

Mrs: Cousins, an aunt, a few people.

Q: You mentioned that the food on the boat was terrible.

Mrs: We were in the *zwichendeck*. About two hundred people slept in this one place—men and women—all strangers. And so many people got seasick. My daughter and myself, we were not one day seasick.

Q: The war was on—this was an army-type boat. It doesn’t sound like a luxury liner. (laughs)

Mrs: It was a Portuguese ship and *umgoteswillen* (Oh my G-d),no luxury (laughs). There were a few people that I knew who had first class accommodation—I don’t know why they got it. And some stewardesses, they gave me always something for my daughter—some fruit. But not those people from first class who I knew—our people.

Q: Just to go back for a moment, when you got the visa, did the *Hilfsverein* give you any alternatives as far as leaving and how to go?

Mrs: Well, when you had your visa, you run and you go where you can get the fare. And I had the money there. We had to wait and I pestered them every week and I called and so when I had the visa—before I couldn’t do anything—but then I did everything. If I would have been a week later, I would have been stranded in Portugal.

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