

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Hanna Biberstein
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PREFACE

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HANNA BIBERSTEIN

October 10, 1995

- Q: I'm here with Hanna Biberstein in Davis, California and Mrs. Biberstein if you would tell me your full name and your date of birth and your place of birth?
- A: Hanna Biberstein. I was born September 14, 1928 in Essen, Germany.
- Q: Tell me something about your family background, what your parents did?
- A: My father was the last rabbi in Esson. My mother was a native of Esson actually and my father married her. Her mother -- well her father died. My grandfather died very early. Her mother had a store in Esson and my father when he was a young new rabbi came to Esson and fell in love with her and they married.
- Q: Where did he come from?
- A: He came from Waldorf, southern Germany and he went to the university in Heidelberg. His parents, his father was a teacher in a little town, cantor, teacher, rabbi everything in that little town and there was quite a difference between him and his parents because he moved to the big city and was sort of a modern person in many ways. In his outlook he stayed modern even his ideas are modern today, very open minded individual. Of course his parents were from a little town, very, very old fashioned and we visited them from time to time but it was really a different world, a different culture all together from the way we lived and the way they lived in this little town.
- Q: Your siblings?
- A: I have a sister. She died two years ago and she was two and a half years older than I was and two and half years actually made quite a difference at that time in Germany. I continued going to a Jewish school, the local school, and she went to a Jewish school in Kolon, a high school, and so our lives were quite a bit apart and quite a bit different later on in life. We were quite different I think in personality, too.
- Q: When did she leave for school?
- A: There were three of them that went together, three friends from Esson, people her age, children her age. And they left at about eight in the morning and came back by train again five o'clock in the afternoon. She commuted by train every day. Our lives were quite different because I went to the local Jewish school still at that time.
- Q: Did you have a lot of religious ritual in your own home?
- A: We had quite a bit but there again I must say my father was a very modern kind of person and he really didn't force us to go when we didn't want to go. I mean certain things we

had to go like the high holidays but on the whole if we really didn't want to go to something or do something he let it be and didn't really insist on it. On the other hand, being children of rabbis or being the wife of a rabbi is not an easy job because you're always scrutinized. I think the expectations of a rabbi aren't real and the rabbi's family equally -- you're supposed to be a role model and be perfect and so if we did go to the synagogue and so forth it was expected that we behave especially well and be a model. Looking back I think being associated -- being part of a rabbi's family is quite a strain on the whole family.

Q: Was that imposed by your own family or more by society?

A: I think that's how it is because much, much later in life in this country my sister married a rabbi also who took over my father's congregation actually and it was the same. And I see it here even now with rabbis. I think the expectations are very great and you expect sort of perfection from everything they touch including the wife and the family. Although I think with the wife it's getting a little bit better with the wives now can have more of a life of their own and not insisting that it's not a package deal entirely that they have to go on leading their own lives a little bit.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what you mean about your father being very modern?

A: Very -- he was not a black and white kind of person. This is the way it's written, this is the way it had to be. He could see different interpretations and people varying the scriptures or the commandments to go with the modern times and what they had to do. Another thing that just came to my attention recently, when he was a young rabbi and just started apparently there was a discussion in the congregation between the senior rabbi -- he was the junior rabbi then -- the senior rabbi and the congregation about the role of the Polish Jews in Esson in that time and the senior rabbi was saying that the Polish Jews should assimilate and learn to speak proper German and should dress the way the rest of the population did and that the way they were acting was bringing on anti-semitism and my father -- this is a newspaper article that I just got -- my father disagreed and said no it was all right for them to keep their own culture and that was not the thing that was bringing on anti-semitism and that it's okay to maintain your own culture and your own environment. I think that's a more modern approach, more open minded. Open to different ideas, open to the world around you and seeing how Judaism fits into that.

Q: How was he received by the community and his modernize, was that unusual?

A: Well, apparently very well and of course as a child what I remember is that he was adored by everybody because everybody respected him, but even looking back now in the articles that I read about it, that I have come across recently, it seems to have gone over okay with most of them. Now what he was able to do, the Polish Jews had their own little congregation because they worshipped a little differently than the other German Jews and he was sort of able to build to a bridge between the two cultures and I think that's a very worthwhile enterprise and was very well received and certainly served everybody well in those times. He was also very instrumental in building what was a _____ time

place for the young people, a big, big building that was established oh about '33 or '34 for the Jewish youth in Esson. It had a big kitchen, cafeteria, lots of room for meeting, big huge gymnasium and this was to serve the youth of Esson, the Jewish youth, but actually the whole community as other things became more and more restrictive the whole community used that building extensively and he was very instrumental in getting that done.

Q: What about your mother?

A: My mother was wonderful. My mother was what a _____ was supposed to be in those days, a rabbi's wife. She was a sort of a shield around my father, she protected him from any criticism or any adverse happenings and was always there to support him and her whole life was also the congregation and she grew up with ideas of the society around her. For instance, when we were small she didn't spend much time with us. We had nursemaids and this and that and that was what was expected of somebody in her position. It wasn't really until we came to this country that we lived together much, much -- because we had to -- much, much closer and we became a really close family. We were not a close family, what I consider a close family in Germany because my father was busy all the time and my mother was busy with other things and we were sort of left most of the time to governesses and nursemaids, what have you.

Q: Was your mother a strongly religious person as well?

A: I don't think so. I think she did what was expected of her. I think that's -- and my father was very religious but he also had many doubts about religion and that's another way where I think he's very modern. He was not able to and not willing to just accept everything. He had his doubts. Later on in life when difficult things occurred, like my mother was killed in a plane crash and so forth and he had his doubts along with everybody else, like bad things happening to good people kind of doubts.

Q: Describe your home a little bit to me, the environment that you lived in. Any memories or images that you have of your early childhood?

A: My earliest childhood was we lived in a very affluent part of Esson and what I remember there is just a big back yard and it was a beautiful home and as I said my mother was not in contact with us very much so it was more governesses and so forth. I think I was a very insecure child. When I started school it was very difficult for me and I had a hard time adjusting to school. It was celebrations -- the holidays were a very wonderful and a very beautiful thing especially I remember the Passover, the _____ the seder nights. We'd have a great many people in. They were mostly scholars and it was sort of a discussion kind of thing. Although I was only allowed to stay for the first part of it, that was always something I really, really looked forward to it. The Jewish holidays all together were a major part of our life. A major stress too, I must say. For instance, the high holidays of course my father, that was his work time. He delivered a great many sermons, especially on the high holidays in a very short time. So, it's not supposed to be but it is a performance. You have to deliver the goods so holiday time was not only a joyous time,

it was also a stressful time because that's actually when my father had to work the hardest.

Q: Did you always go to his sermons? Was the family always present?

A: No, actually we were not always present, and that was an okay thing. My mother was. My mother felt that she had to, but we weren't always there, no. He gave us actually the freedom to come and go as we chose within reason. Holidays or anything big we would be there but otherwise we had sort of a choice.

Q: Did you take on any of the religious feeling or the sense of religion that your father had?

A: I think I did, I think I also took on his doubting at the same time that I took on the religion. Unfortunately part of being the daughter of a rabbi is that you see too much of the congregation and I got really turned off by institutional religion. I just too much of it, but that's more in this country than actually in Germany. In this country -- in Germany the rabbi didn't have to worry about getting paid or anything like that because part of it came out of the tax money which was then given back to each religion so it was a much stabler kind of job. But in this country, of course, he built up a congregation and he had to see that the money comes and all these things that a rabbi shouldn't have to worry about, but in this country they do. So, I associate congregations sort of with a lot of stress a lot of in-fighting and not too positive actually I'm sorry to say.

Q: Was he rabbi at the synagogue from the time that you were born?

A: Yes, before I was born actually and until we left.

Q: What do you remember about the synagogue? Were you impressed by it?

A: Oh, it was a beautiful, beautiful place and on the high holidays the women sat upstairs. I would be with my mother and downstairs the men were and they had high hats and they had their own places where they could put them then and so forth. It was a very, very beautiful building and very impressive and very awe inspiring really. I remember I guess it was one Yom Kippur and you talk about who shall die in the next year and who shall live and so forth and so forth. I remember sitting upstairs with my mother and getting very concerned and very worried and worrying that she might die soon and I kept saying that I hope that she would live until I was at least 16 or 17 which at the time seemed like an ancient age to me. And she assured me that yes she thought she would. Yes, it was a very impressive kind of thing. It certainly carried me along during that time.

Q: What about your home life? Did you play at home a lot with friends?

A: We played at home a great deal. We had when we moved to the _____ to the synagogue later on we had the -- the sexton downstairs had two children that I played with a great deal. I think my sister actually had more friends. She had a great many

friends and they visited back and forth quite a bit and I think I was slow in making friends and had few friends but they were good friends probably.

Q: Do you remember realizing at a particular point that your being Jewish separated you somehow from many other people in the town where you lived?

A: Well, the first time that happened is when I was pretty young, four or five years old or something and when we lived in this nice part of Esson, the very affluent part with big back yards and we liked to play in the back yards and my sister and I and sometimes one of her friends also and we were playing there and the house next door was owned by a family who had one son and he was usually playing there by himself. So, after a while, after watching him a few days and so forth we started a conversation and he seemed very receptive and we got to be very good friends actually. Then he got the clever idea that we should carve a hole in the fence so that we could go back and forth between the yards and we had a big sandbox in our yard which he liked and he could get at readily and he had sort of berries and things in his yard which we didn't have and -- also for hide and go seek you had double the area to play in. That was a great thing to do.

Then it went along very, very well and then one day we came down and the thing was boarded up and we couldn't understand so we kept shouting Harmine, that was the boy's name, to come to the window and he wouldn't come and we didn't see anything. Actually we thought it was all a mistake that somebody probably the gardener or something had seen the hole and didn't know that we had permission from both parents to have that and that's it. It shouldn't be this way, I better do something about it. So, we thought it would be taken care of shortly.

Then a week or two passed by and we kept shouting for Harmine from the yard and we even had the audacity to go out on the street and yell for him. Nothing happened. He never came to the big window.

Finally we approached my mother and asked her to find out what was going on and she really didn't want to do that too much. She didn't like to interfere in relationships between children but she said all right if I see the lady I'll speak to her.

So, another week passed by and she said yes, I saw Mrs. Schmidt but she was just too busy. I didn't have a chance to talk to her. Finally one day she came and she said I did see Mrs. Schmidt and she was crying and she was really sorry but she said what had happened is that Harmine had joined the Hitler Youth and at first they thought that was fine and everything was all right and then one day he came home after a meeting and he said he just didn't want to have anything more to do with Jews and he wouldn't have anything more to do with us. They should right away board up that hole in the fence.

Not only that, that his parents should have no contact with my parents and shouldn't say hello to them, shouldn't do anything with them. Shouldn't talk to us certainly and if they continued doing that that he would report the parents to the authority. Mrs. Schmidt was in tears when she said that to my mother because they had been -- not close friends, but you know, cordial, and said hello and chatted for a bit you know on and off and she said she's sorry. She was afraid of her son and of what he would do. So, she really had to say this is it. There was to be no further contact.

And of course I was aghast. Here I was still the same person. My sister was still the same person. We had a wonderful time. We actually shared very intimate family secrets and all

sorts of things and all of a sudden from one day to the next there was this barrier and he couldn't speak to us anymore. It was beyond comprehension and I was really upset and it's something that you just -- I couldn't figure out what was going on and why that should happen.

So, that was the first time that something happened.

Q: Had you ever when you were playing with him had he ever said anything about you being Jewish?

A: Never. It never came up. Religion had never come up. We never discussed it. We were busy -- he had a pretty good imagination. We were making up games and different things and so forth. We were busy with different games. Then he told us things about his family, what they were doing. You know how kids are, complaining about the parents and so forth. We would do the same, but there was never any talk of any religion or anything. It didn't seem to matter.

Q: Were you aware that there was a difference between your family and Harmine family?

A: Not at that time, no. I think actually at that time my parents still had a lot of non-Jewish friends too. So, we were in contact with non-Jewish people at that time. Our governess, the people who took care of us were not Jewish. SO, so no I didn't consider the problem at that time.

Q: Do you have further instances, further memories?

A: Well, the only other thing that happened while we were living in that house is my sister and I took piano lessons from a Jewish piano teacher who was supposed to be very good or so they said at the time and we had just started maybe three or four months. Then all of a sudden he couldn't come anymore and we asked what had happened and first it was oh well, he's not well this week and then it turned out though that he had been arrested and so I asked my mother why would they arrest somebody like that. What did he do, and my mother said from what she could gather he didn't do anything it was just that he was Jewish and that Jews were suspect and that they had arrested him because they suspected him of doing something subversive and so I didn't -- I asked whether that happens quite often and my mother at that time said while it does happen apparently my father was arrested when I was just a baby and apparently there had been a letter that had been forged but had his signature denouncing the government so they had arrested him for a day and then released him, but then again brought home the idea that being Jewish was something different. You were more suspect certainly and authorities looked on you differently than they would on somebody else.

Q: Did you have any understanding of why that was or any rationale for that?

A: No, and I don't think I questioned it except that that is the way it is. It think that's the one thing how easily -- of course I didn't know anything differently. I grew up in that atmosphere and how easily you accept it. This is the way it is. That's all you know and so

you know you expected that to be the way the world runs. So, no I didn't question it. I just took it for granted that that's the way things are.

So, then well my parents also became very uncomfortable in that neighborhood and we moved in the _____, the parish house which was adjoining the synagogue. It was really part of it. It was a big building. It was a triplex. three stories actually. Then I heard more and more stories of my friends and friends of theirs being beaten up on the street because they were Jewish and yelled at because they were Jews or ridiculed because they were Jewish and so I began to realize that that kind of thing did happen and was afraid of going outside. Not that it happened to me personally although they did yell Jew or something and point across the street but I was certainly never beaten up or anything but just hearing that constantly made you very, very aware that the streets were not a safe place to be.

And our own life became more and more restrictive although I didn't realize this at the time, but my parents had the good sense to see to it that we were more or less in a Jewish environment all of the time so we didn't come in contact with these dangers.

I went to a Jewish school. My friends were all Jewish. By that time their friends were all Jewish only and they didn't have any contact with anybody else. One of the nicer things that happened through this is that the people who helped us, our household help and the people who helped to take care of us had not been Jewish up to now and now we had Jewish help and most of them were young girls who were preparing to go to Israel, Palestine at the time. This was part of their training to learn to take care of a household and children and all that kind of things. Actually for us it was much nicer because they were a lot more fun than the people we had been with before so that was a very positive thing for us.

We went to the _____, the place for the youth and joined youth groups and there was a Zionist group then that we belonged to and we had a gym and actually we had everything -- all the activities that other children had we had parallel in the Jewish sphere so that I really didn't feel that I was lacking anything. I didn't feel deprived at all.

It was just different and I must say I accepted it as most people and I don't think I questioned it. I didn't think it was that terrible. The frightening things were the streets. On the streets there were children who whenever I saw a crowd of children I'd avoid it and go another way. Other children my age don't remember that or other people who were children at that time don't remember it as much. I was very frightened of the parade. They were always having parades with different banners and I've been told that as a Jew even when the flag, the German flag came by you were supposed to stand still and salute and then I was told afterwards that as a Jew everybody else was supposed to salute but you were never allowed to salute. So, I was just petrified because the rules and regulations kept changing. That's something that stands out in my mind that I never knew what was right and what was wrong and that I was going to be caught doing the wrong thing and hauled off to jail and never heard of again.

Q: So you would try to find your way around the parades?

A: Yes, and not be caught in a position where I'd have to either salute or not salute, not be around so I wouldn't be caught doing the wrong thing.

There were lots of stories that went around, more and more stories of people being deprived of their profession or their stores being closed or signs outside that people shouldn't be there, Germans shouldn't buy there from Jewish stores, and this kind of thing. But they were removed from me personally. They were things that I heard and that I took in but in my own little environment it felt relatively safe and okay at that time.

Q: So were you able to forget then that this was going on for greater parts of your daily life?

A: Yes, for most of the time, except when I hit the streets then I was more careful and I would keep in mind all the things that I'd been told. For most of the time it was what I considered a normal life or that's the only thing I knew and it seemed fairly rich life.

Q: Why did your family make the decision to move to the _____ house?

A: Well, because also my father felt that he was being ostracized by the people and it wasn't safe. They didn't feel that in the long run that would be a safe place for them to live because we were the only Jews in that section. So, he thought that it would be a good thing to get out of there and more comfortable also.

Q: How did you feel about moving?

A: We all felt badly about it because the place we left was a very, very beautiful place. The place we moved to was in the center of town with a very small back yard. On the other hand it had compensations. It had a lot of rooms. It had a great big veranda that ran the outside of the building where we could roller skate on top so it did have some compensations for the other things. And my friends stayed the same because they were only Jewish by that time anyway so they were not neighborhood people anymore. So, it was an adjustment to make but it had some good points with it.

I must say through all the changes that we had to make in our life time our parents were very good. They sort of had the attitude well, this is just the way it is. They never looked back and said oh, how much better it was here and so forth and there was never any regret. Whatever came that was it and that's the way it was. I think we kids began to accept that as sort of our standard attitude.

Q: So, you don't think that they were heavily depressed by what was going on?

A: I think they were very heavily depressed by what was going on but they were able to maintain a semblance of normalcy in very abnormal times and did it very well and certainly kept fear away from us as much as they could. As far as giving up oh property or things like that well for a rabbi, that isn't an important thing anyway so that was an easier transition perhaps for us than it was for others because we were really brought up to think that money and these things isn't the main thing in life. So, they made that adjustment. I'm sure they missed it but not so that we children would notice it overly much. They were very good about it.

Q: Did they talk to you about the laws?

A: Not very much and as I say that's part of the thing that the family wasn't as close as it could have been over there. They were busy with their things and we were doing whatever we were supposed to be doing but not as much as later on when we came to this country for instance.

Q: What about in school, were you taught about the laws after Nuremberg were created?

A: No, of course I was in a very low grade and I think what they tried to do is keep things as normal as possible. They sort of tried to hide the abnormalities that were going on around us and to maintain the normalcy as much as possible. So, actually what I heard was more from other children than any teacher saying anything ever.

Q: They would tell you what sorts of things?

A: The children?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, they would tell me mostly what I remember was about somebody being beaten up. Meeting somebody and being beaten up by other children. Usually at that time that was the main complaint or ridiculed or pants ripped down, things like that. But the teachers tried to sort of maintain a semblance of normalcy through it all. That's the amazing thing and I guess that's a survivor mechanism, you know, you don't accentuate the abnormal but sort of try to keep it as normal or stick to the normal part as much as you can. And they did in school. They stayed away from most other things except the subjects.

Q: Did you like school?

A: Well, at first I hated it. It was very hard for me to adjust to school, to being away from home and to adjust to school. Then I rather liked it. I wouldn't say I was crazy about it, but I rather liked it.

Q: What sorts of -- what were your favorite things to do?

A: Well, I liked reading. I was a good reader so I could read to the others. They called on people to read to the rest of the class and I was good at that. I was never good in arithmetic and that stayed with me. But reading and Jewish history and those kinds of things I liked. I had a very good teacher most of the time. There were some teachers that had the reputation of being atrocious and used corporal punishment and all that in the classroom. This is an earlier time but I had a very good teacher who was very nice and very understanding really.

I rather enjoyed it. Recess was the best of course as it always is. We had a big school yard and we played.

Q: Did you have any special friends?

A: I had one special friend. As I said my sister had lots of friends and I was very slow in making friends. I had a very, very good friend in first grade and unfortunately she then emigrated to America so I lost her. That was really a blow. That really made a great impression on me. People were constantly at that time leaving. Whoever could leave was leaving. There was a leader of our youth group who was about maybe in his twenties, early twenties and I really thought he was the cat's meow. I thought he was just it. I really had a crush on him and he left for Sweden and people were -- this community, this Jewish community was diminishing slowly as people were leaving all the time. Anybody who was smart enough to read the signs correctly and had the means of getting out, would. Many had the means of getting out but didn't read the signs correctly, and actually my father had the chance to leave, to go to Switzerland in about '34 and '35 and at that time he felt that his place was with the congregation and that he would stay. I think he must have also thought that he would outlive the whole thing. I mean I'm just guessing. It was hard to read the signs correctly because everything happened very gradually, bit by bit it became worse and you adjusted to each little thing very rapidly.

Then of course the Jews have a history of being oppressed but surviving and so I think a lot of people and I think actually that my father was one of them didn't read the signs correctly. I think. Now, he says his rational was that he should have stayed, he wanted to stay with his congregation. That was his place and I'm sure that was part of it, but I also think that I never got the feeling that he expected to happen what did happen. I don't think anybody could. I think almost if you thought something like that was going to happen, your view of human nature would be such that you'd commit suicide. I mean it is such a horrible thing to have happened that I don't think the average person can imagine it. If you did, if you had that view of human nature, I think it would be practically impossible for you to go on living.

Q: I think there has to be a limit.

A: Yes, it's just something that the human mind can't fathom. It's beyond what we can understand and take in. So, I don't think he read the signs correctly, and I don't really blame him for it.

Q: Did you feel yourself that you wish you could emigrate after your closest friend had left?

A: I think at that time everybody did feel that they would like to. That was pretty late already. Everybody felt that this was becoming more and more oppressive and it would be a good thing if you could go. And of course America was already built up as the place, paradise on earth. Although Israel was too, it was Palestine at that time, so either one of those was the dream worlds, but we weren't living in the dream world, but it wasn't at that point it wasn't a horrible world. It was a world that was imperfect and there were depravation and you had to live with a certain amount of hardship, but it was not an impossible world to live in at that time.

Q: What was the next major thing that happens?

A: The next major thing that happened was the deportation of the Polish Jews, of Jews that were born in Poland and that was a shattering moment in my life and certainly took away any kind of security that I had up to then. That -- I remember that day vividly. It started early in the morning and I woke up and instead of the usual breakfast being prepared and so forth I heard all sorts of phone calls. People coming in and out and so forth. Then my parents said that as far as they could gather at that point, that they were collecting all the Jews of Polish decent and didn't know what they were going to do with them but they were gathering them and they were all in the school yard and they were herding them together there and nobody knew what was going on. The telephone was ringing as more people reported somebody else being rounded up.

So my mother informed us that there was not going to be any school. Actually there was school for my sister who was in Kolone and she had left for school already but that I wasn't going to have any school that day which was great. That my father and my mother and the sexton and his wife and everybody would be busy that day and that I should go downstairs and play with the sexton's children. They had an old grandfather who usually stayed in his room but that was enough supervision if anything terrible happened, he could take care of us, and that they would be gone trying to help the Polish Jews in whatever way they could.

So, I went downstairs to my playmates and they had heard of somebody being rounded up and we'd throw out names and we had no idea really what was going on or how serious it was. The grownups seemed excited and seemed worried so we thought it must be serious but we had no idea actually what was going on. We were by ourselves down there and lunchtime came and nobody showed up and nobody told us anything and we were wondering so we prepared lunch and fixed lunch and then things got to be very, very boring and so we decided to play hide and go seek which was our favorite game at that time.

Since everybody was gone we could use the basement of the parish house which also connected with the basement of the synagogue so it was a huge, huge thing with tunnels going all ways and very, very little lighting. It was really a spooky kind of place and perfect for hide and go seek. We weren't really supposed to play there. That was sort of forbidden territory but we'd been there before and we thought everybody's gone, this would be a good day to explore all the tunnels that we hadn't explored in the past.

So, we went down there and played and I must say we forgot -- or at least I forgot all about what was going on with the Polish Jews or anything else that was going on. We were wrapped up in our games. Then we suddenly became aware that there was another person. There was somebody else down there. First the boy, my friend, saw him first and then the rest of us saw it and we stealthily crept up there to see who it was and what was going on, who'd be down there. As we came close this person turned around and he was frightened, absolutely frightened, petrified and garbled something which we couldn't understand. We on the other hand recognized that it was one of our Jewish teachers, teacher from our Jewish school and we couldn't figure out what he was doing. He was just shoving and pointing the other way for us so we decided we better leave him alone, he's not quite right in the mind. He was sort of strange anyway we thought, but stranger than usual.

So, we decided he wants to be left alone. He obviously doesn't want us here so we better go and we thought it's probably time for us to check upstairs because we didn't want to be

missed by anybody who came home and so we went back and couldn't figure out what this teacher was doing there and why he was acting so strangely and so frightened. We couldn't understand even what he was saying.

We got upstairs and then the parents of my friends, the sexton and his wife came back and they were sitting there and they were very depressed. They were tired too. They were tired and very depressed and telling all the things that they had done. Apparently the Polish Jews had been rounded up and they couldn't gather any of their things together so anything they could throw into a suitcase if a suitcase was handy they could take, but they were only given five or ten minutes. Once they got to the school yard, they found all sorts of things that they were missing, so the rest of the Jewish population was busy that whole day scrounging around trying to give them the necessities at least that they would need for a trip, which obviously they were going to take. Also, to get some food to them, lunch and so forth.

Then, just before the sexton and his wife came back, it had been announced that all the Polish Jews were to go to the train station, to the platform, and they were all marched down there and it's then that everybody found out that they were supposed to be shipped back to Poland. Everybody was just devastated by the event. These were some of our close friends.

Now, the teacher that we had -- well, some of our close friends were caught in that and then the parents asked what we'd been doing and my friend said that we had been down there in the basement and that we came across the teacher, the Jewish teacher and what was he doing down there. The parents became very upset that we had been down there and what we had seen and they rushed to the phone and called my parents and after talking to them my friends parents came back and said that my parents wanted me upstairs to talk to me. I thought it was something to do with being in a place where we weren't supposed to play and I went up there and I already knew what I was going to tell them and the reasons why this had to be and when I got up there, both my father and my mother were there to talk to me and that was very rare that my father would bother to get involved in this kind of thing.

They had asked what had happened and I told them that we had seen this teacher acting very peculiar, very strange and they got very, very serious and they said what we had seen was very dangerous if we would divulge it. It would be very dangerous, not only to the teacher but to our family and to everybody else and that what had happened was early in the morning when all these people were calling in saying that the Polish Jews were being rounded up and this family was rounded and this family was rounded up, my father somehow thought of this teacher and was able to contact him before they arrived at his house and had said that he could hide in the basement. So, it was obviously imperative that nobody knew that he was there and that it would be very dangerous if anybody found out for instance that my father had contacted this man and sort of given him a sanctuary there for a little bit.

So, it was made very, very clear that under no circumstances should I divulge what I had seen and where he was and so forth.

I was just frightened to death, frightened to death of the whole thing realizing for the first time I think, I was realizing what had really happened to the Polish Jews because up until then I really hadn't fathomed it. It was sort of first they were herded together in the school

yard and so forth and it was only after this all happened and they really were put on the train that I realized the tragedy of it all. So, I was overcome by that.

I was also frightened that somehow in my sleep or some way I would give way to what I had seen and that he was there and I just wish I'd never been there and the responsibility of keeping the secret just became a great burden to me. I was just hoping I wouldn't tell anybody without meaning to.

So, then it was then really after listening to the other parents and to my parents that I realized the full impact of what had happened to the Polish Jews. It was already late afternoon, it was Friday night, so we got ready for the synagogue and we dressed up as we usually did and I think everybody who is Jewish was gathered there and everybody was crying and trying to console each other. Now, this I don't know. It has been told to me that my father gave a very stirring sermon sort of saying that the Polish Jews that this is just the first chapter, that similar things would be awaiting us. I was really too tired. I think I fell asleep actually in the evening and afterwards when they told me about the sermon I really didn't believe it. I mean the Polish Jews was one thing but to us, to my family that that would happen I really didn't believe it or couldn't believe it. I think there were quite a few German Jews who at that time still didn't believe it. It's just hard to picture that this kind of thing happens to you.

So after that day, there was no sense of security that anybody had after that anymore because if you can take such a mass of people and uproot them within a few hours and shove them off to another unknown part after that we thought that things could happen.

Q: Let's just go back a little bit to when you were at your friend's house, the children of the sexton and you had come out of the basement and you were hearing about all of things that were happening, were there a lot of people in the house and somebody coming in and making reports and then leaving or how were you learning about what was happening?

A: Early in the morning you mean?

Q: Just after you had come out of the basement?

A: No, it was just what the sexton and his wife was telling us and then what my parents had said what had happened, but apparently every able person who had time was there at the school yard doing the same thing that they were doing, gathering things for the Polish Jews that they needed, providing food for them. So, my father tells this story that one of the Polish Jews that he was helping, handing him some food said but doctor who's going to do that for you when your time comes? I think my father at that time realized that this was the beginning of the end.

Q: So your parents actually spent a good part of the day at the school yard?

A: The whole day. From morning until five or six o'clock until the people boarded the train. And so did the sexton and his wife and so I understand did most of the Jewish population that was able to take the time and help out. There were a great many people and they were all with them until they were finally boarding the train and then leaving.

Q: What happened next in between that time in October of '38 and then between that time and crystal night? What do you remember?

A: Just that there was great fear and I guess I was more leery of anybody that wasn't Jewish when I went out. There was just a greater feeling that things might go wrong and I don't think there was a radical change except a change in how you personally felt, you know how each person felt. They had seen just great savagery done to great fellow Jews and after that they were not certain of their position, a great uncertainty and a great fear.

Q: Did the teacher stay in the basement?

A: The teacher actually in some way and I didn't learn this until much later, the teacher escaped. The teacher is now living in New York City. He was in love at the time. One of the reasons I said that he was sort of weird, he was in love at the time with another Jewish teacher at the school also. He was sort of a dreamer and we always saw him -- we thought he was composing love poems or something. We always ridiculed him. The two of them are married now and live in New York City.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

Q: Crystal night I suppose would be the next very significant memory that you have?

A: Yes. In fact, when I was writing the memoirs I realized how close the deportation of the Polish Jews is in time to the crystal night. To me in my mind in my memory it seems like half a year or a year whereas it's a little less than a month actually between them. But, that's not the way I remember it. As a child I remember it just being a long span of time between the deportation of the Polish Jews and crystal night. That was the next big chapter and after that there was no doubt as to what you had to do. You had to escape. I mean there wasn't any -- after the Polish Jews I still as a child thought well it's them but not me, they wouldn't do that to German Jews. That was my as a child that's how I felt. But obviously after crystal night it became obvious that all Jews were the victims. We were at stake.

So, that was -- well apparently my sister remembers and I'm quoting partly from my sister's memories now and not only my own. My sister remembers that the evening before in the evening the my father got a phone call and he tells the same thing and it was an anonymous caller who somehow warned him that during the night there would be parades. There would be a procession and there would be marches and that somehow they were going to be against the Jews and that the building, the synagogue might be in danger. That's all that they said.

Q: Did you know anything about Hershel Greenspan?

A: I did not, no, I did not at the time. So, as I say in a way my parents protected me and the environment. Everybody else protected me maybe too much but we were quite protected

and things that would upset us greatly or make us very fearful were really talked about as little as possible. So, I did not know.

Apparently my father got this phone call during our meal time and came back very agitated and the meal continued and then my mother told us that a good friend of hers who was also a -- who took a very special interest in me or a nurse by the name of _____, was going to spend the night with us. We went to bed as usual and nothing much really occurred. My father tells later on that after the phone call he didn't know quite whether to believe it or not because there had been so many false warnings. People were always imagining things sometimes there were real dangers involved but there were a lot of warnings and a lot of them turned out to be false. So, he obviously didn't believe that the things would go the way they did.

On the other hand, he took some precautions. He asked this friend of ours to come and stay with us and there was a beggar who lived all the way up in the dome of the synagogue and he went up there about three or four times a week and slept up there. The stories that I was told as a child was that he was really a very rich man that he was hoarding all those things up there. I was never up there and I don't even know how he got up there but apparently he came that evening and they told him not to go up there. So I think they half believed it and half didn't believe it. If he would have believed it all the way he obviously wouldn't have kept his family in the house. So, it was sort of a mixture between taking some precautions but not going overboard with it.

Then during the night there was a lot of noise and when I woke up the lights were on and my mother came in and said that the gestapo went in the house and we had to leave the house and that my sister and I should get dressed right away and get ready to leave and that she would be downstairs. We were on the third floor. The bedrooms were on the third floor. My father's study was on the second floor and the sexton lived on the first floor.

And she would be on the second floor with my father and I think I was in a state of shock when the whole thing happened because I just followed orders. I was supposed to get dressed and we were supposed to leave the house.

Now, my understanding at the time was that we would leave the house and we would come back. I had no idea -- crazy orders like that were the norm so I didn't question it. Okay, so they wanted us to leave, okay, and then obviously we would come back. So, we got dressed and we were in no special hurry actually. My sister and I in fact this was November and some of our Hanukkah presents had already arrived from my grandmother's store and my sister knew that her very nice shirts were up on the top shelves where we weren't supposed to get at them. When she was getting dressed since we were going to leave she got a chair, pulled down the package, put on that nice shirt and everything else. People would come in and say we have to leave and we said yes, yes we'll have to leave. That's fine. We're getting ready.

I personally was sort of waiting for my parents to come and to take us or tell us what to do and they weren't coming and there was a lot of noise downstairs. My father apparently was with my mother and the gestapo and finally the sexton ran up and said okay you've got to go, the place is burning, get out. And so I don't even remember it. I remember being shoved. I did not want to leave because I thought my parents were still someplace in the building and I wasn't going to go without them. They finally kept pushing me and pushing me to the steps and then when we got to the second story, second floor there was

an SS person and he was just smashing everything in sight. We had glass doors and glass windows and a lot of figurines and he was just smashing things and kicking things and our orders though they kept pushing no no you've got to go, you've got to get out of here. So, we ran down -- as we were going down to the bottom floor, we saw the flames from the synagogue coming over to our staircase and they were already on the staircase as we were going down. And down on the first floor also was the sexton's father, the old gentleman who always lived with them and he was in his long white nightgown just standing there petrified. They did the same thing with him that they did with me, they were just pushing him out the door.

Then one of the most frightening things was as we came outside, they were paving the streets with these cobblestones and they were throwing these stones through the windows and the sexton and family apparently when they first heard the gestapo coming and were told that they had to leave had ordered some taxis for us and the taxis were across the street. Somehow we had to get across that street where they were throwing the cobblestones and not get hit by them. I was just frightened to death and there was no way that I could see or that we could see doing that and they kept throwing and suddenly somebody said they're just children, let them go. And they did stop and we crossed the street and they resumed right away to throw the things so we were able to cross the street which when we were standing there with all those stones coming right where we had to walk across seemed like an impossible thing.

Then I was still unwilling to really let go because I really thought that my parents were in that building still but when we got to the taxi there they were. They had come out by another exit and so we all went to the Jewish nurse's home where there were three Jewish nurses living together, and the sexton's family and us we went there and we were absolutely -- as I say, I still think I had not taken in, even though I lived through it, I didn't really live through it until about a day afterwards until it sank in what had really happened. I was sort of pushed this way and pushed that way and I remember -- the only thing I really remember, there were two things I remember as being terribly frightening. The one thing was that I thought that my parents were still in the house, and the second thing was the cobblestones and how to get to the other side of the street and not get hit and those are the two things that vividly stand out but the rest of it I think I was just like a sort of robot, was doing what I was told to do but not really taking in too much of what was going on.

Then the taxis took us to the nurse's home. Then in the course of the day we heard that the synagogue was just the first Jewish house to be destroyed but they were going to every Jewish home in Esson and taking the males and taking them off to concentration camps. Often destroying the whole house, often injuring the people and so when these reports came in my father realized that what he should do -- since they didn't know where he was because he had escaped, we had left the building before the order to arrest all Jewish men had come through, so they didn't know where he was and he took off and for the next two weeks he was gone. He was actually in different consulates in different cities and would call in from time to time that he was okay but he was still not arrested. So, he was gone and we were sitting there and as more and more reports came in we felt that -- and I especially got very frightened then and thought okay, they did our house but they haven't been to the nurse's home yet. They haven't been here, so when are they going to come, and what are they going to do this time when they come because one of the stories

that still sticks out in my mind is that one somebody in Esson whose home they had visited and the husband when he came out and said what are you doing here or something like that they took a pencil and stuck it through his eyeball and that memory still is in my mind something vivid like that. We heard other stories and so it was very, very difficult for me when night time came to go to bed and I had nightmares and it was really got to the point that I was thinking in the evenings okay let them come, let's get it over with. It's done. They'll only visit this place once and when it's done, it's done and it was very hard for anybody to reassure me that we would not be visited.

My mother and the sexton's family and I guess a lot of other Jewish families tried to call the police from time to time, very naive but you try anything you can and the police were considered the good guys as compared to the SS and to see what houses were on the list for that night. Of course they could get no answers and could get no protection but they tried. I remember every evening them dialing the police and trying to find out. This went on for about a week or more and as I say I was just petrified -- it seemed having that in front of you seemed much worse to me, much more fearful than having gone through it when I was sort of in neutral and really didn't take it in, what was happening. But once I realized what had happened and then having to face that again some of the things that I had heard just seemed unbearable. So, all of us were living there together. There were ten of us by then living together in a place meant for three so we were all doubling up in beds, doubling up everywhere and everybody on edge. It was a very, very difficult time.

Q: Were you reflecting on what had happened that night and learning from your parents, from your sister the different experiences that each of you had had, or were you quiet?

A: Actually, I think that I got some of these stories about what had happened with my father and my mother when they were downstairs with the SI, my mother told us how they goaded my father and said well what do you think about this? Your beautiful synagogue going up in flames and they were half drunk and to my mother they seemed very dangerous which is the reason that she stayed with him.

I guess one asked him for a book, would he consider to give him a book that my father would think worthwhile for this SI man to have and they could never figure out whether the SI man was serious in that or whether he was being sarcastic and I think my mother could never figure out.

So, we shared some of these -- I told my mother of course what had gone on with us so all that was shared at that time. In the long run, people remembered the story differently. There were four of us in the family and each one has four different remembrances of what happened, but that's not unusual. The main facts remain the same, but they're slightly different.

Q: What did you think of these people who were destroying your home? Were you able to think of them as being human?

A: Not human, no. I did not think of them as human. No, I did not think of them as being human not at all. Some kind of animal. That was just beyond everything. In fact, I didn't think of the Nazis afterwards as human. I really didn't. No human being that I had ever met could do things like that or would do things like that. A different species all together.

Q: For the next several weeks then you lived in this very small space?

A: From November until March and that was a very trying time for everybody. My father returned after they were not arresting people anymore. It was a very trying time because there were ten of us living there in a place that was meant for three. Everybody was very tense. Everybody was terribly worried. I remember vaguely that there were squabbles about who could use the telephone because everybody needed the telephone. We were all trying to get out of the country. The need to rescue ourselves, our families, and there was tension about who could use the phone when, and who was using the phone too much, and who was going to cook and even adjusting to all these things in very unfavorable conditions. I mean everybody was not at their best. Everybody was very, very uptight and tense.

It was a very difficult time. Also school went on but it was only a few hours a day because some of the teachers had gone, a lot of the children had gone, so there was a lot of free time for us kids, free time and not much to do and the adults were busy. They were trying to make arrangements to get out of this country. My father was busy making arrangements for other people also to get out of the country and so they were taken up with other things. We couldn't go out on the street and play on the street. There was no backyard. The streets weren't safe for us obviously and the place inside was very small, so there really wasn't much to do so there were a lot of squabbles among us kids too and we devised a way sort of mediation, if you get into a fight with this one, you go to this one first, and this one first and the parents were then the last resort. To keep us occupied since we didn't have school, what we wanted was something to do, some job where we could earn some money too. My job was to polish the shoes for everybody in the house every day and then I got some allowances something at the end, but at least it took time and kept us busy and I think the adults were hard put to keeping everybody busy and occupied at a time like that.

My parents were busy with the trying to get out of the country. I remember also that the people who were arrested crystal night were then, most of them were released within a few weeks, but they came back in terrible condition. Their heads had been shaven and stubble and you know wounds, they looked really as if they had been mishandled.

I remember one of them that was a relative of the sexton coming to the house. He had just gotten out of the concentration camp and he was going to come, and I know how I felt before I saw him, I thought oh I'm going to just go up there and give him a great big hug and kiss. Then I saw him with shaven head and so I was just appalled. I was really taken aback. I did not go up and kiss him. I just couldn't. I was just shocked at the way he looked.

Q: Do you remember games that you played?

A: During that time, I really don't. No, I don't know if it was anything different than we had done before. It was a very restrictive time and I think we did a lot of reading and quiet things were looked upon very favorably in that surrounding.

The thing that kept me going was that everybody shared a bed with somebody else because there obviously weren't enough beds to go around and this head nurse who had

been my friend from the time I was very small little girl, I used to spend weekends with her and so forth, and I shared her big feather bed with her and that always made me feel more secure than I did at any other time that I was there with her. We played games -- she played games with me. She in her feather bed she would build caves and have people coming through very imaginative kinds of things that she would do to keep me occupied. We were on the same wave length sort of.

Q: Did that give you any hope, that security?

A: Not hope, but it helped me to go to sleep. It made me feel more comfortable.

Q: Did you have hope? Were you focused on getting out of the country at that time?

A: Yes, completely. Well, I think everybody realized at that time that the only hope was to get out. We weren't going to make it. There was no way you could survive. I don't think there was any doubt then in anybody's mind, even the ones who had denied many things before, didn't read the tea leaves very well, were sure that that was the time that you had to get out. There was no other way. And so I remember having to go -- there were two ways you could get out, by quota or like my family did, if you had a special visa because you had a special profession and had a job waiting for me. We had both. We had a quota which was coming up fairly soon and then we were able to get the other thing also, but the quota would have been earlier. I remember having to go to Stuttgart to the American consult as a family to see if the quota, the number would work. I remember the responsibility I felt of myself that somehow I was supposed to behave, give the right answers, do the right thing and that was up to me to carry this thing off and I remember when it didn't work, the number didn't work. We came the other way, that when the quota thing ended they said no this is not going to work, I thought that this personally was somehow my fault, that I had probably done something wrong. Not made a good impression or not smiled the right way or whatever it was that this didn't work. So there was a -- I think everybody felt a great deal of responsibility for trying to get out and also we felt very much that we shouldn't bother our parents with anything, or any adult for that matter because they were all -- first of all they didn't have time for it, really they didn't at that point and they were so preoccupied with just the basic necessities of making things go from day to day and trying to make plans for getting out.

Q: You mentioned that you would have lessons for several hours a day?

A: In school, yes.

Q: So you would actually go to school?

A: Yes, we would go to school for a few hours a day, but it was very short, a very abbreviated day.

Q: How would you get there?

A: We walked. We always walked to school. Walking was the norm.

Q: Did you feel was it scary to walk?

A: Yes, well it was even more so -- of course I wasn't the only one. The sexton's children, the four of us, or the three of us rather, we'd walk together. But walking was the way we always went to school, and it was only a few hours a day at that point.

Q: Were you ever threatened while walking during that period?

A: I really must say I personally, fortunately never was, no. I was one of the lucky ones.

Q: During that time, did you begin to question more your identity and whether you had any responsibility for what was happening on a grander scale or were you able to say this is because these animals have --

A: I think that was completely my attitude that these animals have -- no I never felt that the Jews had done something wrong because I knew that -- first of all I thought of my parents as being near perfect at that stage and I knew that they hadn't done anything wrong and looked what had happened to us. No, I didn't feel that the Jews had done anything wrong. No, I felt it was just part of a repetition of past history kind of thing. I didn't feel that the Jews were at fault at all.

Q: Did you believe that there was a place that you could go where Jews were not treated in that way?

A: Well, I thought there would be a place in the world where the Jews could live and I knew they couldn't live in Germany. Now there might be restrictions there too and I sort of assumed at that point that all Jews lived under some restrictions but at least they lived and they weren't going to live in Germany and I think that was pretty obvious.

Q: How did you eventually find a way to emigrate?

A: That's a long story. Actually everybody looked for relatives in other countries and somehow there was an article about my father in a newspaper in New York and it so happened that we discovered a very rich aunt on Park Avenue in New York and she was able to underwrite this special visa for professionals if they had a job. The way she got my father a job is that she went to rabbi _____ who was a rabbi in New York City and she said I will give you a monthly payment of so much and you pay it to Rabbi Hahn and we'll call it a job for him. That's how we were actually able to go this special visa who was for professionals who had a job in another country. It was sheer luck and I think that's one of the things that when I read about the Holocaust and when I see pictures of the Holocaust it always comes to me how easily it could have been me. How easily, it's just sheer chance. It's just an amazing thing that that happened and as I say there's always a little bit of I can't get over how lucky I am to be alive, because it's sheer chance that we happened to be able to get out.

The people from Esson that were killed is just tremendous. There were very few survivors, actually.

Q: What was the date? Do you remember when you found out that you were going to be able to emigrate?

A: We came over in March of '39, so it was maybe February, when it was finalized that they were going to accept this. There was also a question whether they would accept this doctored up job. Once we found out that it would be okay, it was just a few weeks before we left.

Q: Do you remember the mood during that time?

A: Once we found of course well, when we found out that this was going to happen, we were of course very, very happy and of course, very, very scared. America is just such a - in a way you're happy because you're going to live. On the other hand you're afraid of what the new place will hold for you and complete readjustment and having to start from scratch in an unknown place, not knowing the language very well, although we had been studying English but it didn't amount to much.

So, I mean we were very happy on the other hand you feel terrible about the people you're leaving behind and you don't know whether they will now get out or how they'll get out and one of the ones was my grandmother who later died in _____ and my aunt. They lived together.

Then the person who was very important in my life this head nurse who I was very, very close to and we were leaving her. Fortunately though I learned much, much later that she did escape to Sweden after we left, so she was able to survive.

It was a big relief. I mean there's no doubt that there was a big relief when we found out that we could leave the country. The first feeling is one of being relieved and the second feeling is oh my but how is this really going to work out. How am I going to make a living. How are we going to survive under these conditions. And then leaving a lot of friends, a lot of people we were very fond of. My sister especially had a boyfriend she was very close to who she left behind.

Q: Were there still ten people in the house at that point?

A: There were still, yes, and the others then, the sexton and his family later I guess were able to go to Columbia, South America, so they did escape also, but we left before they did.

Q: So you left from this little home in Esson?

A: We went by train to Hamberg and then took a boat from Hamberg and I remember on the train trip to Hamberg of course everybody was in tears and I remember my mother crying. My mother hadn't cried very much during this whole time and my mother was crying and I was very upset that my mother was crying and I asked my father what she was crying about and he said well, she's crying because she's worried about all the suitcases that we are taking. What's she going to do with them in America because the

apartments are very small. Then I came forth with oh well we can store them in the basement or this or that and he said well I'll tell her and that will do it. I remember being terrible concerned about the suitcases and how we were going to store them properly once we got there.

Then we got to Hamberg and got on the boat and because we couldn't take any money out we went first class because we spent it all on that, and almost everybody was seasick the whole trip. Except one day there was big meals and I think I was the only one in the family who was able to eat. I went by myself into this place where they were serving tea and I had tea by myself because everybody else in the family was sick.

Q: How long did the trip take?

A: Close to a week. Maybe five or six days.

Q: Did you meet people on the boat who were escaping?

A: Similar -- no not really. They were mostly tourists actually.. I met some American boys who I thought were my age and I tried to study what they were saying, trying to prepare for what was ahead.

Q: Were you feeling hopeful?

A: Yes, actually I was, but I didn't know all the change that was ahead. It was much more difficult for my parents obviously. When we landed here this relative of ours, the one that rescued us actually, was there to meet us. My parents had actually been studying English for a year, year and a half, found out they really couldn't understand a word. They didn't speak very much and this relative of ours was a very well to do lady. She had a black maid and was very fancy and she took us to her apartment and we had lunch there and it was really very uncomfortable I think for everybody even though we were very, very grateful to her but the communication and the lifestyle and I guess we didn't know what was expected, what was good manners, what was the right thing to do and what was the wrong thing to do and all those things.

Then there was another very wealthy person who lived in Esson who had left before us and they had a big house in Scarsdale and they said that after we arrived we could stay with them for a while until we decided what we were going to do. So, we moved out to their house. These were people who lived in Esson. They had sort of a big, big villa, almost a palace and I was always in awe of them. The way my family talked about them I always felt it was like the king or something like that, some exalted person and we were going to live in their house. I was also concerned was I doing the right thing, was I doing the wrong thing and so I had a meal there and I remember them saying well, we suggested that we help with washing up and so my sister and I went into the kitchen and started to help wash up and I saw for the first time they used soap to wash the dishes. I wasn't used to that and so afterwards I said you know what they do, they use soap on the dishes. We hadn't done that at home. I don't think it was a very comfortable time for my parents either even though it was a very generous thing and obviously we needed it.

Then we stayed there for about three or four weeks and then my father decided what he was going to do was build up a German Jewish congregation in New York even though everybody had told him it had been attempted many times and they have failed. But he was going to do it. Of course he had the synagogue of this rabbi who he was supposedly working for and so he started building a congregation. Actually he was very, very successful. The congregation is in existence today and my brother-in-law was the second rabbi and they have an American rabbi now. He did do well.

We then moved to, first we moved to Hugh Gardens into a little apartment and our furnishings and furniture hadn't come yet so we were borrowing things from people around and it was one bedroom. Now we had come from a -- well of course after crystal night we lived in very cramped quarters but before that we lived in a 14 room house and we were used to upscale living certainly with people to help around the house, two or three of them anyway. So, we were in this little apartment with my parents sleeping in the living room on the studio couch which could be converted into a bed and the other room and having no money, and my mother was not used to housework or anything. She had never done that in her life. That's what I was saying before, the wonderful thing about my parents is they took things as they are. They never complained or they never said oh but in Germany I had it so differently and poor me, what I have to do now. They never made us feel that. They never made us feel deprived or that this was a terrible hardship and I really admire them for that because it was such a change, especially for my mother. She never complained about it though, just took it that that's the way things are.

I remember there was no money. I remember that since they were borrowed things we were supposed to be very careful about them, but there was no desk either so I was doing -- we were in school by that time, and I was doing homework and somehow I was writing in ink and I put an ink spot on the cover of this down cover and we tried to get it out and we couldn't get it out. My mother was just beside herself and I felt terrible and when our own stuff came then we finally returned it and my mother apologized and she could not get over how that could happen that there was this big spot on this blanket. Things were very hard financially. There was no money. I remember we never had icecream because that was too expensive. I remember going to school and they used to have cookies at recess a penny or so a piece. I was allowed to have that once every second week, something like that. We just lived -- we had the bare minimum.

But as I say, the good thing was that my parents really didn't complain about it and didn't say well in Germany we had this and this and this.

Q: You mentioned that you even grew closer as a family?

A: Much closer, because there was nobody between us. My mother took over motherly things that she hadn't done before because somehow she grew up with the idea that she had to live a certain way and she accepted that and one of them was that you had other people take care of your children. I don't think she ever questioned it. She became a real mother, got very involved in our lives and we became a very close knit family. That was the very, very positive part. And she enjoyed it and I think afterwards she realized how much she had missed by not having it or doing it before. She took to it naturally and it was very much a part of her. As a family we lived in this very, very tiny apartment together and so we became much more involved and I think we shared a lot of things

whereas they didn't share that much with us in Germany, partly because they didn't think it was proper and partly to protect us, but here in America we were really involved in the ups and downs of the congregation. This is where I get my ideas of congregational life because we were very involved in what everybody said, what every member said or any criticism that went on.

Q: Were you going to a Jewish school at this time?

A: In this country?

Q: No, it was just a regular school. At that time their theory was just plunk the kids into the classroom and eventually they'll catch on and I think actually that's the best way to learn. It may be very, very hard but at least you do learn it and you learn it in a very short time. I think within three or four weeks I was participating first in math and then in the other things and there was only one other German Jewish boy in my class. I think maybe even in the school, but anyway there was one in my class and he would refuse to speak German. He was an American by then and he refused to own up to the fact that he could speak German and understand German. So, I wasn't able to communicate with him and he was no help to me because he was an American by then and wouldn't have anything to do with refugees.

Q: Did you reflect during that time a lot upon your life in Germany and the events that had led up to your leaving?

A: Yes, very very much and especially as we heard -- well we were very worried about what was happening to the people we had left behind and reflected it on very, very much of my life and always because I reflected on it really felt separate from the other kids for a long long time. I remember still when I was in collage I'd think to myself when I'm going to marry it's only going to be to somebody who has had the same experience I have. I don't think anybody could understand me who hasn't gone through that. Actually, that's what I did. It was a very strong feeling of feeling very separate from people. I felt that I'd seen much more, knew much more. I was different. I was apart.

Q: Did people ask you where you came from?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you tell them?

A: I said Germany. Well, they knew it by my accent and everything else and actually German refugees was very common at that time.

Q: Did they know you were Jewish?

A: Oh yes, in New York City that was fine. That never posed a problem all the time I was in school in New York.

Q: They weren't curious at all about your background?

A: No, they didn't ask much and I must say I didn't volunteer much and I was sort of also trying to get accepted as being one of them. So, differences that I had I wasn't willing to accentuate at that point. I was sort of on the same wave length as this other boy. I was trying to become Americanized to be accepted to be part of the group, rather than pointing up differences of what I had known, what I had seen, what I had gone through.

Q: How did those early years in Germany influence you in the few years that were following as you were a teenager and growing up and being an American?

A: Well, I think that it made me realize -- it made me more pessimistic of human nature of people and of what can happen in the world and I think also I realized how important it is to stand up for what you think and what you believe and I think the feeling to do the right thing, social justice and so forth became very important in my life. It has been very important in my life, along with the feeling that anything can happen anywhere, any time. It can happen here. I think it's with you, not consciously, but I think it's with you all your life that you just have this certain knowledge of things that other people don't have. You don't even think they can understand.

In my case I didn't really want to bring it up too much. It's mine, it's part of me. I know it's there and because I felt that others might not understand or reject I sort of kept it to myself rather than share it.

Q: Do you believe that people here were different?

A: No, because the people I had known before were very nice. Some of them like _____. I didn't feel they were different. I felt they were very kind but I didn't feel that you couldn't change. I guess that's what I mean by my basic feeling of pessimism because I didn't think that could ever happen. My father was one of the most respected people in Esson, very well known, at one point had a lot of non-Jewish friends and so forth, and it happened to him so I guess I sort of had the feeling that anything is possible given certain circumstances.

Q: Has your father remained in New York?

A: Yes, he was a rabbi in New York, well he retired and then he died a little later and my brother-in-law took over the congregation before my father retired and my brother-in-law has now passed away too and so has my sister. But it's a thriving congregation still. When I go back there some of the people, people who knew me from the time I was ten years old, they're now in their eighties, high eighties.

Q: Could you just tell me a little bit when you were in New York for how long before you met your husband?

A: I came over when I was ten and I met Ernie when I was 17, so seven years. He was in the army and actually it's one of those things that he was on furlough and his parents invited my family and children to come over. Actually, the way it worked is they invited my sister who is two and a half years older, but they felt that I was too young. So, I didn't go. I wasn't invited, I wasn't included in the invitation. Then my parents invited his parents back and that's when we met for the first time and the thing with my sister and Ernie didn't work out but he decided that he was interested in me but my sister who was a very domineering kind of person didn't take kindly to that so he didn't know how to get out of it so what he did is arrange for a double date and asked us and I thought it was fine. I thought I was going to go with a friend and Ernie was going to go with my sister because that's how it had been. I thought they liked each other and that's how it had been arranged originally and we were going to a concert in Lewis Stadium and we were going to go on the bus and as we were boarding the bus I was going with this other guy and he said no, no, you go with me and they go together. So, then we got to the concert and my sister was just furious. She wouldn't talk to him. This poor guy who happened to be a very nice guy just wouldn't talk to him the whole time and then we got back and then we started dating.

Q: When did you marry?

A: I was twenty. I got married, I finished college in three years and during that time first he was at Columbia and then he was up at Cornell and he came home and would come and visit, take the bus down actually which was quite a trip. There was a certain amount of friction, we had German families that we had dealings with and his family was much more old fashioned than my family. They had the idea that when he came home -- they lived in Brooklyn, that he should first come to see them and he shouldn't see me and our idea was that we should meet first in the city and then he could go home. There were arguments all the time about his role towards his parents and towards me. Eventually, after we got married we spent a summer in New York and then we moved to Cornell and that solved all problems for everybody. When we came we just shuffled back and forth between the families.

Q: How long were you in Cornell?

A: Well we were first in Cornell for three years and then Ernie graduated and was in practice for a year. Then he came back and he got his Phd which was another three years and two of our children were born during that time in Cornell. Then after that we came out here and the other two were born out here. Actually the life at Cornell was one of the best parts we both think of our lives. We were graduate students and we lived in this housing project and everybody there had no family but lots of them had little kids and it was a nice community. We helped each other out. There was always somebody there for you. It was very congenial living even though you had no money but it wasn't hopeless because everybody knew eventually once they finished their studies they'd be okay. So, that was one of the nice parts actually looking back on that.

Q: What were you studying?

A: I wasn't. He was studying veterinarian medicine. Cornell is a med school and I had a job for a while in a flower store, not much of a job and then we were in practice. When he was in practice I had another secretarial job. Then when we came back I was pregnant and had children at that time. You were home with kids, there was no child care or anything.

Q: And you've lived in Davis for 40 years?

A: Right. It's been a good place, a good place to raise children. A bad place for teenagers. I think they get sort of bored with it.

Q: Now that you've had the span of our lifetime and you've had years to reflect on your early childhood and you mentioned your feeling of pessimism after you arrived, has that remained?

A: Yes, it has, it really has. I don't see how it could ever leave you after you've seen first hand what you have seen. You can't erase that. It was so many people I remember when the synagogue was burning when we were coming out, there was a whole crowd there standing there and cheering and they were throwing things. It wasn't one or two individuals doing this. It was a whole big population. So, yes, I don't see how you can wash that away or come to any other conclusion that it's possible.

Q: What's given you hope and kept you going all these years?

A: Well I think the hope is that you have to show people and alert people to the dangers and make them aware that when they see an injustice you have to stand up right away because if you don't do it right away, later on you can't. That was certainly with the Germans. When some of them finally realized, it was too late for them to even do something without endangering themselves.

Conclusion of Interview