R. WERTHEIMES

FW: When and where were you born?

RW: June 6, 1931, Monheim, Germany.

FW: You were born in Monheim? I have relatives there. Can you tell me a little about your education in Germany?

RW: Not very much. Since I was Jewish I couldn’t go to school. I had about two or three years of schooling.

FW: In Monheim?

RW: Yes.

FW: Were your parents in business in Monheim?

RW: My father died when I was a year old and my mother had, I don’t know if you would call it a business, she had her own like a little antique store.

FW: In Monheim. You mentioned that you only had two or three years of schooling. You started, what, in 1936?

RW: When I was seven.

FW: When you were seven, that means 1938, right?

RW: Til 1940, two or three years, right? Because then I was shipped to Guss (?).

FW: So in other words, in those two years from 1938 to 1940, you were in a Jewish school.

RW: Seven. Only Jewish school.

FW: Do you have any recollections of those early years, I know you were very young, in Germany? Before you were sent to Guss?

RW: It was bad.

FW: What do you remember as...

RW: What I remember is that the Jews could not go shopping when other people went shopping. You had to go shopping between three and four in the afternoon and you used to see big signs: Juden Forboden. All over the place. And the kids used to beat you up when you walked the streets.

FW: Did you have such an experience?

RW: Yes, plenty.

FW: Tell me, as a seven year old child, how does one feel when you see signs: Juden Forboden or Juden Onerinsche and you know that you are Jewish? How do you react?

RW: Are you talking about now?

FW: No, how did you feel then?

RW: I don’t know; I guess you get used to it. I mean, you have no choice, I mean, you know.

FW: Do you ever remember asking your mother about it?

RW: I can’t recollect.

FW: When you went to that Jewish school, did other kids, I know there were only Jews in that Jewish school, but did other kids accost you on the way or beat you up?

RW: No, that was going to my grandmother.

FW: Where did your grandmother live?

RW: Also in Monheim and I remember, these are a few things that I remember, we used to have to go a longer way, you know, in order to go straight and make a detour otherwise the kids would beat me up. My brother used to take me there.

FW: Was your brother older?

RW: Yeah.

RW: Did you ever go shopping with your mother between three and four?

RW: No, I just remember these things.

FW: Do you remember having...

RW: Oh, I remember there was a huge beautiful ice cream parlor and it had a big sign: Juden Forboden, but I still went in and got an ice cream cone.

FW: Do you remember when you went in, do you remember what your thoughts were? Were you afraid?

RW: Not when I was that small. It’s really hard to remember these things.

FW: When you say you were shipped to Goorse (Guess, Guss), when was this?

RW: Hal ha-moed Succos, 1940, October.

FW: Up to that time, again, you were very little, do you remember your mother making any plans or trying to make any plans?

RW: We tried to come here but we couldn’t get in on account of the quota.

FW: The number was too high you mean?

RW: Because we were on the Polish quota; my mother was Polish.

FW: Do you remember when you were sent to Goorse? Was it during the day or in the evening?

RW: During the day they came, the Nazis and you had an hour to pack and they watched you very very carefully. You know what you took; everything was left in Germany.

FW: What did you take on that day...

RW: My mother packed, I guess, you know, I was nine years old.

FW: Do you remember watching your mother on that day? Do you remember your impressions of your mother?

RW: No. That far back I don’t. But the idea is we had an inkling that something was happening the next day that someone had mentioned but we didn’t believe it and they did come and rounded us all up from the southern part of Germany. If you interviewed others you’d know.

FW: This was quite a a bit after Kristalnacht, right?

RW: Yes.

FW: Do you remember Kristalnacht?

RW: Oh and how.

FW: What happened?

RW: At six o’clock in the morning they destroyed the most beautiful synagogue in Monheim, the Haupt synagogue. We lied in a jewish building where the school was there was an orthodox synagogue. And the Haupt synagogue was a little more orthodox than the tabernacle and they destroyed that. And then they came into this place and they destroyed that and they came banging on the doors, you know, and I was scared like anything. And then somehow, I don’t know, there was no telephone, we got in touch with my grandparents and they rounded up all the men but my grandfather ran to the cemetery and he hid behind my father’s grave. And I have an aunt who was still there and my grandmother and we went away then that day, from our, we had one big room where we slept in this Jewish woody gemeindervier (??). So you know, anyway, we somewhere afterwards and that’s all I remember.

FW: Well, you remember the Nazis coming to this building though?

RW: Oh yes, I didn’t see them but I heard them, you know, knocking like banging on the door. it was very frightening.

FW: Did you see the Haupt synagogue after Kristalnacht?

RW: RW: I dod not remember but it was not put to use any more.

FW: What did you think, as a seven year old, was going on at the time?

RW: That far back, I don’t know. you know the children today are raised differently than in those days and it’s an entirely different situation.

FW: What happened to you when they came that morning in 1940? To take you to Goorse?

RW: We didn’t know where we were going. We were rounded up in this big gymnasium someplace and we stayed overnight. And the next day we were put on a train; we didn’t know where we were going.

FW: Was there any violence attached to that day?

RW: No, not that I recall.

FW: When you arrived in Goorse, what did you find there?

RW: Barracks and barbed wire and that’s it.

FW: How many people were that were sent from Monheim?

RW: The whole Jewish congregation, population, I mean.

FW: How long did you stay in Goorse?

RW: One year.

FW: What were the living conditions like?

RW: Terrible. Absolutely terrible, with rats, with mice, with lice, no food, and when it rained it was very muddy and the mud used to go up to your knees. You couldn’t go out of the barracks.

FW: When you say barracks, were the men and the women separated?

RW: Wooden barracks. The men and women were in, they called them you, ilo, like sections. They had them listed alphabetically and each barrack had a number.

FW: And were you with your mother?

RW: Yes and my brother because he was just thirteen. I think you had to be older in order to go to the... Since my father died we had nobody. Oh, my grandfather came there too but he died shortly after he got there.

FW: What were the days like, in terms of, like, did you have a routine?

RW: Not exactly. You had to clean the turnips and I think every barrack had a day when it was supposed to do that, like kp in the army and stuff like that. But other than that, I don’t recall any hard labor or anything.

FW: You were nine years old, did you get any lessons at all or...

RW: Oh yes, after a while there was this organization that used to give us schooling, which took my brother and I and many others out of the concentration camp which was called OSE, which stands for Oeuvres de secours d’enfants. You have heard of it?

FW: No, but I understand. When you say an organization, was that organized from within the Jewish population, or...

RW: No, this existed for years and years.

FW: You mentioned this OSE in Goorse, how was this organized?

RW: I forgot.

FW: No, I mean, who came to take you for lessons? Did they take you out of Goorse?

RW: No, within the area there. it was a tremendous big place and we even got food. I tasted my first olives there - uch.

FW: But you mentioned these were people from Switzerland?

RW: Yes, I vaguely remember getting French lessons or something. I don’t really remember.

FW: Was the food better for you?

RW: Just once they used to give a little milk and a little something, I don’t remember exactly, but we were still hungry.

FW: What did the food in Goorse consist of?

RW: Plain boiled water with a few potatoes swimming and a ration of bread, very little and in the soup either boiled turnips or boiled carrots and that was it.

FW: That was for one meal?

RW: Well, that was...

FW: It for the day?

RW: Yeah. Well for one meal. I think you had the same thing at night. I forgot already. It was nothing better unless we used to get packages sent from the States, from relatives, then you would have it luckily, if the mice wouldn’t eat it.

FW: You said before there were mice and rats, how did you try, or how did the people within the barracks try...

RW: I forgot, I forgot. I remember we used to have these beams, you know, and we used to hang the bread up in bags or something so the rats wouldn’t get at it ut some got. You didn’t ask how we were sleeping.

FW: I was going to ask how you were sleeping.

RW: On straw.

FW: On straw beds?

RW: Straw, no beds, straw period, on the floor.

FW: How did you prevent people from taking away your amount of straw?

RW: I don’t remember.

FW: So that wasn’t a problem.

RW: No, well there wasn’t that much fighting going on. This camp was not so bad; that was supervised by the French, gendarmes, you know, and it was not the real Nazi camp but for a nine year old it was bad enough.

FW: What were the bathroom facilities like?

RW: Outhouses, far away from, awful.

FW: Did you go by yourself?

RW: I forget. In the day, I guess, at night I don’t know, I forgot, I really forgot.

FW: For a nine year old, what did you think of life at that time?

RW: That’s difficult to remember because I went through a lot, after, still...

FW: You mentioned that you were in Goorse for over a year, right?

RW: No...

FW: A year. Now by that time the Nazis had invaded France?

RW: No...

FW: Not yet?

RW: Not where I was, not yet.

FW: What happened to you at the end of the year?

RW: Well, I went to a home from the OSE in central France and there the Nazis came and rounded up some of the children and there were a few other homes around there in the vicinity and every home was closed up. Now some went to Switzerland, some went to families, and they closed them all up, the homes.

FW: When you were taken from Goorse to these homes,

RW: It was with a children’s transport. Your mother, the parents were willing to send the children there.

FW: To these homes in the other parts of France.

RW: No, just to these homes.

FW: Yeah, in France. When your mother told you about this,

RW: Well, I was very homesick for her a t first, I remember I used to dry day and night.

FW: How did your mother prepare you? Do you remember?

RW: I remember what she said to me. “I’ll see you when you are a young lady.” And this never happened.

FW: Did you go with your brother?

RW: No, he came later.

FW: So, the day you went, you went by yourself.

RW: With other children who were in the same boat as me.

FW: That must have been a very difficult thing.

RW: And the the first thing they did there, which I won’t forget, is the minute you got to the home, off came your clothes, off came everything and you were put in the shower and you were de-liced and whatnot and you were getting clothes and of course right away the others knew you were a newcomer.

FW: You mean the others in the home?

RW: Yes.

FW: How did that...

RW: React? It wa strange... it was quite strange, as far as I recall.

FW: Did they make you feel welcome? the others?

RW: I don’t know.

FW: How were you treated in the home?

RW: It was run by Jews.

FW: Oh it was run by Jews.

RW: For instance the director of the home was not Jewish but the rest, they were like counselors, you know, young, and they were all Jewish.

FW: Do you remember this as a pleasant time?

RW: It wasn’t bad. We still get together here now with people that were in the homes in Europe in the olden days.

FW: Were you ever able to stay in contact with your mother?

RW: Until the Nazis came and deported her.

FW: When was that?

RW: Oh, 1942, or before that. I really don’t remember. Somewhere around that time.

FW: 1942. So from about 1941 until 1942 you were able to stay in contact. How were you able to overcome the homesickness?

RW: I don’t remember having to overcome it because it’s a way of life and you had to do the best you could in order to live. The way with the others.

FW: What helped you the most to adjust to this...

RW: I don’t remember. Well it was a normal life, like you went to school with other children and I also had a problem because of the language and we were put together, the whole group of us and we learned.

FW: When you say put together, you mean all...

RW: Put together with the kids I came with.

FW: Who were German speaking.

RW: They all were German-speaking there, more or less. We were all Jewish there. Kids in the same boat as I was and some were lucky, they came sooner to this country.

FW: How long were you in this home?

RW: A year. I really don’t recall exactly how long.

FW: What happened to you when the Nazis came? You mentioned that all these...

RW: The Nazis came and we stayed in groups. At night we slept out in the woods and one by one they put us away. I then went to a Jewish family and I didn’t stay very long.

FW: When you say when the Nazis came you slept out in the woods, you mean...

RW: When they started and they came to round up some of the older children, not too many because then through this OSE they started to close up the different homes they had there, so as I said, if we knew that this particular night or day they were looking...

FW: How did you know that?

RW: We were told. So in groups we used to go out and sleep in the woods.

FW: There you went with a counselor from this...

RW: I forgot. I don’t think so. I mean, there weren’t so many. There were some like my brother I remember we went once with a few of his friends. In this home we were divided up on groups by age.

FW: And so you went. But you were told to disappear for the night.

RW: Right.

FW: And you mention that slowly you were put with families, is that right?

RW: Right. This was all done through the OSE. After that a Jewish family took me and it was very good but then it was no good because she was Jewish and I was Jewish and the Nazis were there. So when I was put with a gentile family and it wasn’t that nice. They were very nice to me but I didn’t have much to eat and I went to school and I had already a false name. Just my first. Ruth was not a French name so my name was Renee and I pretended I wasn’t Jewish and all the Jewish children did not go to school on Shabbos and I knew exactly why but I never became friends with them because I didn’t want them to know I was Jewish.

FW: What was it like living in other people’s houses?

RW: Horrible. Just horrible. At the time. First of all with the Jewish family it was very nice. She was a widow and she had a son and he wasn’t bad but I made some nice friends, Jewish kids, and it was very pleasant. And don’t forget, you know you’re eleven, you’re young, and it’s in a strange country.

FW: Were you able to make yourself understood?

RW: Oh yes. Then I spoke French already.

FW: Did you know French already in the time in Goorse?

RW: No, in the home, in the school.

FW: And when you were transferred to this gentile family, you mentioned that you didn’t get enough to eat. Was this because...

RW: They never asked me if I got enough to eat.

FW: Even with the Jewish family?

RW: There I got enough, but in the home it was routine like, you know, what you also got turnips. And I will not buy turnips and bring them in the house.

FW: What was your routine like in the home?

RW: Well you used to, like you used to plant things in the garden, you know, and do kp and homework. And we used to go to school in the town, but it was very pleasant.

FW: Was there any problem with going to school in the town?

RW: No.

FW: The other kids knew you were Jewish?

RW: Oh yes. In those days there was no problem. As far as I recall there was none.

FW: But the problem came when the Nazis invaded France but the homes were closed.

RW: Yes.

FW: When you were this gentile family, did you go...

RW: Nobody knew I was Jewish except the family, but I did go to the school. And that’s where I knew the Jewish children didn’t go to school on the Sabbath and I didn’t become friends with them.

FW: Where there ever any incidents with the Jewish children as far as the non-Jewish...

RW: Not Jewish children but the police came to school, I will never forget this. They came to school and it was an all-girls school and I sit in the classroom and my name was...

...

FW: You mentioned that this was about 1942 when you stopped hearing from your mother. Did you realize why you stopped hearing from her?

RW: I don’t recall really. I forgot already, it’s so long.

FW: You were in this gentile home in France. How long did you stay there? I mean, a year or...

RW: Maybe less than a year, I really don’t recall anymore.

FW: You mentioned that this representative from OSE moved you after you spilled the beans to the police.

RW: To a convent.

FW: To a convent. Did you realize at the time that they moved you to the convent?

RW: To the convent? I was just horrified to go to a convent.

FW: What did they tell you when they told you you were going to...

RW: They just told me, “you have to go to a convent because you spilled here” or something to the effect and I was told, “Don’t tell anyone that you are Jewish. My whole name was changed altogether there. I could choose the name I wanted and I chose the name from the people I stayed with, the last family.

FW: Did they give you papers with your new name?

RW: Not to me not that I recall, but this was my name.

FW: What was your life like in the convent?

RW: Strange, very strange. Well when I came it was very nice because it was during the summer, I recall, and they had a colony there and I had my private room and it was very pleasant but once the summer colony left life was very very strict because it was a small convent with two nuns and lay teachers. And then you had to sleep in the dormitory. There were very very strict rules. You couldn’t talk and you couldn’t do this and also there was a problem with no food; you were always hungry.

FW: Did you have to work in this convent?

RW: No, go to school.

FW: When you said you had a private room at this point you were eleven, twelve years old. (twelve) I don’t know if a twelve year old girl wants a private room. Did you want to be alone, or...

RW: Well, this is what I recall because it was very strange for me to go into a convent. I was never in a church before. You know, when you’re among Jews, all the time, a church is a sin to go into. I was frightened, but I went to church and I prayed better than some of the catholics.

FW: You attended the services?

RW: You had to. Well the thing is this, when school started, there were more Jewish children that came.

FW: Were you able to find out, amongst the others who was Jewish and who wasn’t?

RW: Yes, we knew right away when somebody would come if they were Jewish or not. But the others, nobody knew if we were Jewish.

FW: But how did you find out...

RW: I don’t remember. There weren’t that many but I think we were told by the representative who used to come. And by the way, she was not Jewish and she worked in the underground and she got killed by the Nazis we found out.

FW: Were the nuns good to you?

RW: Yeah, they were, they weren’t bad. There were only two.

FW: When you say life was very strict, can you give any examples of...

RW: There was one Jewish girl who loved to look at boys and she got caught and she got a lecture, strictness. A girl of 14... And of course you prayed the minute you got up til you went to bed. And in school, after school, during recess, before the meal, after the meal. Food also was scarce and we had nothing to eat. And we had a cook who was Jewish but she converted. She was a good cook but she couldn’t do better for us, even though she knew we were all Jewish because, after all, you were rationed too.

FW: Did you realize at the time exactly how serious things were?

RW: No, you were turned off from the world more or less, as far as I recall.

FW: How long did you stay in this convent?

RW: A year.

FW: Again a year. Where did you go from this convent?

RW: After the liberation,...

FW: You stayed til the end of the war?

RW: No, the liberation of, I would say, not the end of the war but they knew they were losing. The OSE opened all sorts of homes, these all the homes in the book here, for all the kids that were in Switzerland or whatever. And this is where I started to go back, to these homes, til I came here.

FW: When you say you started to go back, were you free to go wherever you wanted to, or how did this work?

RW: No, through the OSE. They came to get you. After all, I was all of thirteen. So where can you go with no money, no nothing, nobody to turn to; someone looked after you.

FW: During this time, basically you grew up through this period, I mean, you left home, you were a little girl. How did you manage, your father had died before, you didn’t have your mother with you either.

RW: I guess I’m a person, in general, I guess now I realize it more, that gets used to things fast when you have to.

FW: What do you think was the greatest help to you in those years of moving around and having to adjust to all these circumstances?

RW: I don’t know, I really don’t know. I guess life went on and you took it day by day or whatever.

FW: What kept you going? your morale?

RW: I guess so. I don’t know. Don’t forget, you don’t think in these terms as a kid; you’re happy. You were brought up differently in Europe in those days than you are now. My son would think differently at the age of 14 or 15 than I did at the time.

FW: No, I meant...

RW: I don’t know, or don’t recall any more. I figured I’m happy with the others and I didn’t look ahead. But I figured also that maybe someday, since I had relatives here, that maybe I’d go to America. And furthermore, from the time I was hidden with the gentile people, I did not know if my brother was living or not and the same here. I mean the same for him.

FW: Do you ever remember feeling that you’ll never get out of this?

RW: I don’t remember.

FW: When the liberation came and the OSE took you to these homes...

RW: It felt good because you were among Jews and you had a Jewish life. You didn’t have to be afraid that the Nazis would come. Oh, by the way, in the convent we had to evacuate one ...

---

After the liberation he was in a home and I was in a home. But where I was, I think I was one of the oldest and he was older than me in age and they didn’t take people of that age so I went to a home where I was one of the youngest and his age group was more of those.

FW: And then you were together?

RW: And then we were together.

FW: Did you, was it a hard thing, each time you were changed, several times.

RW: No, because it was always Jewish homes and always Jewish kids and a Jewish atmosphere.

FW: So it didn’t bother you when they gave you news that...

RW: No, because we were all in the same boat. We all had no parents and it was like camp living, when you go to summer camp.

FW: How did you know that your mother wasn’t living.

RW: Well after the war I guess when you found out about the concentration camps and everything, we... some kids were very fortunate. Their parents came back. And somehow, I guess through the Joint Distribution or the Hyas or the UJA, they found out, but with us I don’t think. But we also found out that many people died and we didn’t hear anything so we figured that my mother died.

FW: You were never given final information as to...

RW: I don’t think so because you can’t recollect who died. See, my brother came out of Goorse much later than me and after a while the Nazis came and closed these camps and I guess everybody was shipped to Auschwitz or whatever.

FW: When you found out that your brother was living...

RW: I was very happy.

FW: Do you remember the day that you first saw him again?

RW: No, I don’t remember exactly. The only thing I remember when I saw him I used to get these sties (?) in the eyes. I greeted him with the bones of goats. (? - side 2, about 100)

FW: Was it hard...you had both been apart for a number of years and you had both grown up. Was it hard to readjust to each other.

RW: No, I only went to visit him in that home but later we were together. No, we were very close then, very very close until we came here.

FW: Who made the arrangements for you to come here?

RW: Well, I guess through the organization and the relatives I have here.

FW: Had they asked you if that’s what you wanted to do?

RW: I don’t know. Maybe my brother, not me.

FW: But you and your brother didn’t plan together as far as you want to come to the States?

RW: I don’t remember.

FW: When you finally did get the visa to come to the United States, you came together?

RW: Yes, we came on a children’s transport.

FW: Where did you leave from?

RW: Marseilles.

FW: Who was on the receiving end, I mean, who helped you when you first came here?

RW: Here? My relatives.

FW: So they had been contacted.

RW: Oh yes, they knew I was in touch with the relatives right after the liberation and I used to write to them and they used to send us packages.

FW: When you arrived here with this children's transport...

RW: There was a strike.

FW: You mean a ship strike?

RW: A pier strike.

FW: A pier strike. Where did you first live?

RW: I lived with relatives in Queens.

FW: Were these the same relatives... How close were the relatives, an uncle or aunt?

RW: Cousins.

---

...forget a language you learn as a child so I remembered the German but my brother had to interpret for me. But then after a while I got used to the German and slowly I learned English.

FW: When you were in school in the beginning, do you remember any embarrassments or anything like that about not being able to speak the language or mistakes that you made.

RW: Oh, I made plenty of mistakes but then I met right away a very lovely Jewish girl a little while after and she spoke German and I was put in French classes so I could... And the most embarrassing thing was a fire drill. I didn’t know what that was.

FW: What happened to you?

RW: Well, everybody walked around the block and I started to say in my broked English what is this and they all went like this. So when I came home at night I asked my relatives and they told me, it’s a fire drill in case of a fire. You don’t have these things in France. We had air raids. And the other most frightening thing was when I came to this country, when you hear the siren at noon. I thought it was an air raid.

FW: It reminded you?

RW: Yes, it reminded me because I went through plenty of air raids.

FW: When those air raid sirens rang, in Europe, what did you do?

RW: You usually had a cellar where you can go to.

FW: This was in the convent as well as in...?

RW: When the Nazis came and a lot of it I recall from home in Germany because when the war broke out we had a lot of air raids.

FW: When you say you were first living with relatives, this was in Queens? Was it easy living with relatives?

RW: Well, I don’t remember exactly. They were very nice. But she had lovely friends, this cousin of mine and I met them all and with some I became very friendly. But again, it’s a big adjustment in a strange country, you know.

FW: Were you ever made to feel like a refugee?

RW: In this country, and how.

FW: In what ways.

RW: The accent, at the beginning and if you didn’t know your way around they always used to say go back where you came from.

FW: Who, the children?

RW: No, not the children, the public in general. If you ask something or didn’t like it.

FW: You mentioned that you didn’t finish school, that you had to go to work.

RW: Well I went to beautician school instead.

FW: Why did you decide to do that instead of finishing...

RW: Well my financial problem and they all thought it would be better because I was 15 when I came and it would take a long time.

FW: To finish high school you mean?

RW: Yes, because of the language barrier and it would have taken a long time and they can’t support me and so on and so forth.

FW: Did you want to go to b beautician school?

RW: At the time yes, if I had to do it over again, no.

FW: Once you went to beautician school, you still lived with these relatives?

RW: No, the minute they heard that I would have to go to work, they said, out. And I came to Mrs. Culfer’s. She wanted me in the first place.

FW: Is she a relative?

RW: Her husband was a relative. I worked all along when I went to school. I did babysitting and I worked in a bakery.

FW: Was your brother also living with this family?

RW: No, he lived on his own, right away.

FW: He did live on his own and he went to work right away?

RW: Yes.

W: When you were in beautician school, you moved to Mrs. Culfer’s?

RW: Before then.

FW: Before you started. And after you finished beautician school did you work all the time?

RW: I don’t remember.

FW: Movies,... or

RW: Movies, vacation, away to the country, and got together an awful lot with my friends.

FW: Were your friends mostly from the refugee community?

RW: Yes, only.

FW: How about today, are your friends still mostly from the refugee community?

RW: All of them. As a matter of fact, I’m very friendly with the people from Europe here. We are a whole group; we try to get together.

FW: When you say from Europe, you are saying from the homes?

RW: Yes, and from people who came over with me.

FW: Do you feel a part of the American mainstream or more part of the German-Jewish refugee community?

RW: American. I don’t think so, maybe some people consider me but after being here a long time I feel more American than...

FW: The other. Do you think as a parent, do you think you were a different parent from the parents of other children your son’s age?

RW: No. I would say a certain little European background maybe I think differently, but other, I think I’m the same.

FW: In what way do you say little bit of European background?

RW: Oh, giving the thing, or the freedom, you know, in that respect.

FW: You think you were more strict?

RW: Not so lenient to the kids.

FW: Do you think that in your life now there are many holdovers from your German background?

RW: What do you mean by holdovers?

FW: Do you see things that reflect your German background?

RW: No, I don’t think so.

FW: Have you ever been back to Germany?

RW: I have never been back to Europe period.

FW: Would you go back to Germany?

RW: The only thing I would like to do is go to the cemetery and see where I lived, but I wouldn’t know where to find it by myself. I would have to go with someone that knows the area because it’s all rebuilt and it’s entirely different.

FW: Looking back over the whole experience, basically you lost your childhood.

RW: Yes, definitely.

FW: Do you feel that...

RW: Yes, I do, I do and I do see the difference of the way my son is growing up and the way I was in his younger years, what I missed out.

FW: What do you feel most that you missed?

RW: The most I feel is the way he was educated, which is very important in life and the way of living, that when I was his age I was always in fear, you know, and have to be afraid and not enough food. And what, for instance, he takes for granted now I didn’t take for granted.

FW: Such as...

RW: When I was his age I never had my own room or nice apartment or nice surroundings or, don’t forget, I didn’t have all these things, it was always community life wherever I was until I came here.

FW: Do you remember having those things before you left for Gorse?

RW: We were not well off altogether. He has a much richer life, not financially, but with a lot of things.

FW: Also, as a young girl you grew up in community life, did you miss not having...

RW: Under the circumstances you have to make the best of it. I’m pretty sure that I missed it but that was it.

FW: Have you told your son, does your son know about your whole life?

RW: Everything. We discuss it quite often.

FW: What is his reaction?

RW: I don’t know; I really don’t know. I really can’t tell you. He listens and that’s it. I don’t know what’s his reaction now because he was always told what I went through. I guess he doesn’t feel that great about it but what can he do?

FW: I meant can he understand that such things...

RW: Oh yes, he... furthermore he learned in last year in high school or whatever about Hitler in Social Studies. And I told him exactly what I told you and I guess he realizes...

FW: Do you think having as many children with you as you did helped you over some of the hard times?

RW: I guess so because we were all in the same boat. You made the best of it and you had a good time, which ever way you looked at it. You had no other choice. Where were you going to go. You had no money, nothing, so this was the best thing you could do.

FW: Were you ever afraid, even later on, in later years, were you afraid to put your trust in anybody?

RW: No, I wasn’t afraid.

FW: Just in terms of knowing what people can do, what the Nazis could do.

RW: I wasn’t afraid such thing. I guess when you go through all that... Don’t forget, I was so young and this came so suddenly you don’t know what hit and you weren’t always told you shouldn’t do this or you shouldn’t do that. You just lived, period. You were lucky you had warm clothes and barely the minimum to eat. In the evening when it was very cold the Jewish kids taught the others and they learned the hora.

FW: In the convent?

RW: Yes, we danced, we had recreational evening. We used to square dance and all that and we taught them the hora and we said it was an Alsace-Lorraine dance.

FW: The nuns accepted it?

RW: Well, one nun... As I said, there were two nuns, there was one nun and the mother superior. The mother superior we very seldom saw. And we used to do different things and we used to go for walks and we were so hungry we used to take the apples off the trees and eat them. And then the nun asked the priest if that was stealing and he said yes so we could only get the ones from underneath. But when she didn’t look we took them anyway.

FW: Did they make any attempt, not to convert you, but try and influence you?

RW: Well, you were so brainwashed already by participating, which you really had to do, that nobody could really actually sense that you were Jewish, weren’t Catholic. Because we prayed the same as the others, we went to church with them at all times, ...

FW: In the beginning, when you first came there...

RW: That was the hardest, that was the hardest to get adjusted and to pray. I didn’t know any of the prayers but as a child you learn very quickly.

FW: They made an effort to teach you...

RW: We learned, 123 you’re here, you learn. I don’t know how I learned it but I learned.

FW: Did they want you to do it more...

RW: You had to, you had to.

FW: But more for protection or because they wanted to influence you. I mean you had to do it...

RW: Well, you know, it’s like the saying, you are in Rome, you do as the Romans do. You go to Broyer (?) to the yeshiva, you have to. It’s the same thing.

FW: Yes, but when you go to Broyer you have a choice.

RW: No you don’t.

FW: Well, I mean you had a choice to go.

RW: But you had to. This is the way of living there. You lived you did whatever was required of...

FW: Had it ever occurred to you through this time or later on that you went through all this because you were Jewish.

RW: And still I always preach to my son that I suffered an awful lot because I was Jewish and he should remember what it means to be Jewish because my life was not easy. But I don’t know if it sinks into the kids of today.