Ada Speyer, Nov. 1, 1977

Q: When were you born?

A: 31st January, 1893

Q: Where were you born?

A: Bremerhaven, in the north of Germany.

Q: How would you describe Bremerhaven?

A: I can’t remember anything, I was a baby, I think of two years when my parents left and they moved to Hanover, a wonderful city more in the north of Germany and I began there my schooling for about three years and then my parents separated and my mother and I, we went to the Rhineland to my mother’s sister and there I grew up and had a wonderful schooling time there and in between, as I said before, I went with my mother to Burma and after we returned in 1916 during the first world war, I worked in Germany as a volunteer in the city, Neuvit (Neuwed?), on the Rhine near Koblentz and I worked at the city hall and I had a wonderful occupation there – I had the distribution of the food ration cards under me and at the end of the war when the American occupation came, they called me always for interpreter and that was also very funny for me because very often American soldiers married German girls and they called me to assist and translate the official wording of the ceremony and so on so that usually when I came home, my aunt teased me and said, “if he beats her up, it’s your own fault”.

Q: That’s quite a story. You mentioned that you grew up in the Rhineland. There was that?

A: Neuwied (or Neuvit?), on the Rhine, near Koblentz and ½ hour away from Koblentz.

Q: Did you go to school there?

A: I went to school there, ja, boehere tochterschule, and I had a wonderful schooling. I had an excellent teacher for English and of course, English was a second language in our family, owing to that, as I said before, all the brothers of my grandfather, they were in England, in London and so constantly, we were in connection with London. They came over with their children and we went over and so on.

Q: How long had your uncles been in England?

A: They were sent over as very young boys. I have a booklet here and in fact, I noticed that the youngest was only 17 years old when he was sent over and he became afterwards the main partner in the firm. The firm still exists today with a branch here, in Canada, in South Africa is a very big branch, in Johannesburg, and in Sydney.

Q: What kind of business was this?

A: Export and import. Besides, they bought factories. They have still a factory in the south of France, in the Jura, in smoking-they manufactured smoking pipes. It’s a very large firm- it’s already the fourth generation now.

Q: Did you visit London as a young girl

A: On my way to Rangoon to Burma. My uncle took me first to London because he had to do still business there with an agent, so that was the first time I was in London and that was a visit I was looking forward since years because I grew up and heard always “When you are grown up, we will send you to England to learn proper English, we will send you a year to France to learn proper French” so of course, you see I was eager to come to London. I had a wonderful time there for three weeks.

Q: When you went to the Hoeheae Tochterschule, did you study for a particular profession?

A: No, that was a general education there but attached to the Tochterschule was a Lehrerinen Seminar – if you wanted to study to become a teacher, you could study after finishing the school for nine or ten years, you could study three years to be a teacher. Some of my friends did this but I wasn’t interested too much in that. I wanted to go out of the city, and I went afterwards to Frankfurt and visited for two years the business school there because I wanted to be in a girls boarding house where many girls were. I was the only child, I lost a little brother, a very very small little brother and so I always was more or less the only child in the family so I had opportunity with friends who were already there and I had a lovely time in Frankfurt. Until, when I was finished there, I went to Burma directly.

Q: Why did you go to Burma?

A: My mother had an uncle living there and a brother. And this uncle lost by the birth of the second child his only daughter and owing to that the telegrams came over to Germany who is free, who could come over and look after the two babies. So it fell on my mother, and I decided not to go with her directly because I wanted to finish the last six months of my school and knowing that my uncle would come next year, her brother for vacation time, so I told my mother that I would come with him and that is what I did. And he was a wonderful companion to me – he spoiled me all over.

Q: It sounds like a wonderful trip.

A: Yes, it was. That was when I went through the Suez Canal. That was in August, 1911 and we had to leave Burma the end of 1915 – the end of November, 1915 and because we were English prisoners of war my mother and I, we had to travel two and a half months before we came back to Germany. They wouldn’t allow us to go back via the Suez Canal, we had to make the trip all around South Africa. They brought us to Madras, to Calcutta first, then passing Madagascar to Capetown. From there up to St. Helena where they frightened us deadly. They said “Here you can stay on” because St. Helena made a terrible impression on us. There were all rusty old ships lying in the harbor and so on but only for a few hours, we stopped there. They we went on to the Canaries and from there to Gibraltar and from there to London. But they couldn’t bring us directly to London because a few days ago, the Germans sunk a British submarine so we had to stay out of London and we came from a tropical country we were not prepared for the sever winter in the Channel so I still see us with the blankets around us and I constantly said now I know what it means to be a poor immigrant.

Q: Where you able to get back to Germany?

A: Well, the British were very hard to us. Finally, they let us come into the harbor. It was in the evening and we were examined, if we have no money or anything on our body and there were several old gentlemen with us and some from different consulates and they were, the men were all taken off the boat to a concentration camp and we were transferred to a wonderful Dutch boat and the Dutch people were lovely to us – we had warm cabins and good food and real beds to sleep in and so we were brought over to Holland and by train we traveled to the German frontier. But the British had taken all our luggage and our passports so we had to wait at the frontier a few days for the luggage. But our passports we never got and owing to that my mother and I, we had great trouble in Germany because it was the war. You see, in Neunied, where we were know, they said well we don’t know that you are not spies now or something like that, you first have to see that you get your papers. So, we managed it this way, two cousins of my mother were doctors and they were in the medical service as officers so they vouched for us. They were in the German Army and finally we got some papers and we could live quietly because my mother was terribly afraid to be without any papers, without recognition but that was settled then and then my aunt said to me Listen, all the girls are working voluntarily now for the country. You should do the same, in the household is no work for you, I have the maids here. So I got the job at the City Hall. It was a wonderful job. I had the ration card distribution under me and when the war ended and the American soldiers came as occupation army, they asked me to be a translator.

Q: During all this time, you sort of had divided loyalties. Did you feel yourself a German national?

A: Absolutely, and how. I will tell you the minute we got out of the train in Wesel – that was the German frontier. I saw the first German soldiers and officers in their grey uniform and I rushed to one of the officers and I’ll never forget this and I asked him “Will we win?” and he answered, “Gnaedige Fraeulein, on the knees they will be lying in front of us” and so the Germans lost the war and the Kaiser had to flee to Holland.

Q: How do you think the Germans felt about losing the war?

A: Well, they were sorry. You see, they were all sorry. It was sad, their country and their army and the population didn’t want the war – it was the Kaiser – as their said years before the Kaiser is rattling again his sword.

Q: During this time of the war and while you were growing up, how would you describe the relations between the Jews and the Gentiles?

A: Well, in Frankfurt, that was a Jewish school more or less. The director was Jewish, it was a private school. In Frankfurt I didn’t feel anything. In Neuvit, I felt sometimes a little bit because my maiden name was David and in German it sounds a little bit harder – David- Ada David and whenever a new teacher came and she asked the names of the children, I had to get up and say my name, Ada David, I just had the feeling that somebody is looking at me because I’m a Jewish girl – perhaps it’s my own imagination, I don’t know. Nobody said anything against us – nobody, never. Although my aunt always told us already in Bismarks time, it was very reluctant but fine anti-Semitism here. That she always told me. I knew there was always a difference.

Q: Did you have many non-Jewish friends?

A: No, no. We kept together. In my class, we were about five Jewish girls and we were the friends. I mean we talked to the others and now and then we visited the others but I can’t say we were close together as I was with my Jewish girlfriends – with them I was very, very close.

Q: As you were growing up, how did you get a Jewish education?

A: Well, there was a very good congregation. They had an excellent teacher there. He was like the Rabbi and the Cantor in the synagogue he did everything and he was the teacher of the Jewish public school. There was an excellent Jewish public school to which you had to go first two years before you could go to a higher school.

Q: Where you from a very observant home?

A: No, no. I mean my grandparents were very religious but the household of my aunt was just modern. I mean I feel as a good Jew but I’m not too orthodox. Because as I say religion is an own business of each person. As long as you feel as a Jew – it’s all right.

Q: This period when you were working with the ration cards and then as a translator was after the First World War. Do you remember the inflation at this time?

A: Oh yes, very well, I remember because I earned some money there at the city hall and I always loved to buy books so my aunt said one day “I wouldn’t out the money all into books. Keep it in case you marry and then you are pleased if you have some money free with which you can buy something you don’t get as a present – a piano or something like this.” You know at that time, all young children learned music, piano and in our house my mother had her piano from her won home and my aunt so there were tow pianos and of course, I had to learn piano. My mother was an excellent player while I was not gifted at all. It happens this way sometimes.

Q: How did the inflation affect you?

A: Well, when I really married, the money was just a stamp worth nothing.

Q: When you married, this was in Frankfurt.

A: My wedding was in Frankfurt.

Q: And did you continue to live there?

A: Yes, yes. My husband was – they opened a branch there of his parents business. They were wholesale grain merchants. They had flour and in Frankfurt was the business for the foreign grain what they imported maize from South Africa and South America.

Q: And was his business affected badly by the inflation.

A: Well, during the inflation, I didn’t marry yet. It was directly after the inflation. Well, it was a very solid firm and they must have felt it, I think because we became engaged directly after that so I don’t know too much. I only know that my mother-in-law always said that one good idea she had during the time she told the boys go and buy now furniture in case you are getting married one day, it’s standing there. But she said I forgot to buy for each of my five children a house. She said the money was there plentiful and I made the big mistake I forgot this, I never thought of it. So they felt it and didn’t feel it too much.

Q: After this period, how would you describe the morale in Frankfurt?

A: Well, people always spoke about the inflation. I mean, everybody lost money and so on but altogether Frankfurt was a wonderful place to live there. It was a very cultured place you know and there were Jewish people who were in high positions and they did a lot for the city and so on so I mean the life there was really a good life and as I always say if Hitler wouldn’t have come, it was good enough for us to live there. That was always my word.

Q: Did you and your husband participate in the cultural life in F?

A: Well, we enjoyed everything. We went to lectures and so on and to the theater and to the opera. Yes, my husband liked to sit therein the evening and read again and again parts from Schiller or Goethe or so. He was very interested in all that.

Q: You mentioned that you went to a business school. Did you help in the business at all?

A: No. No. I couldn’t. The business was large without me and there were four partners, he and his father and – his father and his uncles founded the firm and later on, the uncle died and his sons came into the firm when they grew up and so my husband was with his father and the two cousins so that wouldn’t have been good if a woman would come into the business.

Q: That’s really what I wanted to ask. Was it possible for a woman of your position to help?

A: No. No. I only could help now and then my husband with my English. I mean when there was a difficulty with some merchandise so he came home and brought me papers along and said could you read it and translate it and that I did.

Q: In the early 1930s, were people really fearful of a communist threat?

A: Well, people spoke about it very much and I knew that the Communists, they must not be all right with what they are doing but I personally never felt anything in Frankfurt.

Q: Did the business people or people in general have confidence in the Weimar government?

A: Well, they had to have confidence, you see, what could they do otherwise. As it was, they had to take it – even when the name Hitler came up. Now and then, I heard a word about it but then they always said something is going on, something is going on but it was always so in the distance more until the reality came.

Q: When did you think Hitler was a serious threat?

A: Already in 1930 when he moved to the Rhineland, when he took over the Rhineland then we knew how it’s getting bad.

Q: He only marched into the Rhineland in 1936, right?

A: Yes, but I think it was earlier. I remember we were at the wedding of my niece in Mannheim and suddenly somebody said Just news came, Hitler went to the Rhineland and everybody was shocked.

Q: Why were they shocked?

A: Because the Rhineland, after the French occupation, when they left, should be free –that was in the contract.

Q: Treaty of Versailles.

A: Yes, yes, and suddenly Hitler went there and then suddenly we felt that he was against us Jews.

Q: Why did you make that connection?

A: Because that shocked everybody when we heard that he went into the Rhineland and then slowly, slowly we heard that he was not good for Jews.

Q: Did the people of the Rhineland ever feel themselves French or non-German?

A: No, nothing. They were absolute German people. I mean the French occupation – Napoleon was there many years before maybe 100 years. Only a few names were still there in French.

Q: Were the people of the Rhineland happy to be reunited with Germany?

A: Nobody I know was happy about it because at that time, people liked to live quietly doing their business and enjoying their life and so on and suddenly somebody came and wanted to change everything and that was rather peculiar for the people, very peculiar it was when it started at the beginning.

Q: I was after whether they were happy about being part of Germany again?

A: Well, he didn’t separate the Rhineland from Germany – I think it wasn’t allowed to have soldiers there and that’s want he did.

Q: Yes, he remilitarized the Rhineland.

Q: When did you begin to notice a difference in the Gentile attitude toward the Jews in Frankfurt.

A: Well, when Hitler came to power after 1933. You see he made it so openly directly that famous 1st of April on a Saturday – that was a horrible day for all of us. I never forget how trembling I sat at home and I said in the afternoon to my husband “Let’s go to England”. I once was there and let’s go so far away that we don’t have anything to do with that. So my husband said “How can I?” There are the two businesses and how can I. So my husband, until 1936, he was not at all thinking of leaving the country, you see and one day a steamer came with maize from South America and as a Jewish firm we had to get special permission from Berlin from the Reichsgetreidestelle and as a Jewish firm they didn’t get it so my husband had to travel to Rotterdam and try to sell it at any price there you see, Rotterdam was full of filled boats with maize and all kinds of things so you can imagine, they didn’t just wait for this load of maize. And there he met business friends formerly from Frankfurt and they said to him, “Mr. Speyer, what are you thinking, why are you still in Frankfurt? Don’t you know what’s going on?” Then he was ripe. He came back and the same evening he said to me “write to your mother, I know she has the cousin in London who is a good lawyer and he is an Englishman, the son of the uncle who was knighted by Queen Victoria and if we could go over and talk to him about leaving the country and where to go to” So, a wonderful letter came back from this relative of my mother and he said he is fully prepared to receive us but it would be good to come over and not by writing. So my husband and I decided to go over to London and I never forget it, we hurriedly traveled between Rosh Haashonah and Yom Kippur and this relative, he really open your eyes. He said you don’t know in Germany what’s going on. You only read in the papers what Hitler allows you to know but we here, we see further. He’s not only giving you trouble in your business or takes you business away or you passport or your money, he will take your life. I advise you as soon as you go back, call all the family members in Frankfurt, the relatives, tell them what I’m telling you here, that I warn them all and go and see that you are being prepared to leave Germany as quickly as possible. And that was October, 1936 and we left Germany in February, 1937.

Q: Were you surprised at all when you were speaking to this cousin that you were nt seeing the same thing in Germany?

A: Yes, of course we were surprised.

Q: Why do you think the Jews in Germany were not seeing it?

A: Well, we knew something was going on but nobody was really there who opened your eyes further. In fact, like Elsie’s mother, she always said “Ach, that means nothing. After the storm, the sun comes out again” And she didn’t want to know anything about leaving the country even when we came from London and we told Elsie’s parents about it, then her father who had been in America when he was young to study the business here, for two years, he said directly I like to go back to America but her mother said, “Ach, that won’t last long” and unfortunately many, many Jewish people were always saying it won’t last long but we were warned and this relative tried to be helpful as much as he could.

Q: Were there many signs in Frankfurt at the time like Juden Unerwuenscht?

A: Oh yes, when we were in the evening in the bed we heard them singing in the street, they were marching – wenn das juden blut vom messer spritzt. I tell you I put my bed cover over my head. I never forget this feeling – it was horrible, horrible. And if our neighbor, we lived in the Freihervonsteinstrasse where the liberal temple was and nearly at the corner of the next street, that was the Bochenheimerlandstrasse, and there they had taken already several houses over and in front they stood as guards and I had to pass there every day when I had to buy something in the city so you can imagine my feeling when I had to pass there going to the city and coming g back. I always turned my head to the other side not to look at them, it was horrible.

Q: Did you know anybody who was a member of the Party or the Hitler Jugend?

A: No, no, than God not. Thanks God I say not. But my husband encountered when he was on business to one of the smaller cities, he always came home and said some people are so scared of the Christian people – they are terribly scared. And they always said well, Mr. Speyer, you are right to leave the country, I wish we would leave the country too. We are afraid to speak often in front of our children. We don’t know who they might say something to. . . . . (tape ran out).

And really opened our eyes and he said when we left, he has a friend he is with the British embassy working in Berlin and he will write about us and give our address to him

And in case something happens, he should let him know directly in London, and this friend will bring us to the frontier and he will receive us at the frontier. But luckily nothing personal happened – only one morning the bell rang on our door – very early and the maid came in and said there’s a gentleman outside, I don’t understand what he says. The cousin had sent his secretary to all the relatives in Frankfurt, in case they wanted to have help with getting some money out or something and I think that was very nice of him.

Q: I was going to ask you, at this time was it already in effect that you could only take 10 RM?

A: When my husband and I went to London, he as a businessman could officially take 50 RM with him and for me 10 RM and you can imagine with 50 RM if you want to be four days in London, be in a hotel, you can’t get very far. So you know what I did? I asked my husband beforehand. I said do you know which suit you will wear for the trip? I just asked like this. He said probably the gray one and we had in our bedroom behind the night table a little safe in which we always had English money and I took some money out – some paper money – I opened in that coat inside the lining and between the cotton I put the money. I didn’t say a word to my husband, not to make him nervous. He wore that suite and when we were on the boat, in the Channel between Holland and London, I whispered to my husband in his ear. Do you still have pain in your shoulder? He looked at me disturbed. He said, “my shoulder? I haven’t any pain, I haven’t got rheumatism” then I told him what he has in his shoulder. He said good God, lucky you didn’t tell me. It was very good we had this money. We didn’t use it all and we left some already with a cousin in London.

Q: Now this was on a trip to London.

A: Yes, it was an information trip.

Q: What happened when you came back to Germany?

A: Well, directly we gave up our apartment as quickly as we could. Yes I must interrupt. One day, Elsie had an aunt and she associated with another lady in a little private business in the apartment of the other lady. They were selling men’s and ladies underwear. So my husband needed something and I went there one afternoon to buy something and I had to wait a few moments because some other customers were there and on a little table were magazines lying and I took the top one to look in and it was from the German Hilfsverein and I read in there, from all corners of the world and I was excited and I said to the lady, could I borrow this magazine? We don’t know anything about it, I would like that my husband sees it. She said it doesn’t belong to me. I said I promise you honestly that tomorrow morning 8 o’clock you have it back in the house so she gave it with me and my husband took it to bed with us and he read and suddenly he said “there is a place we can go to – Uruguay in South America! I just read it has a wonderful climate – that would be also a good climate for your two mothers who are suffering with high blood pressure. That’s a wonderful place – I look up tomorrow morning directly the address of the Consul of Uruguay and I will go there and talk to him. So it happened my husband went to the Consul-Weilhauch was his name – my husband came back very very pleased. He said he was formerly working with the Jewish banker Speyer-Ellison. He is so Jewish friendly and he said here you can speak as you like – here you are an Uruguayan ground already with me – don’t be afraid to speak openly with me. And he showed my husband pictures from Montevideo and he said take them along to your wife and if you think you would like to go there, phone me up and I sent a Spanish letter directly to the Foreign Office in Montevideo – the whole immigration visa cost you 20 marks. After 6 weeks, you have it. And so we went to Montevideo – very easily not trouble at all. And this consul was wonderful, when we left, we asked him when we are settled and we want our mothers to come, he will help them too and he helped them wonderful. He even visited me later in Montevideo.

Q: You didn’t consider going to England?

A: I considered directly while I was in London because I knew London but the cousin said don’t do it. You better go overseas – you are young people still and it might – we don’t know what Hitler will do – he might bomb us or anything he said already. You better go overseas. My husband had a wonderful opportunity that time by an Italian business friend to come over there and join them but this cousin said no, don’t do it, don’t do it, I warn you. And he was right. Everything he told us, he was absolutely right. I often think about his words, what he said to us, how he warned us.

Q: Did you consider coming to America?

A: No, my husband never wanted to go to America. He always said, “I’m not running after the dollar. It’s not my country.” He wanted to go to South America because according to his former business and he hoped perhaps he could work again something like that but it didn’t work out like that. They didn’t wait for us, let’s put it that way. You know there were big firms in maize in Buenos Aires. My husband knew the firms and he went over but it wouldn’t work out for us but my husband had taken German – to be an agent for German goods – like he took the agency for Underwood typewriter and for the Mundloess little sewing machine and all these but very shortly Hitler decided that no Jews allowed in foreign countries to sell German goods so this had to be cancelled but lucky, my mother had money in England, a heritage of a late uncle and with that money we could help us in Montevideo. The cousin helped us to get the money over so that as he said your old mothers must not suffer.

Q: How did you feel on the day that you left Germany?

A: Pleased. Not sorry because the minute we left in the evening to the station and when we came with our luggage to the station, some boys were there and they said, “Oh, now they go to Israel. Good-bye, Good-bye. We don’t want you here.” Then I said to my husband it is high time for us – the highest moment is there. And so we were not sorry. It was only our idea – my husband had five sisters and a brother – how do we get them out too. Our mothers we would know because in reality we nearly packed them already before we left that they could follow us.

Q: What happened to your husband’s business?

A: Ell, they wanted to sell but there was nobody. None of their employees had the money so it was dissolved, absolutely dissolved.

Q: At that time, besides the money you had in England, were you able to take any money with you.

A: Not much, no. my husband was in that way very straight and he didn’t want to get into no trouble – no trouble at all. He said let them take what they want but I want to go out without fear. So we left Germany without fear.

Q: When you came to Montevideo, what were you first impressions?

A: Well, my husband said isn’t it the paradise we were waiting for beautiful city – that we knew already. The Consul showed us the photos and he spoke so much about it – only one mistake we made owing to the Consul – he said don’t take any furniture, it won’t keep over there. There are little worms or something, they come into the wood but it wasn’t like this. So we were the only ones who came without furniture so we wrote back to everyone who asked us for information, if it is not too much to pay for you, do take each nail and sell it here and you get the local money for it so we could advise them very well and that we did.

Q: How did you earn a living in Montevideo?

A: Well, we had the money from my mother, you see.

Q: How long were you there?

A: Thirteen years about. But you see, when we were on the steamer to Monevideo, I was so thankful and I said to my husband, we had a young nephew of my husband with us, a boy of sixteen and we took him directly to Monteideo. He wanted to become and engineer but he couldn’t go anymore to the Technicum in Darmstadt as a Jewish boy, so when we were in London we tried, if he could come to London but then we were told there by the director of the Wowern House, that was the Jewish welfare society, something like this and this cousin knew this gentlemen who he gave us a letter of introduction and he advised us, he said wherever you go to take that boy directly with you, put him to school, there will be some schooling somewhere and there was a grade school in Montevideo so we put him directly to school there. A boy of sixteen picks up the language like nothing, six months later when his mother came, he was speaking Spanish, he was already driving the school truck and he was established.

Q: Did you manage to get the other relatives out?

A: Well, our two mothers came in October. They followed us. We rented a house, at that time they didn’t have apartments over there – all houses and so we rented a house and we had no furniture and so I designed all my new furniture – very plain and very simple I wanted everything and we found some young Russian Jews who had a business in furniture and they made all the furniture for us and then when the war broke out, the Civil War in Spain, my husband said, it’s high time, the mothers must get out. We don’t know how the combination with the boats will be later. So we wrote to Consul Weirauch to help our mothers and he helped them wonderful. They had second class tickets and he got a first class cabin for them. Everything was fine and we went to the steamer with which they should come back and we tipped the stewardess and we told them two old ladies are coming and please have a good look for them and when you come back we are here again and greet you with something. The two mothers were alright and traveled with one of my husband’s sisters the mother of this boy we had with us. Those three came later on, another sister of my husband and her husband came but too late, they all waited too long although constantly we asked them give up, come over before it’s too late so unfortunately three of those young lovely sisters of my husband went to Auschwitz. I never can get over that because it wasn’t our fault. In fact the youngest sister was married in South of Germany, in Offenburg and her husband was the director of the savings back there and when we wrote to them to get ready to come over, my husband said you are speaking, Offenburg is near the French border, you are speaking a good French, try to learn some Spanish and you can work here as a bookkeeper, something like that. His answer was please don’t mention anything anymore about an emigration. And then they went to Auschwitz. First to France, to Gurs and then their letters came, help, help , help. We tried, we tried in vain. Too late. I never forget this becase I was so close to that young sister of my husband. I can’t get over it. I always imagine her. Good God, how she must have thought of us.

Q: There was no problem in Montevideo so far as getting visas to send to people in Germany?

A: No, that time it was very hard already. When we came, the first two years it was nothing but then it was a small country and too many came, you see and then the Foreign Office made a stop and then it because very very difficult. I mean only with money you could do something.

Q: Was there a large German Jewish community in Montevideo?

A: When we arrived there were only a few young German men, single men and my husband and I, we were the first young German Jewish couple to enter the country so everything fell on the shoulders of my husband. For instance, very shortly after we arrived, we arrived in March and in April he had the Yahrzeit of his father and he wanted and he wanted to say the Kaddish and we went to the HIAS because he met already the president of the HIAS and he asked him where could I say my kaddish. And he said I’m from Littown and I take you to my congregation or schul and my husband went with him that evening and then my husband came back and he said everything is so different to our German reptus (style) and I must see that I get ten young men together whenever somebody wants to say kaddish. So my husband spoke to the young people and they said well, Mr. Speyer, call us together on a Sunday morning and let’s talk about it. So , this my husband did and he came smiling home, “We Founded a little congregation! And then he was alert. He said I hope to have next Friday evening the first service already. There is a young man who can read the Torah and you have that little new sewing machine with you and you love sewing. Go and make him a Tallah. I thought Good God, how do I make a Tallah. I thought how did your Rabbi look and I made it with it with a little velvet collar and a velvet bust with the yoke here and the while sleeves. Everything worked out very well and so we started and I was fantastic. I never heard my husband speaking in public and he had written down a little speech which he wanted the first Friday evening. How excited I was! The tears were constantly running down. I always thought about our mothers because – I forgot to tell – when we were on the steamers, I said to me husband “listen, we came so easily out of here. When we are there, let us try to help many many others come over” and that was the moment with the congregation. Then we did everything to help the people who arrived. We founded a Kleiderkamer – I collected dresses and suits and underwear and all that. And my husband founded the welfare organization so the people who arrived that they could be counseled directly and so on and the first evening – I have to say this first – the first Friday evening – no the first Saturday morning a strange gentleman was at the service and after the service he came and introduced himself. He was a gentleman from Buenos Aires, one of the elder immigrants there since years who had already a big firm and al that and he introduced himself and he said that he heard that some Jews from Germany had the courage who hardly was there to found a congregation and as hid brother founded a congregation too, he was interested to meet the people and we had a good friend for years then in Buenos Aires and he said my brother had still a Torah in his house – I ask him because my husband said I don’t know what we can do, we don’t have a Torah for the holidays. For the first service my husband said from where do I get a Torah? So I bought my meat from a kosher butcher in the market there. I went to him – he was a Hungarian Jewish man. I spoke to him about it. He said, we Hungarians, we are so poor, we cannot help you but go to the Sepharadims, they are a rich congregation, they could help you. So I told my husband. My husband went there. My husband spoke a good French and he conversed with the Rabbi directly there who received him, Rabbi Dr. Algasi and he said wait a few moments, our board members will come afterwards for the service. So he introduced my husband and people said to him, we believe you. Can you bring us 300 pesos as a deposit and tomorrow morning you can have the Torah. My husband said in 15 minutes, I’m back form the bank. He took a taxi, he came back, he gave them the money. The next morning he had the Torah and they said you can keep it until the High Holidays. So my husband was very happy very proud and as I always say, my husband was not only the president, he was also the shammos of the congregation. He did everything. Fridays, he went there to put the tables and everything together and he bought a little, like a little wardrobe to put the Torah in. and then I said to my husband, I hope your two old mothers will travel very safely to this country. Let us give something to the Temple. So we ordered a curtain in red velvet and for the pulpit a nice cover and I was happy. Then, suddenly we got a telephone call from New York one evening. I went to the telephone, we were just sitting down for eating. New York, who’s New York. It was also a gentleman from Sao Paolo who wanted to meet my husband. He heard about it on his way to Buenos Aires. And he called us from New York and he said Mr. Speyer, I’m here with the Joint Distribution Committee and they would like you to go to a steamer. There are people arriving without proper papers and try to help them. Then my husband said he just had the heart on the right spot. He said “Tell them htat we need money here to help the people who are already here” and then one Sunday, two gentlemen arrived there and phones us up and they came from the JOINT to speak matters over with my husband and they said to my husband we would like you to be our trustee. And my husband said you honor me very much but I don’t want to be alone. I will from a committee. I don’t want to have the responsibility all by myself and so we found gentlemen and ladies who helped them. And so we founded a Children’s Home which still exists and a kitchen and my husband was just preparing the papers for founding a home for old aged people but this was already during several years and then my husband died of a heart attack just before the opening of the kitchen and everybody was so kind and nice to me. They called the kitchen Maurcio Speyer. And I’m still in touch with them all. Whoever comes from Montevideo rings me up. I meet the people and here I meet several people who were formerly there too. And I have everything in writing about the founding and all that because when it was the twentieth or fifteenth anniversary, they wrote to me send us something. So I sent them a resume and I have it lying there. I have photos of the children’s home and all that. Our name is very well know there.

Q: What was the size of the erman refugee community in Montevideo?

A: We started, as my husband said, like Hitler. Our old kampfer were fourteen and afterwards, we were about four thousand, after they came. First came Frankfurt, then came Breslau, then came Berlin. So by and by, you know the consuls sent them, sent them and that was the reason why suddenly it was stopped.

Q: When you say Frankfurt, then Breslau, you mean that’s where the people came from?

A: yes. The first immigration came from Frankfurt because four weeks later than we came a Dr. Leopold who still is living there with his family and so he was also a great help in the beginning. As a Dr. in fact it was like this, if someone missed the Sabbath service in the morning, Dr. Leopold quickly went to their home, “anybody ill, anybody ill” so close we were, we were like one family. And then came a marriage, after three or four months. People from Berlin wanted to marry and we had no rabbi. My husband had to make the official ceremony. It was wonderful and when I left, these people came and brought me the words he said. So you see, the beginning was very, very nice in Montevideo for us. We wanted to be helpful and the people appreciated it.

Q: Did your husband mind at all, after all he was active in business in Frankfurt, did he mind not being so active in Montevideo?

A: My husband was very active. He opened an office for this welfare organization and he had employees so he left every morning to work there and in the afternoon they had sprechstunden all the immigrants who wanted something could come and one day something strange happened. It’s so funny I must tell you. My husband came home and laughed and laughed and said you know what happened today – a goy came. I say directly hi is a goy. You know they heard about it and at that time so many were leaving Germany and going to South America and he went there too – to the Jewish welfare organization. My husband say directly who he was so my husband said to him, “Did you ever meet the Shma Yisroel. He said No, this gentleman he never met!

Q: What made you decide to leave Montevideo?

A: The death of my husband. I have no brothers and sisters and going on in all these institutions, although they were all wonderful – they took me directly into the Board and I was the President of the Children’s Home and so, I couldn’t take the loss of my husband, sitting with all his friends and not seeing my husband. So, suddenly I said to my mother, I couldn’t take it any longer. I have to leave here. I will go to America. We both know the language and Elsie and the family is there and we won’t be lost there. So of course my old mother who was nearly 85 ears old she said of course I’ll go with you wherever you want to go. But we had to wait five years before we could come here because during the war, not steamers were going to South America from New York. All of the steamers were going to Europe for the armies and when the first steamers came by the Moore-McCormick Line then a Christian German in Montevideo who always was helpful to us. He was introduced to us by one of the main Jewish gentlemen in Buenos Aires, my Mr. Hirsch who founded there everything, he introduced us to this Mr. Jungblud and he was so helpful. Owing to him, we always had free our coffee for the children’s home when we started the children home. He had connections with a firm and we got free all the blankets and all that and he traveled over to Buenos Aires to help me to get two tickets for my mother and me to go to New York.

Q: You mentioned that you were in Montevideo thirteen years, so you left in 1949.

A: We arrived in 1936 and I left for here, 1948. We arrived here in June, 1948, it was one of the hottest days in 1948. Since then I’m here, I’m in America.

Q: When you came here, did you move directly to Washington Heights?

A: No, first I stayed in a place, I had a rented room. My relatives here had rented for us an apartment because the people were away in summer and when they came back, we had to leave and I went to the HIAS, they knew me name and all that and they helped me to move into the hotel Marseilles. They said you can stay there as long as you like but I put directly and advertisement in the Aufbau and so quickly I found a nice room for my mother and myself here in Washington Heights and I stayed with this couple for eleven years. My mother died after one year already and the begged me don’t leave us, stay with us and I did. I’m still in contact with her – her husband died.

Q: What was your impression of New York when you first came?

A: What I expected, I saw. I knew it was New York of which you heard so much. I intended to work at an organization owing to all the work I did in South America and I had very good letters of introduction with me and but I couldn’t find anything. I was sent from one to the other one. You see, I went to the HIAS, I went to the Self-Help, I even went to the Quakers because we were partly also with the Quakers in Montevideo and they sent me back to the Jewish organizations because they worked with them here and they said if they want to they can take you. We know it from one gentleman, they gave me his address. I phones him up, I talked to him and I said no, they won’t help me very much he told me. And meanwhile, yes, my mother came from the same place as a child where the old Senator Wagner came from and I was advised to approach Senator Wagner that perhaps I could come to the organization for the refugees, something like that. And he was very very nice to me. As soon as I mentioned who my mother was, and that he went to school with one of her brothers and so on, so he tried everything in Washington to try to get me to the organization for displaced persons. They sent forms to fill in adn then they wrote to him, I still have the letters, Dear Senator Wagner, we are very sorry, we are not able to be of help to Mrs. Speyer. She just entered the country. Our policy is to take citizens. So of course, it was out of question. So this lady where I was staying she said Mrs. Speyer, you love sewing so much. Try something with sewing. So the next day I had my job and I stayed there for several years.

Q: What kind of job did you get?

A: Well, it was very interesting in one way. The proprietor imported from France angora wool and he had machines running there and workmen who knitted baby caps and baby hats and I belonged to one who made the little silk bows and al these ornaments, you know and I loved the job.

Q: How did you get the job?

A: By the paper.

Q: The Aufbau.

A: No, no. At that time there existed a special paper, I don’t know anymore the name, New York, it doesn’t exist since years anymore and that was the paper where all the immigrants more or less looked for it but before I went form on Jewish organization to the other one with my letters of introduction and the JOINT was very distressed about it because they also wanted to help me. They sent me to the not the, yes I was also at the Jewish Agency, but the Bonds of Israel and it wouldn’t work out.

Q: That’s too bad because you had a lot of experience.

A: Yes, but it wouldn’t work out. Nobody wanted me. So, I started out this way, in the factory and later, I went to B. Altman’s and I was there in the mail shopping office and I liked that very much although in the beginning they couldn’t read my German lettering and I had trouble with their letters, the big F and the big T, something like that, and I went to Elsie’s boys and I said show me how you learn to make the F and all that. But afterwards, everything worked out well, and I still go shopping to Altman’s because I love to be there and one of my England cousins, I brought there and he is still there in the Oriental carpet department. He has a very big job there. So it worked out in the end.

Q: Having worked in New York, how would you describe the difference between the American ways of working and the German?

A: Well, I didn’t work in Germany only during the war, more as a volunteer. I was treated very nicely here and at Altman’s, I was treated excellently.

Q: In looking back, what were the most difficult things of adjustment that you had to face?

A: If you have something in your head what you want to do and you don’t get it, you know that makes you a little depressed because you think what else can I do. If you don’t have a certain profession I mean if you have you own profession in some way, then you know what you are looking for and you might get it but if you come as a single person who never really had a firm profession and she wants to do something, then it’s rather hard. I tried everything, I went to so many places and talked and several times I went to the JOINT and we talked matters over and they always thought, because my English wasn’t so bad that I could manage to get to an office but in the beginning I was a little afraid to go to an office because I don’t like typewriting and I though that might be the first thing they might offer me but at Altman’s it was handwriting. I was very happy there. I got the job like nothing. I got it myself, you know, I just dropped in and asked for work and directly they said would you like to come tomorrow morning for a job – no I must tell you something – how I got to Altmans. I went this one morning to the Mizrachi. I had a letter of introduction and I went to a lady – I showed all the letters I had with me and so and she said she couldn’t help me very much and she told me to go to 16th st. – There’s an agency and I should go there – a Jewish agency. From there I went to the agency and when I came there – it was a very pleasant young girl, she said lady, I’m very sorry but we are only helping young people who came from Israel. So, I had to leave again. And there was a very very old out of style elevator so I waited for the man. It was an old Jewish man there and he was just washing the floor where he took me down and I don’t know how it came out of me, I was so disappointed. I said is it really not possible as a Jewish woman to find work here. So this old man said to me Don’t worry land, up there is somebody who watches you. I left there, I took the bus, I passed Altman’s Fifth Avenue. I said Ach, here you never were, get off and ask. I went there and so I came to Altman’s. isn’t it strange because when I came there, the gentleman – directly, I filled in a form and I was only troubled when they said about educated, college so I marked educated in Germany and I told him afterwards and he told me that doesn’t matter, I see who you are. Would you come tomorrow morning for a test. I said certainly. It was on a Saturday morning and there were other people too. It was like a school room there and we were seated and the lady gave us a booklet and a paper and then we had to add figures and to divide and all that and to compare very very difficult words – words I had never heard in English or read them. So that was difficult for me. So when she said stop, she came to pick up my paper. I excused me and I said lady, my schooling was not in this country. I’m a foreigner. This was too difficult for me. She said don’t worry we only want to see the intelligence. I didn’t know what to say. She said we all sit outside and wait. I thought I’m through, I’m through. I was called and the gentleman said to me Mrs. Speyer, you did so well, we would like you to work for us. Could you come Tuesday morning. I nearly dropped to the floor. That was the least I expected. So I came to Altman’s and I was so happy there- all the years I was there, I was happy. So that was the ending of my working time.

Q: Let me just ask you, why did you join the Hebrew Tabernacle.

A: More or les they were in the neighborhood where I lived before. I lived on 161st near the Broadway, the corner of Broadway and the Temple was – I just crossed the Broadway and there was the Temple. And besides we were a liberal congregation in Frankfurt and I loved the organ. I grew up in such a Temple in Neuwied and so it was natural but sometimes I’m not to happy there like now with the new book, because it’s so little in Hebrew. It’s too much in English, you se but I have nothing to say.

Q: You were there on Friday evening when they used the new book?

A: No, I’m a little afraid to go out in the evening. I was attacked in front of our house in summer and since then, I’m more then nervous in the evening although Elsie offers herself but mostly she’s invited afterwards and I don’t want to take her pleasant time away so I stay home but I went Saturday morning. And I looked though the book and everything and I was there when Rabbi Lehman spoke and everything.

Q: From what I know, I think the new book included Israel and the Holocaust?

A: Yes, but it’s too much in English. I mean if you re used to all these nice Hebrew songs and prayers because I learned much in Hebrew in translation as a child so I’m missing something. The songs, the melodies are mostly like everywhere – I was n the temple in London. Of course, we in Montevideo didn’t have an organ, we didn’t have the money for it.

Q: What kind of congregation was it in Montevideo?

A: My husband wanted to have it Orthodox, more or less, he said then everybody can go there – there is then no objection, you see. So this soup kitchen we had also kosher because we said everybody can eat there if he is religious or not religious it doesn’t matter. It is the best way then – then there is no difficulty.

Q: Was that the only German Jewish congregation in Montevideo?

A: Yes. And there is a Rabbi Dr. Winter who was there.

Q: Just a few more questions. How do you feel about the Widergutmachunn?

A: Well, I have to be thankful and satisfied. It’s something of which my husband and I never though any more. Otherwise, my husband probably would have taken some of the business books along I mean the accounts and so. Because when the Wiedergutmachung came, I had no proofs and then I had the great help of my husband’s late secretary in Germany. She really was lovely. She always wrote to us in Montevideo so that my husband said if I only had a business here, I would ask her to come. In fact when I was so bad – she was Protestant – when it was so bad with Hitler she asked on day, Mr. Speyer, couldn’t I go with you to your synagogue, the Church doesn’t give us anything anymore. Nothing. Imagine, so she thought. That was her thinking. She was a lovely person. She still writes to me during the year.

Q: Have you ever been back to Germany?

A: No, I don’t want to. No, no. although I would love to visit the graves we have there but no. I don’t want to see them. And I hear from relatives who go over there – they say you are glad when you are back at the station. I was in Switzerland at the German frontier and I said . . .once we went to the isle of – the one which belongs to the Count of Sweden, between Germany and Switzerland and we had to show our German passport and the moment they said “Ihre Passe” I grew pale when I heard this and my cousins from Burma were with me and they said “Ada, you must forget” I said “I never can forget” the whole day was spoiled for me owing to this word “Ihre Passe”, the way they spoke to us. No, not to Germany anymore. I have no connection there. The old maid of my mother and my aunt – she is in a home in Neuwied and I write to her and for Christmas I think of her and this secretary, that’s all.

Q: The maid of you aunt.

A: I always help her. I send her packages and she always was so against Hitler that my aunt was afraid they put her, they would arrest her one day. She warned her always. She always called him the devil.

Q: Looking back, you spent a part of your life in Germany, part in Montevideo, and part here, how . . .

A: I’m satisfied with everywhere we lived I’m satisfied. You see I have the feeling wherever fate puts you, you have to be. I’m not looking back. The moment we left Germany, my husband said let us make a big line underneath. We won’t talk about our former life anymore. We never said we had it good or this or that, never we compared as unfortunately so many of the others are doing – it has no use, it has no sense.

Q: Do you think you are art of the American mainstream or do you think you are more part of the German Jewish community here.

A: I think I have still too much about the former education in myself – you know, to join the young ones in their present ideas and life – it’s too hard for me. I hadn’t get it very often. I can’t get along with it. It’s natural, I mean you were a finished person, an adult, finished with education when you left there so to take it into yourself – the present time is too hard. I mean you go along but you can’t enjoy it. I always say to myself – what kind of citizens these young ones want to be later on if they have such silly ideas. How will they govern the country. How might it look in fifty years. Because we live in a very hard time. Either we have been born too later or too early – two wars,