

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

RUTH FOSTER

Interviewed by Patricia R. Mendelson

C410/102/01-06

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**BRITISH
LIBRARY**

IMPORTANT

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

Should you find any errors please inform the Oral History curators.

This transcript is copyright of the British Library. Please refer to the oral history section at the British Library prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

Oral History
British Library Sound Archive
96 Euston Road
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk

Fl184 Side A

My name is Ruth Foster. My maiden name was Heilbronn. I was born in Lingen an der Emms in Germany. That's the Northern part of Western Germany, near the Dutch border, in November 1922.

And where were you brought up?

I was brought up in Lingen. I went to the Volksschule in Lingen. That's the elementary school. And then to the Gymnasium, until 1937. I had to leave the school. All Jewish children had to leave the school.

And could you tell me your father's name?

My father's name was Wilhelm. And he was born in Lengerich, Kreis Lingen.

And was he brought up there as well?

He was brought up there. And the family has been living there since 1750, something like that. Came originally from Holland, most probably from Spain. My mother's name was Caroline Heilbronn nee Gruenfeld. She came from Wener, which is in Ostfriesland, near the Dutch - very near the Dutch border. And her ancestors came from Holland.

And what was your father's occupation?

My father was a cattle dealer. Which most of the Jews in that part of Germany were.

And what sort of position in the community were they?

My father was a Vorstand Judischen Gemeinde. I don't know what you call it in English.

Were they relatively well off?

They were relatively well off until Hitler came, you know, then things did change.

And was your father brought up in an orthodox family?

Fairly - traditional orthodox. I mean he kept a strictly kosher home. We kept all the holidays. And it was more tradition than learning.

Now this was your family, but your father's family as well when he was a child growing up?

Yes, and father's family. My mother's family were ultra-orthodox. And I still have cousins which are still very orthodox. Uncles of mine had their own synagogue in their house in Bremen. And - but at home we were - and after you couldn't buy kosher meat anymore, we didn't have any meat at all. That's why I ended up in the

Agudaheim in Berlin, when eventually I went to Berlin to make my 'O' levels, the equivalent of 'O' levels, and I stayed in an Agudaheim.

Was your father one of many. How many brothers and sisters did he have?

My father had five brothers and two sisters. They were all married with children. And they all got killed with their spouses and their children. From father's side there are only three cousins, we are three cousins alive. One in Bielefeld and one in San Francisco, and me. From mother's side there were ten. Five brothers and five sisters. They were killed with their spouses, and there are six surviving cousins.

Now in your father's home, when he was young, would they have spoken German?

They spoke German, perfect. No Yiddish at all. I learnt Yiddish in London. In the camp first, and then from the English Jews in London. My father, as I said before, had five brothers. They all served in the First World War. And they were in the.. What do you call regiments here? One served with the Hussars. One with the Kurassiers. And one with the Dragoons. Because they were all six feet tall. And my father served with the Kurassiers in Santawold, which was in France and Germany. All five brothers were in the First World War, where my father got the Iron Cross first and second class. And afterwards Goering gave all those Frontsoldaten the Feldehrenkreuz, even the Jewish ones. And as I have told you in my story before, my father was shot in Riga in May '42, because a German soldier recognised him at his workplace, and asked him "Wilhelm, what are you doing here?". My father just made a sign, 'be quiet', and just said "Bread". The following day this soldier brought my father a piece of bread. And on the gate, in the evening, back into the ghetto they found this loaf of bread on him, and my mother and I we were called, we had to stand in the front row, and they shot him in front of our own eyes. And his last words were "Kaiser Wilhelm said Der Dank des Vaterlandes sei Euch gewiss".

Was your father's family a political one?

Not to my knowledge. I was a child then. I know that my father was a Social Democrat. But how far he believed in it or not, I don't know. But he was definitely not political active. And neither of my uncles or cousins, some of them were much older than me.

In your father's home, when he was growing up, would his parents have dressed traditionally or in modern dress?

Oh, modern, modern, yes, modern.

Would your grandmother have worn a scheidel?

No, no, no. Oh, grandmother, from father's side, no. From mother's side, yes. Yes, yes.

And were they very observant?

Very observant. But they were more modern. I mean modern dress, no Hassidic attire.

And your mother's family's political affiliations?

None whatsoever.

What about their leisure time, what sort of interests did they have when you were growing up and living at home?

I don't know. I mean the family was their life. And they were always very close knit Jewish communities. And they were on very good terms with their Christian neighbours. That's what I saw now when I went back to Germany. They came - you know the grandchildren, and they had heard from their parents, how they talked about Heilbronn's Wilhelm, as my father was known. Which touched me and upset me at the same time, that ... they were very well liked.

Did they have anti-Semitic experiences?

None whatsoever, except my father in one case in 1933, right at the beginning. And there are still witnesses in my home town, that he - was in a pub where he met some business friends. And there was one young fellow there - who was alive until recently - and he said, "You dirty Jew, what are you doing here?" And that was unheard of at that time in our area. So my father said "I don't want to make any business here with you, come outside". But before my father could give him... I don't know in English.

Say it in German.

Eine Ohrfeige. Before my father could sort of .. get hold of him, he kicked my father, who fell to the ground, and he really and truly crippled him for the rest of his life. He injured his spine. And from then on my father walked with a limp. And he was taken into Schutzhaft. What they called that at the time, you know, so that nothing should happen to him. It was a paradox actually, expression for Schutzhaft. And there he was for about two months. In the prison, in my home town, which has a very large prison. It still has until now. And he was released. But that was the only incident. In other smaller towns and villages near my home town the Jews were molested. But nothing in my home town. And also in that small town my father came from, where there were only Heilbronns. There were no other Jews, but Heilbronns.

How did your parents meet each other?

That I wouldn't know. Most probably it was an arranged marriage, like it was so often done.

What year did they get married?

1919 I think. Or 1920. I'm not exactly sure.

And how many children in the family?

I'm the only child.

Can you describe the home you grew up. Was it a house, or a flat?

A beautiful house. I've got the picture upstairs.

Can you describe it for me?

Yes. It was a beautiful house. Sort of - a detached one. In a Tudor style. And with an inscription, which I have to say in German, 'Trautes Heim, Gluck allein'. And a beautiful big front and back garden. With two big pine trees in the front garden. What do you want to know, how many rooms there were? There was a very big entrance hall, a dining room and a lounge, which was called Herrenzimmer. And then a living room, and a kitchen. And we had a meat kitchen in the basement, and a milk kitchen on the ground floor. And there were four bedrooms, and a bathroom, at that time was quite something. The water was heated by wood - and by coal. And one floor higher was the attic, where in the winter the washing was dried. And the two bedrooms where the maids slept.

How many maids did you have?

We had two. We had the small Maria and the big Maria. And from the big Maria I've got even a tape here.

You have a tape of hers?

I have a tape of hers, which a friend of mine made. And they asked her similar questions, about my family and about my youth, and she answered. And they asked her about the Jewish Festivals, and she explains that the meat had to be koshered, and my parents bought - bought her dowry for her when she got married, and she was with us for six or eight years.

I would love to hear that if I may.

That is here.

So you had the two Marias, and they were with you for many years?

For many years, yes.

What was your mother's role in the house?

She was just a housewife and mother. She did, even in her small way, voluntary services. As I said, there was a very big ... prison in my home town. And from time to time, unfortunately, there were Jewish prisoners there. And specially during Hitler time, because of the Nuremberg laws, or.. smuggling money, smuggling, etcetera, etcetera. And my mother got to know of it and she would cook kosher meals and bring it to them. And also we had a very big hospital there with a gynaecological

department, and when there were Jewish women there she would cook and look after them. That was concern. But otherwise she was just a housewife and mother, and all together a very good and religious person.

Could you describe the household routine for me perhaps?

My father would go out in the morning on business. And my mother was just in the house. I mean at that time once a month you did the washing. And in the autumn - you know the big washing, bed linen etcetera. Because in the basement there was a kitchen specially made for washing. And in the autumn one would preserve fruits and foods and vegetables. And she was always busy. We always had visitors.

Jewish visitors or also...?

Family, family. Jewish visitors. And business acquaintances of my father's. And neighbours and friends from the town. My parents were fairly popular. My father belonged to Schutzenverein. I don't know what you call that!

It's shooting, isn't it?

Yes, it's shooting. And every second year they - elect a king. He elects a queen. Because my father was - went horseriding a lot, so they had special uniforms, you know, on the horse. I think I've got pictures somewhere upstairs, I don't know.

Was the house in a particularly Jewish sector of the town?

No, there were only twenty families in my home town, and I came back the only survivor. Except one who lives in Derby, he was sent with the children's transport, and I met him again after 50 years. So we are the only two survivors.

So you were very well integrated?

Very well, yes, yes, yes. But we were very secular at the same time as being orthodox. We didn't keep ourselves to ourselves, you know, we mixed freely and - I had - Christian girlfriends needless to say.

They came home?

They came to our place.

And you to theirs?

And I to theirs, yes, yes.

And what about Friday evenings?

Friday evening was strictly kept. One prepared the whole week for Shabbat, more or less (laughs), you know. On Friday nights everybody had a bath before Shabbat came in, and my father would shave at the last minute. And the food was being prepared

for Shabbat already on Friday. My father would go to the synagogue on Friday nights. And the last words of my mother always were, "If there are some poor men there..." - because at that time you had these hawkers, they came with havdala candles and with things, "If there is somebody poor there bring him home for a Shabbat meal". And I had lots of cousins that came over Shabbat. So Friday night started when my father came back from the synagogue, with Kiddish and Mauzeh. And we had our traditional Friday night meal.

What did you have to eat?

We didn't have gefillte fish what they have here. We had chicken soup. And always a sweet - after chicken soup a sweet vegetable. It wasn't served with the meat, but separately. And then we had meat and potatoes and salad, and compote. The English Jews call compote mixed dried fruit. We had either stewed pears or stewed apples. Then later on we had always a cup of tea with nuts and chocolates and little biscuits, and we sung Semiroth. And that was sort of Friday night. And on Shabbat we would go to the synagogue. And Maria would - and the food was prepared, but Maria would do the potatoes and she would do the fire, and so on. After the Nuremberg laws when we didn't have any more maids, the woman who came every month to do the washing, Frau Westermann, she became our daily, our cleaner, because she was over 45 years old. And she became the lady that came in on Friday nights, she turned off our lights except for one. She came in on Shabbat and she cooked our potatoes and heated up the soup and vegetables. And on Shabbat after the synagogue and we had our meal, my parents invariably went to sleep, and I met some friends. And then one went visiting, or visitors came to us. In the summer we went for long walks, until in the evening my father - there was no evening synagogue on Motse Shabbat. But then my father made Hawdalah. And Shavua tov. That was it. Then on Sundays we invariably visited the grandparents, the grandmothers. I never knew my grandfathers, they died before I was born.

And the grandmothers lived near you?

Father's mother lived 17 kilometres, which is about 12 miles. He went there more or less every Sunday. And to the grandmother near the Dutch border we went not as often, but I spent my summer holidays with her, and an uncle and aunt who lived with her.

Did you have a car?

No. My father had a motorbike. And a bicycle.

So how would you go the 17 kilometres?

We either would cycle with my father, or we went - there was a small - schmalspur -

Small gauge.

Small gauge train. We would go by this small gauge train. And our cousins with horse and cart, would pick us up, because it was three kilometres to where my

grandmother lived. Or I would go on the back of my father's motorbike. Or my mother would go by this little small railway, and the cousins would pick her up.

Were you close to your grandmothers?

Yes, very close. But there were lots of grandchildren, so - one had seven children, they all got killed, from father's side. One had four, they got killed. One had six, of which one cousin is alive in Bielefeld now. And there was a large family also from mother's side.

So you were large families on both sides, and you all lived close to each other?

Close together, yes. And were always very close.

So you saw a lot of each other?

We saw a lot of each other, and cousins spent summer holidays either with us or I spent with my uncles and aunts and the cousins and the grandmothers, you know. And we took in in the last years, during Hitler, some Jewish children from bigger towns. That was done through the Reichsbund Judischer Frontsoldaten. They sent their children into smaller towns. They couldn't afford to send them to holiday homes, so they sent them to Jewish families, and my parents volunteered to have some youngsters. Because they enjoyed living in the country and with horses and cows and chickens (laughs). Maria will tell you how she had to go every Wednesday to the slaughterhouse to have the chickens slaughtered when a Shacharit came. I think it's on this tape. With my mother she went. (Laughs).

Now you described your house for me. Could you perhaps describe the furnishing, what style it was furnished. Can you remember?

I know that I was told for - for that time - my parents had beautiful furniture. And there is still one leather three piece suite in my home town, which they call Clubmotel. And a very nice smoking table, with a brass top, inlaid brass top. And I was told, do I want it? I said "I can't bring it to England unless you transport it. And where would I have room for it here?" But I would not have minded their smoking table. They had it beautifully furnished. And she might even mention something like that in here.

Pictures on the walls?

Yes. Very nice pictures. But what they were and how they were, I don't know.

Flowers?

Flowers. And my mother had beautiful jewellery, and she was known for that. Which my father didn't buy her, but she bought it with her dowry. And all the daughters got the same dowry.

What was your mother's father's profession?

He was - I didn't know him. But he went - with materials. He had a horse and cart and went to the farms, and into Holland, and sold materials, remnants and things, to the farmers. And he apparently made a lot of money at that time. Which was before the First World War. I mean nothing highbrow. But very honourably.

Can you remember any games or songs and things you used to sing as a child?

Oh yes, I know all the songs.

Really?

I still know them. All the songs. I was in the childrens' choir for my Volksschule, for my school. And every Christmas we had to sing in this prison, and in the church, which my mother really didn't like much, and always - Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her, etcetera etcetera.

So you weren't at a Jewish school?

No. But twice a week, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, came a Jewish teacher from a nearby village, which was much smaller. My home town was a Kriesstadt, you know, was quite a big town.

How many inhabitants?

25,000. Which was then not bad. But from a smaller town, or village, came this - the religious teacher. Religionslehrer. On Wednesdays and Sundays. And we learnt quite a bit with him, in spite of us taking the mickey out of him. But I learnt a lot then when I was in Berlin. I went to the Adass school in Sigmundshof, where I did my 'O' levels. Mittlere Reife. And then I went to the kindergartnerin Seminar.

Where did you have these lessons on Sundays with the religious teacher?

We had a little school, which is still standing. They burnt the synagogue in '38. And behind it was a tiny little school. One room and a toilet. And there was an iron stove in the middle of this room, with a few benches. And there we were. Lomed aleph beth. And this school still exists. And I was told after the synagogue burned down in November '38, they made this into a stable for horses. And my home town want to make a little museum there now. They want to buy it back from the owner, or whoever took possession of it at the time. And want to make like a little Volksmuseum, a little museum.

So tell me about the games you used to play as a child. What sort of toys did you have?

Dolls. She will tell you I was quite spoilt. Dolls and - doll's pram. And I had a beautiful... Doll's house. And we played the usual games, Mensch arger Dich nicht, and all these things.

Did your parents play games with you?

No, my father played every Sunday morning, he had his Stammtisch, it was his certain cronies. They met in a pub and they played Skaat. Every Sunday morning, and sometimes during the week as well. And he belonged to the local mens' choir. There were no other Jews there, but my father did. And - what games? I played with the children in the street, you know, we annoyed other people by ringing the doorbells and hiding behind the next corner. And there were seasons. You played with your skipping rope a season, and then you had - called it a pintop, which was a little thing with a whip. A sort of different season for different games. And I was not artistic, but I was quite gifted and I did a lot of needlework. So some friends of mine, we would meet in each others houses and do some crochet or knitting or embroidery, and we made presents for our mothers for Channukah, made it for Christmas, or for their birthdays. I've still got a - I've got it here. I came across it the other day. A beautiful tablecloth which I embroidered as a surprise for my mother's birthday. I think we occupied ourselves like that.

How old were you at that time?

I was between 10 and 12. And when it was finished I had...

Did you celebrate the Christmas festivities in any way?

No, we didn't. But as we had these maids - there was never a Christmas tree or anything in our home.

End of F1184 Side A

Fl184 Side B

I think you were saying that you didn't celebrate the Christmas holidays?

No. It was my mother's birthday on the 21st of December - 24th of December. And we always had lots of visitors. If we didn't have visitors, we would go to my grandmother's, from father's side, and my father and all the uncles would play cards, the whole night, they would play cards right through the night. Then the women were gossiping and we were playing. And I used to go to the neighbours in my father's home town and sing under their Christmas tree, all those little Christmas songs, you know. Which I learned in the choir. And three years ago the Jews - the Heilbronns, there were only Heilbronns in Lengerich - they were very honoured, they put a beautiful memorial up in their honour. And the whole village of 5,000 people assembled.

That's wonderful.

And I had a memorial put up in my home town. With a Hebrew text from The Lament. And it is: 'Um diese weine Ich'. 'For These I Cry'. With all the names. And on the 9th of November there they made a beautiful, beautiful commemoration. And I was invited, I went there.

So what about schooling. You went to kindergarten?

I didn't like it. So I was very short in the kindergarten, which was with nuns. Then I went to the Volksschule until I was 10.

That was from what age?

From seven, till 10. Then I went to the Gymnasium. But they called it Hoherer Tochterschule.

Could you perhaps describe the Volksschule?

It was a Protestant one. Girls and boys, but we were segregated, only girls' classes and the same with boys' classes. And they came from all walks of life. And when you were 10 you could sit for a free scholarship. There were only a few places. Or you had an entrance exam to either the Gymnasium for the boys, or the entrance exam for the Hoherer Tochter Schule for the girls. And I didn't get an assisted place, but my parents paid for that, and I was there until '37.

And what year did you go to the Volksschule. What year was that?

Must have been '32.

Were there any special provisions for Jewish children in that school?

No, but I did go on Saturdays. But I was suspended from writing. I didn't have to write. We had to go Saturday mornings. And on Jewish holidays I stayed away.

How were you treated?

Very well. Very well. At that time. But later on when I was in the Tochter Schule, we had a teacher, she was a head of the Frauenschaft, and she was absolutely dreadful towards me. I was the only girl, Jewish girl, in that school. I had to sit separately. There were two benches left vacant, and I sat against the wall. The other teachers felt sorry for me, but they couldn't show it - in the playground. And they couldn't give me any privileges, because they were afraid of this teacher.

Can you remember her name?

Yes, Fraulein Senkstark. She apparently died only a few years ago. And when I come to my home town there's quite a - quite a gathering of former school - I can't call them friends, but - com... compatriots?

Companions?

Companions of mine. And I wonder sometimes how they have the nerve to show their faces. They never did me any personal harm, but they shunned me. They were maybe afraid to talk to me, or... up till - up till shortly before that, we used to walk home together after school, because we had needlework certain afternoons and sports another afternoon, and I was always excused when Shabbat came in early. On Fridays we had sports, and I had to be home in good time before Shabbat came in.

What year was it that the childrens' attitude towards you changed?

I would say '35. I can't be certain. Because this teacher who became then the headmistress, because she fought with the headmistress who was a strong Catholic, lost her job, and she made herself the headmistress. She used to go to the Nuremberg Rallies. And so I would say it changed about 1935.

They then avoided you?

They avoided me. Except for one or two, and they are still alive, and I see them when I go over there, and I had a postcard from one of them, she is at the moment in a Spa at Bad Salzoffel. Her father was a dentist, and the other one's father was a gynaecologist in the home town. And they were very decent, they never charged the Jewish patients during the Hitler time. And were not afraid to treat the Jewish patients either. I must say, there were quite a few fanatics in the town, but... And my father always thought - we were talking about emigrating, and I was supposed to come with a children's transport. My father said, "I am so well known, nobody will do us any harm".

What role did your father play in your upbringing?

He paid for everything (laughs).

Discipline and that sort of thing.

Oh, they were pretty relaxed, and I think I was not unruly, I was quite easy to... There were no problems. My mother used to say she never had any difficulty with my homework and with my eating. Never any worries. I was a good eater and I never bothered them about my homework, I did it always, and... No trouble there.

What was the nearest big town?

The nearest big town was Osnabruck.

Did you used to go there?

Not often. Only when there were - during Hitler times there were from the Jewish... Jewish Frontsoldaten... How does one say it in English? There was a - a group of German Jews who served during the First World War, and birds of the feather flock together, so they made Vereine...

Reunions?

Not reunions. It was allowed under Hitler... Clubs. And they had, for instance, Channukah parties, or Purim parties. Channukah Bal or Purim Bal, for which they had to have special permission. And we went there. I was too young, but my parents went, and the children were together, you know, we were entertained, and one just kept busy amongst Jewish circles.

What about music? Theatre and things like that?

When I was at an age where I could have gone to the theatre, Jews were not allowed anymore. But my mother used to go a lot, because my father was busy. And she used to take my cousin who lives now in Bielefeld, who is 13 years older than me, she always used to - They used to put her on a Postauto, you know, there were no trains at the time, or there was this little train, but that didn't run as frequently as this Postcoach, or the Postbus. And they would put her on there, and my mother would meet her, and she would take her to Osnabruck or Munster, to the theatre.

How about music?

There wasn't much. I was very musical, that's why I belonged to the choir. But already we had a piano at home. And when I showed signs that I might be musical there was no more - no music teachers anymore who might have taught me to play the piano.

Were your parents musical?

They sang beautifully, both of them. And I was known even in the camp for always singing while we were working. I was told by a friend of mine who lives in the States now, even while we were working, you know, I was singing. But -

You found schoolwork easy, or..?

Very easy, very easy, yes.

Can you remember any other teachers apart from this one who...?

Yes, I remember most of the teachers, the French teacher, they were exceedingly nice to me. But they couldn't show it. They couldn't show that they felt sorry for me, because their job was on the line. So I just stood during the intervals, you know, I stood in a corner on my own. And I walked home on my own, I got there on my own. But... That was it. And then in '37 we had to leave, that was law all over Germany, that Jewish children can't go to Christian schools anymore, to German schools anymore. And I was for a while at home, and went to an aunt who had a big farm, for six months. And there I had to really work hard and I was only a youngster.

What year was this?

That was before I went to Berlin, that must have been '36, '37, I don't remember.

How old were you then?

I was 15. And because I was on the waiting list for Berlin, my mother said, "If you stay at home you will stay in bed long, you don't do anything, you better go there and learn how to milk cows and all sorts of things, which... whatever you know might come in useful later on". But I never had to milk cows.

So your schooling stopped at that point?

Stopped, until I went then to the Adass school in Berlin.

And that was in what year?

That was - the years, I get them mixed up. '37, and it only took six months until I took my 'O' levels, equivalent of 'O' levels. And I had already a place at the Kindergartnerin Seminar in Berlin, in Grunewald, in Wangenheimstrasse. Later on they had to give up this beautiful building, and we went into the Meinikestrasse 10, near the Ulanstrasse, near Kurfurstendam. It's the same building where the Palestine Offices were. And I went then to live in an Aguda home. All religious children were there. Because - not just from the kindergartnerin Seminar, but also others were there, they learned - they were with ORT. Some learned dressmaking and hairdressing and so on, you know, something that might be useful if you were to emigrate, because you couldn't study anymore, so you had to have some artisan jobs, you know.

When you first went to Berlin, where were you living?

I was living also already in this Agudaheim.

But you went to school every day?

Every day to the Wangenheimstrasse in Grunewald.

Was that a mixed school?

No, no, no, it was a Kindergartnerin Seminar. Oh, that was the Adass, that was in Sigmundshof, near the Tiergarten, in Berlin. That was a mixed Jewish school. Yes, a very orthodox one. And there I took my Mittlere Reife, you know, my 'O' levels. But I lived already in Agudaheim. And from there I went to the Wangenheimstrasse for Kindergartnerin. A kindergarten teacher you see, and nursing. I learnt - I was trained there, until that was... until they had to give this up, and we got rooms in the Meinikestrasse zehn, where the Palestine Offices were, the emigration for Palestine. And we worked in different Jewish kindergartens, in Berlin. And also in the Jewish Hospital. As trainees. So I never finished my training, because then my parents got, in December '41, they got a notice that they would be deported to the East, and I volunteered.

Now can we just go back for a minute? How far was Berlin from your home?

Quite a bit, had to change in Hanover. About a three hour journey, I don't know, by train.

So how often were you able to go home?

I had to have special permission later on, you know, to travel. I used to go for the Jewish holidays, twice a year. My mother came over sometimes. Because I had an uncle and aunt, a brother of my father's, with his wife, who always had strokes. They came from my father's home town, Heilbronn. And they were in a Jewish old people's home in Berlin, and my mother would come sometimes to visit them. The parents of this cousin who lives in Bielefeld. And they were sent both paralysed, they were shipped into cattle trucks.

How did you feel about being separated from your parents at a relatively early age, and sent to Berlin to school?

I enjoyed it. Because I was entirely in a Jewish surroundings. Sort of it was more like a ghetto life. The Jewish children. And we got on very well with each other. And we were pleased that we were... we felt safe... in each other's company. We didn't have to look over the shoulder. We didn't have to be afraid what we were saying, we could let ourselves go and...

It must have been a very different life from home though?

Oh, it was quite different, yes, it was quite different. It was actually like living on a Hashara. You know, we had our duties. And we had to clean the rooms, and all the rooms for the boys and the washrooms, the dining rooms, we had to wash up. You know, there were all different things. And I was thinking the other day of the girls that were in my year at the Kindergartnerin Seminar and the nursing, the Nursing Seminar, there are only two left. As far as I know. One in America, with whom I exchange Jewish New Year's cards. Kate Selig her name was. I've forgotten her

married name now, it's upstairs. And myself. I can't recollect... We met five years ago. I couldn't recollect anybody else who was with us in that year.

So your formal school education finished with your abitur?

No, with my 'O' levels.

'O' levels, I'm sorry.

I wasn't that clever. I might have been, but -

And that was at what age?

16.

And you then went straight to the kindergarten to learn?

And I was there until my parents - until December '41. Until I volunteered to go with them on the transport to Riga.

You were saying that you were in a totally Jewish environment in Berlin, and what did you do in your spare time there, all of you?

There wasn't much spare time. We had homework. And then as I mentioned before, we were sort of in a hostel, a Agudaheim, which was a Hashara without the work on the farm, on the land. And we had to do the chores in the home there, we had to help with the washing up and clearing up and cleaning and keeping a garden, and grow some vegetables, because food was hard to come by, and so on. They had these little plots. Everybody had their job to do. And at nights there were already air-raids, from '40 there were air-raids we had.

So you couldn't really take advantage of Berlin as a big City?

Not at all. Not at all. Not at all. First of all, my parents would not have liked it if I had run around there, you know. So that's why they got me into this orthodox home, knowing that at least there I would have been safe (laughs).

Did you have synagogue services at that time?

Yes, we had even a synagogue in the home. And only on Shabat did we go all the way to Sigmundshof to a synagogue. But we had morning service and evening service. And during mealtimes we sang Semiroth, on Friday nights and Shabat. The boys were separated from the girls, you know, they sat at different tables to the girls. And -

Did you actually fraternise with the boys. Or was it very separate?

Not much. We fraternised with them, but from a distance. Like you see now at orthodox weddings, women are in this room and the men in the other. We were

sitting on one side of the room and the boys on the other. I mean we did sneak and have a conversation with them. No, but not openly.

So there wasn't really much time for fun?

Not much fun, no. But even so, I was very happy being amongst Jewish boys and girls.

It gave you a feeling of security.

Security. Because in my home town there were only three other contemporaries of mine. One was sent on the childrens' transport, who lives now in Derby. And the other one, Gerda Grunbecher, was two years older than me, came on to the transport with her parents, then perished in the camp. We were the only three young... At that time, you know.

The distance from the home where you lived, to where you were working?

It was quite a way, we had to go by U Bahn. We had to go to the Ulanstrasse and Kurfurstendam. How we got there, I don't know now. But that was the nearest U Bahn station. And then into the Meinikenstrasse and Meinikenstrasse Zehn, at number ten was the Kindergartnerin Seminar. But when we were in the Grunewald, in Wangenheimstrasse, first, that was a long way, and we went by... I don't know how we got there, I've forgotten.

Was that without problems, or did you come up against discrimination?

No problem, no, none at all, none whatsoever. None whatsoever. But the - the Seminar in the Grunewald, it was too expensive for the Jewish Kulturgemeinde to keep open. That's why we shared the.. The school came into this building where at the same time the Palestina Amt was housed.

And this was all functioning normally up until 1941, when you...?

It was functioning, yes, yes. And I think afterwards I heard... I made enquiries, and I was told - I don't know by whom - that they went as a group, were sent to Auschwitz, the youngsters. But that is only hearsay. As far as I know, there is one woman now living in New York, she was together with me. There might be some more, but not to my knowledge.

So when you heard that your parents were going to be deported East, what did you do?

My mother sent me a telegram that on the 10th of the 12th '41, they would be deported. I think they knew already Riga. Either Riga or East. So I volunteered. At that time we wore already the Star of David. And there was a curfew for Jews, after a certain time we were not allowed to leave the houses. And you had to have travel permission. So I got permission to travel, and I volunteered to go with my parents on this transport.

So you went home?

I went home. At that time already since early '40, all the Jews in many places, and in my home town as well, had to leave their own homes, and they established Judenhauser. Houses where the Jews were living. And there were two in my home town, and in each house were about three to four families, because by that time there were not - there weren't many Jews left.

Was that very cramped, or did they...?

It was very cramped. We had two rooms, you know.

How did the people get on with each other?

Very well, yes, they knew each other from... Everybody had their own kitchen, and that was important. Even if it was just a little gas-ring in a corner. They didn't have to share. You still had your independence. There was a bathroom in the house, so that you had to share. And what they called a Waschkuche, which was like an outhouse, where you did the laundry, where you did the washing. That had to be shared, and you sort of had to put your name down when you wanted to do it, you know. But otherwise I think it... I was away, not very often.

So what had happened to your own home?

We had to vacate it, and it was sold Zwangsverkauf. I got it back after the war. Yes, I got it back. And I had a flat in the house. Unfortunately - I mean after I married my husband, and he came to England with his regiment, and we intended to go to the States. And he was a Polish quota, so it took a longer time for him to emigrate, so he is established here as a doctor. Being in the Army he didn't have to qualify again, so he was in '48 allowed immediately, he came onto the permanent register, to practise. So he said, "We are not staying here, we are going away, you sell the house". So I sold the house to a neighbour, for the old D Mark. Not for Reichsmark. I don't know what it was called then. Which was later on... (laughs)... I got very little for it.

Right. So you went home. Can you describe a little bit what happened, what you found there and what happened subsequently?

It was panic, you know, it was panic. We were sent, only three families were sent, my parents and Grunbergs and another uncle of mine who had to leave Lengerich, and was also in this Judenhaus. And people were fairly panicky. You know, we had a big list what you could take, what you were allowed to take. Up to a hundred pounds per person, and what was the best thing to do, and what to do with the other things. And - and where to get those things, the vitamins which they said you should take, and, you know, we got a list from Berlin. And - but then... I think you have it even in the book, what happened. What happened in my home town.

They sent you lists of what you had to take, and what you had to leave behind as well?

No. They didn't know what we had. They sent us a list... Who do you mean, the Germans? Oh the Germans. Yes, we had to make a list what we left behind. Every little... Every stick, and everything they wanted to know it. You had to write down everything what was left - left behind.

What was the attitude of all the other people in the town to this?

They didn't know. Only very few people knew that we were deported.

What did they think was happening?

They didn't know, they didn't know.

Because it was a small town, and you had been on good terms with everybody.

Yes, but we were already sort of... We were put into this Judenhauser, it was similar to being put into a ghetto. Nobody was allowed to talk to us anymore. And if they did, they would talk to us at night. My father had his friends, and they would meet my father under - under - and harming his own safety. He sneaked out to meet them, and so did the Germans. I mean if they were caught, that they met with my father, they would be severely punished. Even maybe sent to a concentration camp. So we were really separated from the rest of the German people.

So when did you actually leave?

On Saturday, and my mother was very sad, it was the first Saturday in her life that she had to travel. Being orthodox she never travelled on a Saturday before. On Saturday, the 10th of December 1941. And one policeman came to our door. And - whom we knew very well.

End of Fll84 Side B

Fl185 Side A

Now you were in Berlin until what date approximately?

Until - I would say until the 1st or 2nd of December 1941.

And at that time did you... Moving around in Berlin did you experience any problems at all, or was it...?

Oh, we had the Yellow Star, we wore the Yellow Star. There was a curfew, you couldn't... After a certain time in the evening you were not allowed in the streets. But as we were sort of like a Ghetto, unto ourselves, so we had not much to do with the outside world. But at the beginning of December, I got a telegram from my parents, where they wrote they will be deported. I can't remember the exact wording, either to the East, or they knew already to Riga, on the 10th of December. So I volunteered to join them. And it wasn't so easy to travel then, you had to have a travel permit. There were special compartments for Jews on the trains. It reminded me in the olden days there were compartments for Reisenden mit Hunden, for travellers with dogs, now it was for Jews. And so I volunteered to go with my parents.

And you left Berlin?

And I left Berlin, so that must have been the beginning of '41, of December 1941. I was there a week or so before we were deported.

And when you arrived home, what did you find there?

My parents already lived in Marienstrasse 4, which was the Judenhaus. The Jewish people had to leave their own homes. And there were two houses for Jews in Lingen. And my parents lived there with three other families.

So how many Jews were left in Lingen at this time?

Approximately I would say 20 souls.

What was their daily life like at that time?

Curfews applied to them. They couldn't go around freely, they couldn't go to shops any more. They had ration cards with a 'J' on. And were only allowed to buy in a certain grocers. But neighbours and farmers were very good to my family, and at night they would put baskets of food and fruit and eggs etcetera, in front of the door, or rather the back door, not to be seen. So we just kept to ourselves. We didn't have a telephone any more. So we - there was a baker - a bakery, they were very decent to me, to us. To whom I went afterwards as well, when I returned. And we would phone in the evening there, to neighbours of my uncle's and aunt's. You know, they had this sort of - to just give messages, that we are still all right, that we will be going away. Others had already been deported to Litzmannstadt, to Lodz. And to Minsk. My mother's brothers and sisters, with families. And we were more or less one of the last ones.

Did the locals in the village ever give any opinion on what was going on, how they felt about it?

Not openly, because we didn't talk to them. They were too afraid to come to us, and we didn't want to embarrass them by going to them. But my father had a very dear friend, he was an architect. And with his two daughters I am in contact. They used to meet at night. And otherwise no, not openly. And I wasn't in Lingen, so I really don't know what was going on.

So the deportation came. Can you tell me what happened?

We were allowed to take a hundred pounds of luggage and hand luggage with us. We had to make a list of the inventory of our - we only had two rooms - what we left behind. And it was on a Saturday morning, the 10th of December '41, that the police came. One policeman and a Gestapo man came to us. And the policeman cried like a child, that he had to take us away. The Gestapo man put a seal on the door, and we were taken to the Rathaus.

Town Hall.

Town Hall. It was a Town Hall, where already the family Grunberg and their daughter were waiting, and an uncle and aunt of mine. And we were the eight deported at that time. We were taken by train to Osnabruck. This policeman, Brandt was his name, he accompanied us. And he cried all the way. And my mother was only upset, not because we were deported, but this was the first time her life that she was on a train, or that she rode on a Shabbat. So we arrived in Osnabruck, we were in a big Gymnasium, with lots of people. We were lying on straw. My father was pleased he saw so many of his friends and his contemporaries. I had been at the Kindergarten Seminar in Berlin, as I stated before, but we also did - we learned nursing. So somebody asked, "Is there a nurse here?" So I put my hand up, and they gave me a Red Cross armband. So there were lots of women with small children, lots of old people, lots of sick people, they were all lying about, without proper sanitation. We all had food, we were not given any food, but we all had food taken from home. I can't tell you exactly how long we were there, but we definitely spent one or two nights there. Then we came on to a train to Bielefeld. Because the transport was called 'The Bielefeld Transport', which a thousand Jews were sent to Riga. Each transport - each transport were of a thousand Jews. And in Bielefeld we met some relatives, my cousin and her husband, who survived, and lived again in Bielefeld. And some other friends. And we were put into proper trains, in proper compartments. And somebody - and our luggage, the hundred pounds, went into goods trains. And later on we were told they were already - the goods trains with the luggage was taken off already as soon as we left Bielefeld. No sooner did we travel, it was fairly cold, but it got colder and colder as you came towards the Baltic. And the toilets froze, and there was no sanitation, there was no water. And small children and babies and - it was terrible. We had a few people who died of heart attacks. Some tried to commit suicide. And it was - it was terrible. We went via Konigsberg, Memel, Riga. And arrived at the railway station, Riga Chirotava, which I think it's a goods railway station, not a proper... Just for goods. There we were greeted by SS, in big leather

coats and big dogs. That's why I'm still afraid of dogs, even if it's a poodle. With truncheons and with God knows what. We were driven out of the carriages. And with loudhailers they said, "Who can't walk, there are... Who can't walk should go on these lorries, which are specially provided for the sick and the old and the children". And those lorries never arrived, needless to say. So we had to - the little bit of hand luggage we still had, we had to put down. And in rows of five or six we had to march towards the ghetto. It was then minus 20 degrees cold. And the wind, and the snow was blowing - I can't even describe it. Lots of people had frozen limbs. And afterwards their fingers and toes, they broke off just like matchsticks. And then they had gangrene and they died a terrible death. But the most shocking thing happened on this march from Chirotava to the Riga Ghetto. We walked with Mr and Mrs Grunberg and their daughter Gerda. And in front of us walked a young couple, the mother had a little child on her hand, and the father an infant on his arms. And one of the SS men came over to this child and said, "Would you like a sweet?" The child was frightened, and the mother tapped on her arm as if to say "Answer him". So she said, "Yes". "Open your mouth", and he shot right through her mouth, and the child dropped dead on the mother's hand, and she had to leave it there. And my father who was a soldier in the First World War, said, "I thought we were coming here to work. But I never expected anything like this". So we dragged along, it was quite a long march, in this cold, and we came to the Riga ghetto, which was a part of the old town of Riga, where there were old wooden houses. It was with barbed wire, and electric wire, and watchtowers. And this was like a ghost town. The streets were empty, there was nothing to be seen then, it was dark by then. And we were just driven into these empty houses. We were then told that between the 10th and the 20th of December they killed 30,000 Latvian Jews, which they had taken out of Riga and the surrounding areas, put into the ghetto, and killed them. Some Latvian Jews were very cynical afterwards and said, "They had to make room because you were coming". But we had the same fate as them.

How did they kill these 30,000?

They were taken to the forest, which was called The Roopvald, or Bikenvald, outside Riga, where some of them - or even Russian prisoners of war, had to dig the graves. And they were shot with machine gun. And had to undress completely, and even to sort out their clothes, the underwear there and the shoes there, and the overcoats there. We were told this afterwards by Latvian Jews who heard it from the Latvian population. So we were in these empty, cold houses. And you could see how the people were driven out. The wardrobes were open. Because they were allowed to take things from town into the ghetto. There was food on the table, but frozen with a spoon in it in the soup and the potato. And we were in one small room with kitchen. We were about 15 of us. We didn't get any rations or any food whatsoever. Every group organised themselves. There was already a group from Kassel there, from Dusseldorf and Cologne. Cologne was the first group, that is why the main administration was in the hands of the Cologne Jews. But Bielefeld also named then an elder. Because everybody thought if they had a position they might be safe.

How many people were there altogether in the ghetto, would you say, at this time?

At that time was - 4,000. But we had - at the end there were 12 transports which did arrive.

And each transport had what?

And each transport were supposed to be a thousand, but of course they died on the way. And after the end of January '42, no transports arrived anymore in Riga. But we were told they were all taken to the forest and nobody survived. And the Latvian population told them that after these slaughters that the soil was moving for days, because people weren't killed, some were only injured and were thrown amongst the dead ones in these holes. And the soil moved for days.

Nobody went to try and help. The population?

Not what I know of. I've got a book written by a Latvian Jewess, and she writes, "I Survived Rambuly"(ph) Rambuly(ph) was another place where they were killed, and she was hidden by Latvian farmers. So we were now in the Riga ghetto. And shortly after they have taken all the young men away for - they said for - to work. But it was extermination camp, to such an extent, not that they had crematoria there, but they just starved and froze to death. That was Salaspils. Each transport - out of each transport they took the strongest young men. As a transport arrived they were put aside. And they didn't ask whether they were married or not. But they took quite a few hundred from our transport. And only a handful survived from there. My cousin's husband did, who lives now in Bielefeld. And in the meantime things got a bit organised. But shortly after was a big... It must have been February, March of '42, when there was an Aktion which we called the Dunamunde Aktion. Where all of us had to assemble on the famous Blechplatz, or in the streets. In rows of five. My mother, who had a nervous breakdown then, we were hiding her in a - in a shed. And we were told by loudhailers from the SS, the whole ghetto was surrounded by SS, that people should volunteer for Dunamunde. "They will be in factories where they make tins of fish, and they'll have a good life, and in they will be in the warm, and they will have plenty to eat". And they wanted just the old people and some volunteers. And that was the incident when the Commandant went from row to row with Jewish girls who were taking the names, the names of the transport, because this Dunamunde transport only left a few days after this Appel. So when the Commandant went through the rows and he came to my father and me - my father was over six foot tall - so he said to him, "Na, Dragoner". No, my father wore the ribbons of his war medals. And he asked him where he was during the war and where he - because he had the one from the Erster und Zweiter Klasse. And where he served as a soldier, in which regiment? So my father said he served with the Dragoons. And my father said, "And that is my daughter". So he said, "You are Dragoon Regiment two, number two". And I kept that name with him, all through the time I was in the ghetto. When he met me he called me, "Dragoon Regiment Two". Or "Dragoon". So then those poor people were taken away on that certain day. The lorries came into the ghetto. Very orderly the poor devils went on these lorries in the hope - they believed what was promised to them. But somebody spotted that these lorries could not have gone to Dunamunde, because the same ones, by their number plates, returned within 20 minutes. So then we knew something was up, that this didn't exist at all. Only afterwards we found out, you know, somebody...

And they had then kindergartens there, schools there, and dental stations there, they had little first aid... every group had a little first aid station. And had their Arbeitseinsatz, that means where you had to register and then they would allot you to a different workplace. And lots of bribery went on. People wanted to have a good Kommando, as it was called, where they could get some food or something, for their families. And I never left the ghetto at that time. I worked as a nurse in the hospital, which was called Central Latzaret. That was the old Linatshatsedek in Riga, which was incorporated into our ghetto. And my mother worked at that time for the Wehrmacht as a tailoress, to repair uniforms which were brought into the ghetto, into workshops. My father went into Riga, which was meant to be a very good Kommando. To the SS Dienststelle, the centre of the SS, to cut wood. Lots of women went to skip - to shovel snow, to clear the roads for... I mean it was a picture, you saw the Jews moving out of the ghetto in the morning, you know, clad in... not in rags, but against the cold, you know, they were... wrapped up, you know, right up to the eyeballs. Accompanied by the SS, or soldiers from the Wehrmacht, depending on the units they were working for. In the ghetto were only the old people which had survived, the children and the sick, and this Kommando where my mother worked, the workshop for the Army. So in the mornings the columns, you could see the columns going to work, accompanied, as I said, by SS or soldiers. And they all had a Jewish... a Jewish self-appointed supervisor. Sometimes he got the job through bribery, you know, because they were much better off, they didn't have to work, but they were responsible for the numbers of Jews they took out in the mornings, they had to bring the same number back dead or alive.

Can you tell me, what was your day like in the hospital. Can you describe that a little bit? And the facilities?

Yes, the facilities were very good. I mean the ambience was quite good. But we were lacking in everything. Food, medicines, bandages, we had a fantastic operating theatre, we had very good surgeons.

Can you remember any of the names?

Yes. From the Riga ghetto came a Professor Minsk. Also from the Riga ghetto came Dr Sigbert Josef. He had his own clinic in Berlin, the Trautenau Klinik. He was a gynaecologist. His brother was Nasen Josef they called him. I mean he did cosmetic surgery, but he was not in Riga. Dr Josef wanted to wait for his affidavit, for his quota, to go to the States with his wife and children. So he emigrated to Riga. There he lost his wife and children, and ended up in the Latvian ghetto, where the Latvian Jews were. Oh, I forgot to tell you, when we came to Riga, into this empty ghetto, there was a separate ghetto where there were 3,000 Latvian young men. They were the survivors of these big Aktionen. And from whom we got to know what happened and what... what was happening and what has happened. So there was Dr Josef and a very sweet surgeon, a Dr Caspari, from Berlin. But unfortunately, Dr Caspari died of typhus later on, a long time after the ghetto was liquidated. Dr Josef got killed by a Russian bomb, when the war - when they were liberated, where he was at that time. And Professor Minsk died, he was an elderly man. Our chief was Dr Aufrecht, from Cologne. As I stated before, all the administration was in the hands of the Cologne

Jews. And he was not very well liked. I must admit, whoever had a position couldn't be liked by everybody, but he wasn't liked by anyone, because he was very much on the side of the Germans, of the SS. He was bowing to them and he was running to them. When he was liberated at the same time as me, but I didn't know he was also there; by the Russians, and somebody told on him and he was hung by the Russians, more or less in the hour of our liberation. People saw him.

Why particularly the Cologne Jews?

They were the first ones there. And the adjutant of the Commandant, he came from Cologne, Ginnich. He came from Cologne. And all the cultured dialect they spoke. You know how it was, so they got... they thought they might get a better - better jobs.

End of Fll85 Side A

Fl185 Side B

So the hospital was on two levels. On the ground floor... no, on three levels. On the ground floor was the operating theatre and the administration offices. First floor was the female - were the female patients, and on the second the male patients. We performed lots of operations there. Complicated ones. And also a lot of abortions, because nobody was allowed to give birth to babies. So women who found themselves pregnant, even from arriving, pregnant into the ghetto, or become pregnant from their husbands, while they were still with their husbands, had to have their pregnancy terminated. So we had quite a lot of abortions every day - not every day, but a few times a week, which Doktor Josef performed. And Doktor Caspari was the anaesthetist, even though he was a surgeon by profession. Then we had a lady doctor, Weiss, a Doktor Weiss from Vienna. She mainly gave the anaesthetics, because I remember always a very funny incident. Doktor Josef was pretty short-tempered, and he would say, "Frau Doktor, the patient still has to breathe a little bit". It so happened that one Latvian Jewish woman gave birth to a little boy, who was called Ben Ghetto. The Germans found out - I mean the Commandant too, when I say now 'the Germans', it was the Commandant too where the SS was sitting. They found out about it. And this baby and the mother were brought to our hospital. And the baby had to be killed. First of all there were SS men put in front of the room where the mother and the baby were, and at a certain time the baby had to be killed. And Doktor Aufrecht got the order to kill the child. He had to press in the fontanelle, the soft part of the... head. Which Doktor Caspari said, "It would have been more humane to give the child an injection of... of a high dose of a sleeping drug. But we were very short of medicines.

How did you all feel about that?

Terrible. Terrible, terrible, terrible. They made Caesarians, we had lots of Caesarian operations, with laparotomy, with open cut in the tummy. But then later on Doktor Josef did something which was in a way more cruel, but it was healing better. He would try, under anaesthetic, to get the foetus out in bits and pieces; that saved the mother with healing of the wound. People came back from work and they had lost limbs, and... all sorts of things. The food was very bad. And we had even an isolation block in the garden. There were children with diphtheria and scarlet fever. So it looked somehow quite normal. People went to work, came home at night, and there was visiting at nights, they brought food for their relatives, which they smuggled in under threat of their own life if it would have been found on them coming into the ghetto. Because the patients had food, I got their rations, which was just a piece of black bread and either a cabbage soup, or a black soup, you know, made of black bread, and sweetened with saccharine, which I took to my mother, who had very little either. Only those who went to work outside the Ghetto did have a chance sometimes to get some food, or bring in their mid-day soup which they would get at the workshop. My father worked, as I mentioned before, at the SS headquarters. He was - he had to saw wood for their fires. And also for certain trucks which were heated, not by petrol, they didn't run on petrol, but on wood.

How did that work?

I don't know how it worked. They had like a cannister there and it was stoked with the wood and the thing went. Quite an invention. One day, it was the 16th or 18th of May 1942, my father came very excited into the ghetto in the evening, and said he met a farmer's son from the - a neighbour from our neighbourhood of Lingen. And asked him "Wilhelm, what are you doing here?" My father only answered him, "Bring me bread".

Was this boy with the Wehrmacht, or what?

I don't know, I think he was Wehrmacht or SS, but he saw him, he was in uniform, a soldier, in uniform. I only know what my father told us. He even told us the name that time, but I have forgotten it. He came from the vicinity between Lingen and Lengerich, from where my father came. And the next day this soldier did bring bread - gave bread to my father, which was found on him as he entered the ghetto. Every so often the SS would control all the Kommandos as they came in. If they brought in food. Some Latvian Jews still had some money and had some valuable objects, like jewellery and gold coins etcetera. They would control it at the entrance into the ghetto. And my father came from his Kommando, they found on him this bread. There was a little boy of 12 whose father had died in Salaspils, and he had a mother and two little sisters in the ghetto still. So he brought some potato peels into the ghetto. He worked in the kitchens and was allowed to take potato peel into the ghetto, where his mother could do something with it in the evening. And one man who was a friend of my father's, that's why they worked together, his name was Michel. He came originally from Burg Steinfurt, that was in Westphalia. And he was 75 percent immobilised, or invalided from the First World War. 75 percent. He had an artificial leg, and he lost one eye in the First World War. Or 90 percent.

How had he managed to survive in the ghetto that long without being selected?

It wasn't that long, because there were no selections to such an extent that we had to get undressed or anything. He walked very upright in spite of his wooden leg, so they didn't - didn't, up till that point, they didn't know that he was - that he was an invalid. So they found a sandwich on him. So the three of them were marched to the famous Blechplatz, where we all had to assemble at different times. We had Jewish police, we had Latvian Jewish police, they were on the Latvian side. And we had German Jewish police. They called them Ordnungsdienst. So one Ordnungsdienst man came to my mother and me where we lived, and said we have to come to the Blechplatz. There was my father, in chains, with Michel and this little boy. And Krause arrived with and Roshmann, who was then our Commandant to follow, after Krause. But Krause was there to show him the ropes, so to speak. So when my father saw that Roshmann was pulling the revolver, my father shouted the words of Kaiser Wilhelm I, he said this to his troops in the First World War. My father shouted at the top of his voice, "Kaiser Wilhelm der Erste hat gesagt - "Der Dank des Vaterlandes sei Euch gewiss". And with that he drew the pistol and he shot the little boy first, then Michel, and then my father. And what happened to the corpses, we don't know, but we presumed they were taken to the old Jewish cemetery in the Bergstrasse, which was part of the Ghetto as well. Because lots of people came back from work and were taken to the wall, to the old cemetery, and shot there. Like an uncle of mine, a brother

of my mother's, a year later, they found something on him and he was taken to the Friedhofsmauer, to the wall of the cemetery and shot.

Who would have removed the bodies?

They had Leichen Trager. They had two Latvian Jews, they were before the Chevra Kadisha in Riga, and they also came when somebody died in the hospital, and people were shot in the streets. People died while they were queueing to go to work in the morning, they fell... they dropped dead. And when the Commandant came into the ghetto we used to say, "He comes and he is going to shoot the pigeons". Which he did. They were always shooting. There were lots of pigeons and lots of ravens. Because in the winter it was too cold for the bodies to be buried, so they were open. But they put lime on them. And there were always hoards of black crows or ravens or God knows what birds there. And they went there to shoot them. But the ghetto, whoever was in the ghetto when his open limousine drove in, everybody went off the streets, and even our Jewish Police shouted through the loudhailers, "Clear the roads, clear the roads". Because always somebody fell victim. Either he didn't stand to attention straight enough, or he smelt his breath and he had smoked a cigarette, which was forbidden. And they were either shot on the spot or taken to the old Jewish cemetery.

How did your mother cope with your father's death?

Remarkably well, I would say. She was a deeply religious woman. And always her sayings were, "The Almighty never sends you more than you can bear". And I think maybe she thought to herself maybe he is out of all the Schlemazzel. But she did suffer from depression, on and off, during the Hitler time. And since then she suddenly pulled herself completely together, and was all right. She went to work and she had her little cronies, her friends. She even had an old German supervisor, a soldier, a sergeant, Feldwebel Kaufmann, who came from near Konigsberg, who would give her every evening a sandwich. She wouldn't have any meat on it, so he gave her cold potatoes in it, which she shared with me. No, she... coped very well, considering this. Because my father was one of the first ones to be.. openly to be shot, and in front of the families - or with a family present.

It's interesting that she would continue to bring a sandwich in after what had happened to her husband?

No, she worked in the ghetto at that time. She worked in the ghetto at that time for the German Army, repairing the uniforms. They were sent in - they had to repair uniforms etcetera.

So there was no check at the end of the day?

No. And it was already cold, Armeekleidungsamt.

Was there any sort of functioning synagogue that you...?

There was a synagogue, the Kolner Gruppe had a synagogue. I don't think there was a Rabbi. I know my mother used to go every Shabbat, to synagogue. And we were sitting Shivve, after my father got killed. And my mother used to go every night, and somebody offered to say Kaddish for my father. To the synagogue at the Cologne - Kolner Gruppe, Cologne Gruppe.

Was it possible to have any sort of social activity amongst all this?

There were from time to time, there were some very eminent musicians, not so much in the German ghetto, but in the Riga ghetto. Some very fine opera singers. Some cantors. There was a very famous clarinet player. And they would - they advised - not advised - but -

Forced.

Forced by the Germans to lay on a concert, for the SS. And some privileged Jews also attended, like from the Kolner Gruppe, you know, the Arbeitseinsatz, you know, the one who... His name was Schultz. And the Alteste, the Oberjude was Leiser from Cologne. Those people were the prominents. They were invited to these concerts. Then they had boxing matches.

Forced or...?

No, no, proper boxing matches. There was somebody who was a boxer in the ghetto, the Latvian ghetto, and one from the German ghetto. And they had a football match, the Latvians against the German Jews. But that was all very short-lived, because in between they had different Aktionen where they took people away. And they took the children away. And people were shot. And people died. I must say, not so many died in the hospital, because the after-care was quite good after operations. And it was quite hygienic, everything.

And you continued to work in the hospital all this time?

I continued to work in the hospital until the 2nd of December 1943. When the ghetto was liquidated. And a little after. Those people who accompanied the Jewish... the columns that went to work, they were called Kolonnen Fuhrer, they were leading the columns, Kolonnen Fuhrer. So after my father was shot, the Chef Arzt, Doktor Aufrecht, said I could go to a working party of my choice, into Riga. Because however dangerous it was, there might be a chance that I could get some food or something for myself and my mother. So I chose the HVL, Heeres Verpflegungs Lager. This was on the harbour of Riga, where Jewish men and women had to empty the ships and boats and barges with food, and load them on to lorries. And always fell from the back of the lorry a thing, as the saying is. Something fell over from the back of the lorry. And there was a chance sometimes to get something. And this Heeres Verpflegungs Lager, in this Kommando, worked as a doctor, a Doktor Jawits. He was a Latvian Jewish doctor. Because all these large Kolonnen had either a doctor or a male nurse, or somebody for first aid, to accompany them, in case of accidents. So this Doktor Jawits said to me - I only went a few times, two or three times and then it was finished, because Jawits said to me would I like to go with him across the road

where there were Latvian Jews kaserniert. That means they were housed in a building where they worked. That was called Lenta. They worked for the SS. And in this house, Lenta, all the suitcases, all the belongings which the Jews brought into the ghetto, were stored. That's why when people knew that since January, February of 1942, no more transports arrived alive in Riga, but their luggage did. And these Jews in Lenta had to sort out their luggage and send it to the Reich. And they had plenty of everything. The SS would ask the Jews, "Can you find me some nice silk underwear for my Latvian girlfriend?" And they would give these Latvian Jews a bottle of Schnapps or a bit of ham or something, so they had plenty of everything. So Doktor Jawits said to me, "Look, lunchtime I go across the road to Lenta for lunch. Come along with me". So I went across the road with him. The road was not larger than 15 yards. Not wider than 15 yards. When one of these open limousines came along. In this one was an SS man, with his driver. I was told his name was Rese. And he shouted, "What are you doing here?" He arrested us, and he took us to the bunker, into the bunker, which was in Lenta. You know, they had like in the cellars there. Of which nobody ever came out alive. So we were in this cellar. And Jawits said to me - he had arranged with the Latvian Jews beforehand, if ever anything should happen to him they should say that somebody had become ill, and he would go across. So this happened now. I don't know how long we waited there in this bunker. Until Krause, the Commandant, with Ginnich came. So we were taken out of the bunker. When he saw me and he said, "Dragoner, what are you doing here?" I explained to him what happened, somebody became ill, and the doctor and I, we went across. He said, "How dare you go without being accompanied by anybody, across the road". So the doctor wanted to say something and he got... Krause always wore a pair of leather gloves on his hand, and with his leather gloves he got it left, right in his face. So I thought already our fate is sealed there, finished. We had to get into this big limousine, not of Rese's, but in this one where he always arrived, like an open one you see sometimes on old newsreels, with Hitler riding in it and 'Sieg Heil', you know. So we had to sit in the back. Ginnich was driving always, and Krause, so we drove into the ghetto. And our Jewish Police were always on the gates, they had to receive always the Kommandos as they came from work. So we were taken to the Kommandantur. And we thought now we are going to the wall of the cemetery. So we were waiting there for a long time, and our Jewish Police said, "How dare you, how could you, why did you go across the road?", and so on. So we said, "It happened". So he said, in Yiddish, the Latvian Jew used to say in Yiddish, "Se is nicht Du wass zu reddn". I mean there was no more we could say, it had happened. So after a while we were... he came again, Krause, and he said, "Dragoner, don't let it happen again". And that was the end. So he let us go. And that was the end of me ever going outside the ghetto. Then I met a very nice Latvian Jew. His name was Sigi Blankenstein. I don't know whether he was... He had something to do with UFA Fox. And his wife came from Berlin. And he said I reminded him of his late wife. He was a lot older than me. His wife had also been taken away at the Aktion in December '41. And he was one of the prominents. In German they say Oberen zehntausend, you know. And he spoke a beautiful German. So he... I became friendly with him. And I think because of me he tried to join the Latvian Jewish Police, the ghetto Police. But it took quite a while before he was accepted. And because lots of nurses were friendly with the Latvian Jewish Policemen. Because they were during the day in the ghetto, and we were in the ghetto, so we struck up a friendship. On the 31st of October 1942, in the morning, the people went out to work as usual. But already there were SS in the camp. And

out of the Kolonnen they had taken elderly people out and put them at the side. And didn't let them go to work. Shortly after that SS arrived in the ghetto, on open trucks. And with loudhailers - after all the people had gone to work, with loudhailers our Jewish Police, the German Jewish Police, were shouting everybody had to assemble on the Blechplatz. With that the SS came to the hospital. And our Doktor Caspari said, "Don't wash the patients today". He must have known already what was going to happen. "Just make them tidy and make them look decent. Don't take their temperature, nothing". Shortly after that a big open lorry stopped outside the hospital, and the SS were shouting, "Everybody out, everybody out". So we had two male nurses, and some of our Jewish Police led and carried the sick, the ill people, onto this lorry. I will never forget, there was one young Latvian Jewish man in the ghetto, he had injured his hand. And he begged Gimnich on his knees, and said that he can still work, why should he go onto the lorry. Because he knew what was going to happen. So he shot him there and then while he was kneeling in front of him, begging him to spare his life. So the hospital was emptied of patients. And we were not allowed to go outside. We had to stay in. So we thought any minute they come to take us. My mother, who worked in the ghetto, I didn't know what was happening to her. And another nurse of mine, whose mother survived, she lived in Frognal, her name was Mrs Carten, and ...

End of Fll85 Side B

F1186 Side A

So this nurse, Anne, Anne Carten and I, we sneaked out of the hospital, after all the patients were taken away, wanting to find out what happened to my mother, and she to her parents, who had the day off from work. But as we came near the Kommandantur, there were SS men - and we were in nurse's uniform - "Where are you going? Go on to the lorries", they said to us. So I said, "No, we want just to find out when they are going to collect the patients from the hospital". But they had gone already. So they said, "Then you'd better go back". We saw the open trucks rolling by, passing by the hospital, we went back to the hospital, with all the people in it. They had benches either side on these trucks, where SS and Latvian SS were sitting with their guns. And the lorries were full of people, old and young. And driven out of the ghetto. I don't know how many lorries went. And by 5 o'clock in the evening it was over, you could go outside onto the road, onto the street again. And I ran to this room where my mother, my uncle who had been shot, but my aunt and I, we lived. And there was a note from her to say that she was with neighbours, and the Almighty had spared her. So I had my mother.

What about your aunt?

My aunt was at work, outside.

She was all right?

She was outside, working outside. But that was a terrible night. When the people came back from work, it was like a ghost town. The children had lost their parents, and the parents had lost their children, and husbands had lost their wives, and wives had lost their husbands. It was - the cry, I can still hear the crying in my ears. I think there was the worst wailing I ever heard. Now many of the units in Riga and surrounding areas arranged for their Jews not to go back to the ghetto any more, but they arranged Kasernierungen. Like Lenta was one of them already from the beginning of the ghetto-time. For instance, my mother, where she worked, they arranged ABA, Armeekleidungsamt. They took a few hundred Jews; my mother went there and my aunt went there, and I, amongst others. And the Reichsbahn, the railways took some Jews. Then there was an aerodrome, Spilve, they took Jews. And Lenta took some more Jews. HKP, Heeres Kraft Fahrpark, where they repaired lorries and trucks, they took craftsmen, women also for the workshop and for the kitchens etcetera. My mother and I, we came to the Armeekleidungsamt, where they had big storerooms of old uniforms and army underwear, boots etcetera. The repaired ones were taken back to the Russian Front. The dirty and torn ones came from the Russian Front, they were cleaned there. And there we were from the end of December until the 6th of August 1944. But on the 20th or 22nd of April 1944, the Jews made a present to Adolph Hitler. In all these camps who still had the children, all the surviving children were taken away.

In 1944 or 1943?

'44. The ones who had survived all the previous Aktionen, were taken away on the 20th of April 1944. Because our Arbeitseinsatz Schulz, from Cologne, he had two

little boys, and he had to put them himself onto a lorry. And his older boy of 7 said to the father, about the little boy, "Daddy don't worry, I shall look after Danny". We carried on working there until the 28th of July 1944, when we came back from all our units, because even so the Armeekorps, we were Kaserniert on the Duna, that's a river in Riga, in an old factory. But we worked, different ones worked, all over Riga, where they had factories and warehouses and so on. As the units came back on the 28th of July, we had to - there were SS officers in the camp, or in this place, and we had to - as the units came from work, we had to be in rows of five, had to undress, take our clothes under our arm, and march in front of some SS men.

Was this the first time this had happened?

That was the first time in Riga, that we were undressed. And later on this was Doktor Kepbsbach. There was a big protest somewhere here, Kepbsbach. I think it was in... Or was he hung by the Russians, I don't know. But anyway, this was Doktor Kepbsbach. And my mother's unit came home slightly earlier than my unit, into the barracks. And I went through naked in front of them. I went back into the barracks. Then right away to the bunk where my mother slept. We had bunks, four or five on top of each other, wooden bunks. And she wasn't there. One of our Jewish Lager policemen gave me a little note from my mother. On which she wrote "The Almighty should bless you. Next Thursday is Tisha be'av". As if she must have known that she was taken to the slaughter. And that if I should survive that I know when I have Jahrzeit. These people were taken away and I tried to - when I read the note I tried to climb down the fire escape. The yard was surrounded by SS with rifles, and our Jewish policemen. And one SS man shouted, "Where does she intend to go?" And pulled me down. And I got hit with the end of his rifle. But I lost consciousness. And I was told afterwards our Jewish policemen put me back into the barracks. When I came too everything was over. Had finished, the Aktion had finished. And I still have scars to prove, you know, not so much where I was hit, but where I fell. Because the gravel of the yard is still underneath the skin. These people we thought were taken to the forest, and had the same fate as the Latvian Jews and the others from the Aktion and before. But I met in America in 1984, or '82, somebody who was on this Aktion, and told me that he and his brother were also taken away, and were taken to Auschwitz. His brother was deaf and dumb, and they had to march to music, or to singing, and as the brother was deaf and dumb he couldn't keep the correct step, and he was shot there and then when they found out that he was deaf and dumb, or taken to the gas chamber in Auschwitz. So we were in this ABA, and all the other units. This more or less happened simultaneously within a few days, that the people were taken away. And on the 6th of August, in the morning we had our heads shaven - it was a Sunday. And we were given our prison garbs, the striped dress.

Tuesday, November the 13th 1990

Now I think you said, just before we started, that there was something you had forgotten to say and would like to bring in now.

On the 31st of October 1942, there was an Aktion, shall I call it? Where they had taken all the Latvian Jewish policemen. They rounded them up, they had to come to the Kommandantur.

This was still in the ghetto?

That was in the ghetto. That was before the ghetto was liquidated, a year before the ghetto was liquidated. Because somebody had split on them, that they intended an uprising. And they found an arsenal of weapons somewhere. They rounded up the Latvian Jewish police. They were fantastic young men, highly intelligent, and very Zionist. They had to come to the Kommandantur, the administration building, in the ghetto, in the yard of the Kommandantur. And they were marched to the famous Blechplatz. But not only had one taken them to the Blechplatz, but they found - you know, the SS found an old man somewhere there, whoever was in the road, they have taken them along as well. But the police already had a notion what might be happening to them. So they started to sing the Hatikva, as they marched to the Blechplatz. And there the SS had already machine guns ready, there were about twenty of them, and they were just mowed down. And the other people which the SS caught in the roads, in the streets of the ghetto, were taken to the wall of the old cemetery and shot there. I mean incidents like that happened all the time.

How many police were there?

I would say about twenty.

Our heads were shaven and we were given our prison garbs, the famous grey and blue striped ones. The women's heads were shaven completely. But the men we called it the autobahn, they were shaven in lines like a cross, from the forehead to the nape of the neck, and from the left to the right ear. Somebody said they did it because so they shouldn't escape, that they were easily recognised. Others said for hygienic purposes, that we were shaven because of lice. We were marched to the Export Hafen in Riga, where a big liner, or a big ship, was anchored. And we were put into the bowel of the ship. And not only our Kommando ABA, but all the other Kasernierungen and all over Riga, came on to this ship.

How many people would you think?

I don't know, must have been thousands. And we saw people we hadn't seen for quite a while. But in every Kasernierungen some were left behind. Because this was the first transport to Stutthof. Later on we found out that about six months later, came another transport to Stutthof, or four months later, I'm not exactly certain, as the Russian Front came nearer.

We were in this big ship. And I don't know how long without food. But I don't know how long we sailed. Until we came to Danzig, Gdansk. And were unloaded, so to speak. And then men and women were segregated. And we came on barges, on coal barges. And that was absolutely dreadful. They pushed us down a ladder into these barges, and in a few minutes we looked as if we were coalminers, coal dust and dirty. And one fell on top of the other, without any sanitation, no toilets, no facilities, nothing. No food. I don't know how long we were in these barges, but people choked to death and some had heart attacks. We had quite a few casualties amongst the people. And when we got out of there we had to march to the concentration camp,

Stutthof. Where in Auschwitz it said 'Arbeit macht Frei'. In Stutthof it just said 'Waldheim'. So we thought this is a convalescent home. But we already - we didn't know anything about crematorium. But we never heard of Auschwitz, Treblinka and so on, at that time. But we were met by a terrible stench. When you boil eggs and the water evaporates, you forget about them, and you have this terrible smell. And that was the smell that hung over - that stench hung over the whole area of Stutthof. And we saw tall chimneys smoking. So they pushed us - I mean they herded us into this camp. The men on one side and the women on the other. And we were herded into barracks. For the first time we got in touch - in contact with the SS women, who stood there in their... The first time we came in contact with the famous SS women, SS Madchen, as we called them. They stood there with their big alsation dogs. And SS men. And prisoners. We had some German prisoners and some Polish ones. And you recognised not their nationality, but by their uniform. We learnt later on we all had our number. And we had the Star of David on our number, and they had triangles. There were green ones, there were Berufs Verbrecher, I don't know in English what you call them. Criminals. Criminals. Then we had lilac ones, they were the homosexuals. And we had, I think, green ones, they were the Jehovahs Witnesses. Red ones, I think they were the Communists. I don't know exactly the numbers now. But in charge of us was Mr X, he called himself. He was the most brutal human being you can imagine. He hit us. And I'm fairly tall, so I had to always sort of bend over not to get hit over the head. We had to stand Appel, you know, had to stand to guard. No, not guard.

Attention.

Attention, for hours on end in the - it was hot at that time, in August. And in rain, from early morning to late at night. The food was non-existent, and we were just herded into these barracks, on the floor. There were no bunks like we had in Riga. We shared a plate, we were given a plate, one to three women had to share a plate, and one spoon. So we were hoping that maybe we get food eventually. But at that time already, they had fleck typhus. That's typhoid, is it?

Typhus. And not only did women die of typhus, but every day, or every second day, you had to get - while you were standing attention, you had to get undressed, and who had lost a lot of weight, and some had scabious, some had boils. Whoever had something wrong with them were taken away into the gas chambers. Every morning the dead were... the corpses were piled up outside the barracks. And that was the only time we saw any of the men. They came with wheelbarrows and they took the bodies into the crematorium. And the ones who were selected to go into the gas chamber, they were taken onto lorries. I mean I just talk about it as a matter of fact, but it wasn't just like that. But I was saying at that time, we didn't care anymore. We had lost everything but our life, and that wasn't worth anything. So later on you already didn't... upset you anymore. It was a thing which happened all the time. And here by the grace of God go I. You know, the woman who stood today on the left of me, was gone today, and I'll be tomorrow. So we didn't care already. So we were in Stutthof for quite a while. And always we were told, as we came with ABA, that they would open workshops there, to repair uniforms, like they did in Riga. And the soldiers apparently were also in Stutthof, who were our overseers in Riga, hoping that they could have the good lives they had in Riga, not to be sent to the Eastern Front.

So we always hoped, anything is better than Stutthof, that one day they will have again these workshops. When one day at one of these selections I was taken out, we were ten or twelve young girls, all were a certain height, a certain age, and not Jewish looking. So we were marched away by an SS woman. And my friend stayed behind. She lives in America now. And we were taken to a barrack. We were very ignorant at the time, or we already didn't care anymore. We were taken into a special barrack, which looked like a hospital. And as we didn't feel ill or anything, we thought, "Oh, this is good. They will give us food". We didn't know what they intended to do with us. We were given white - sort of aprons, or overalls, and we stood there in our white overalls, and they were busy behind the screen, you know, doctors or whoever they were, we didn't know at the time. When suddenly I heard, with a loudhailer, somebody going through the camp, "Everybody from ABA, antreten", have to come out, everybody from ABA. I said to some people there, who were in charge, "I am from ABA". So he said, "Run as fast as you can". But that was a false alarm with ABA, nothing came of it, and nothing ever did. Five hundred women were eventually chosen for road building. With a firm by the name of Milke, Konigsberg. Not a few years ago I passed the Autobahn near Frankfurt, where I saw a hoarding, 'Strassenbau Milke', and in brackets, Konigsberg. So the firm is still - it's now in the West. I could go back to Konigsberg, but at that time...

Did you find out what happened to the people you left behind in the hospital?

Years later. That they made experiments on them. And one woman survived, and she lives in Vienna now. And I am in touch with her. She was even taller than me. And she came to visit me here. She is absolutely bent over, like a hoop. And she has to have mirrors in order to see. And it was very brave of her that she came to visit London. Highly intelligent. And she said people are fantastic to her when they see her. So she had an... They had hormone injections. Others were sterilised. They made experiments. They had taken their ovaries out, without anaesthetic, without anything. The women just died of septicaemia afterwards. And this went on all the time, not just the ten or twelve they had taken, and I was one of them. And I don't know when this lady who survived was taken. I don't think she was in my group. But as I met her afterwards, I knew what was going on. Some did survive and were sterile, I mean they married afterwards and couldn't bear any children. Not all perished, but most of them perished of septicaemia. So I went with five hundred women to work for Milke. And that was in Sofienwalde, not far... that was in between Stolp and Lauenburg, in East Prussia. We were taken on a train - given a loaf of bread, and we hadn't seen any food for days. And when the food came, everybody - it was not orderly, you know, like animals, they would... One would knock the other one down to get some watery soup. We five hundred of us were on this train, with a loaf of bread, taken to Sofienwalde working for Milke. They had little Nissen huts prepared for us, without any flooring in it, just Nissen huts. No, Nissen huts are out of metal, these were sort of out of plywood - huts. With barbed wire, with electric wire, and one watchtower. So we five hundred women arrived in the Sofienwalde camp. And the Commandant was an SS man, by the name of Schulze. And of all the five hundred women he picked on me. We had to walk in front of him and give him our numbers, we were given numbers in Stutthof. No names, just numbers. So I went in front of him and gave him my number, and I was the only one whom he asked, "What is your name and where do you come from?"

And I found out during this short moment, that he was different than the others. That he was more humane than the others.

Why do you think he picked you? Just because you were tall?

I don't know. But that's what it was. And he called me Kummelturk. I already got another name.

End of F1186 Side A

Fl186 Side B

And the women saw - there were Polish, Hungarian and German, Czech and Viennese women there - and they saw that he talked to me. They asked me would I have the courage to approach him to find out where the men had gone to, our men, some boyfriends, some fiances, some husbands and sons. And I did. So he said the next time when he goes to Stutthof he'll make enquiries. Because our meagre food came from Stutthof. And he must have been to Stutthof, when one day he called me out of the... when we had to stand in line to go to work, and said that the men had gone to Buchenwald, from Stutthof, and a part of them to Magdeburg, to work, and the other part, from Buchenwald, to Bochum, to work for Gruppe. I thought to myself, he is spinning me a yarn. But after the war we found out that was true. He was - one shouldn't say it - but he was very decent, not just to me, but to all of us. He didn't make it any harder... he couldn't make it much better for us, but he didn't make it any harder. There were no beatings, nothing. And he arranged with local farmers that we would get those little potatoes after the harvest, which were left on the fields, you know, for us to get at lunchtime, wherever we worked on the Strassenbau. We had to build roads. And my friend, who unfortunately died a few years ago, she said, (laughs) "No wonder the Germans lost the war, the way we built the roads". And this Commandant always came with his girlfriend, an SS woman, to visit us at our places of work. And one day he came to us, because we worked at different places, he came to our place, and he said, "Kummelturk... [TELEPHONE RINGS]...

We had to excavate land for road building. And we were given pickaxes and so on, and with pickaxes we had to loosen the soil. And there were Polish prisoners of war and Dutch prisoners of war, and from time to time they would give us some bread, they would throw it...

They were working on the road as well?

They were working, but they were not allowed to talk to us. But they were operating a little railway. They would be taking the soil away which we loosened, and we had to fill these tip lorries, these... wagons. And they would take them away. And he said "Kummelturk, that's not the way to work with a pickaxe", when he came to see us. So I said this in German, I thought I was very Schlagfertig. I said, "Wie die Verpflegung, so die Bewegung". And he laughed. And when I got back - when we came back in the camp that night, he went to the cook, and he said that from then on I would get double portion. Because double portions only got - the Kapos, the ones who were in charge of us.

Did this not make bad blood between you and the others?

Yes, so I said, "I don't want a double portion unless my friend also gets it". So she, Margot got it, and this friend who died a few years ago here in London, Lydia. So we shared between us. You will find that there were always some - nobody was on their own. You sort of, you adopted each other, two or three adopted each other. And you looked after each other. I was - from Milke, I was taken out of that group to carry water, to a private house. From this place where we worked they had a well, where three women had to pump the water, so that the building site could carry on cement

mixing etcetera. And from this well you had to take water to a private house where they cooked for our guards. Which were SS men. They were Hungarian SS. So the Hungarian girls in our camp were very friendly with them. That's why our Lager Alteste, she was Hungarian, and she was worse than the SS girl we had there. So I was selected to carry water, which was supposed to be a privileged occupation, to this house, where the kitchen was for the guards. Because at the end of it you got a slice of bread. At the end of the day. So I had a yoke, with two buckets of water, and I was trudging up a hill with this water. And I would never eat that slice of bread, which I could have done, nobody needed to know, on my way back in the evening. So I shared it with Lydia and Margot. So we shared everything. We had no facilities to wash. There was a lake nearby, and we were driven twice a week into this lake to wash. But then later on we had also a... like a water cannon came and we got a bit of water to wash ourselves. I mean we were riddled with lice, we looked dreadful. And one day we got a pullover, which I still have, and a pair of men's underpants. And a coat. He brought these from Stutthof. And we looked like... like clowns. I mean it was too dreadful for words, but it kept us warm a bit. My aunt... They had a little Revier they called it, like a little sick bay, and they wanted me to help there, but I didn't want to, because I knew that at Milke at mid-day you would get some potatoes, and that was more important than anything else. Those little potatoes in their jackets, which were normally fed to pigs. But I had an aunt who was together with me. Her husband, who was a brother of my mother, had been shot on the wall, on the cemetery wall, in Riga. She was one of the first ones that went down with typhoid.

Typhus.

Typhus. In our camp. And she was in a barrack with a few... And then later on a few more girls, they were isolated from us. And I, in spite of it, I used to go and visit her. Or look through the door. And one day she said to me, "Oh, I would like some chicken soup and some herring". And I thought to myself, what have I got to lose? I go to the Commandant and I say my aunt fancies chicken soup and herring. But don't laugh, she got her chicken soup and she got her herring, as true as I want to see my grandchildren again. So I fed her, and she said, "Like Friday night at home". And a few days later she died. And that was on the 10th... She was the first one who died in our camp. And I asked the Commandant what the date was, it was the 10th of December 1944. And I said to this Commandant, "It's her son's birthday". I didn't know her son was in Switzerland, he survived in Switzerland, and he lives now in Los Angeles. And he said, "You can't go to the cemetery with her. But", he said, "you can go behind the wagon until the end of the camp". So I said, "Where will she be taken?" "To the cemetery in Sofienwalde", that is what he told me. Whether that was true or not, I don't know. But later on they died... Lots of them died there. And...

Was anybody else treated the way you were, with so much privilege?

Yes, yes, quite a few. He had quite a few there, yes, yes, yes. One who survived, she is now in America, Eva Metzger. She was there with her mother. He called her Punkt. I don't know why. So we were there until, I would say until December, January of '44. In Sofienwalde. Then we had to leave that camp. And we marched to a place called Gothentor. Because the Russians came nearer, the Front came closer. And we were in Gothentor, which was previously a camp for Arbeitseinsatz, for

German... part of the German war effort. These barracks were not too bad. And our Commandant was with us. And every day new prisoners arrived from all different working camps in that area, and East Prussia. And my cousin who lives now in Bielefeld also arrived. She was in a terrible state. I then worked as a nurse again in Gothentor. Not a nurse, I mean first aid. And she arrived in a terrible condition. She was the only German Jewess amongst Hungarian Jewesses. And one thing I must say, the Hungarians had only been in the camp since May '44, and they just couldn't knuckle down to the regime, they could not assimilate, they were more or less... The ones we came in contact with were like animals. They were cannibals we found out. We were hardly given any food. The people became cannibals. From the corpses they tore out little bits of flesh from their buttocks, and the liver. I didn't see it personally, but we had to stand Strafappel, we were punished and had to stand for, I don't know how many hours. By that time it was already very cold and snowy and ice, it was after Christmas, January of '45. Otherwise we would have never found out. And our Commandant was always drunk. And somebody else was in... He was not in charge of us anymore, it was somebody else who was in charge of the whole lot. So he was...

Subordinate.

Subordinate. And kept in the background. But in charge of us was one of the Berufsverbrecher. Mr X, who had come from Stahlhof. And he used to shout the most horrible slogans. "Ich schlag Euch zum Handkoffer, dass Ihr in keinen Sarg passt". And he was the most brutal thing you can imagine. With a truncheon he used to walk through the rows of us. It didn't take much, a fly could have pushed us over.

Was he a Jew?

No, he was one of the Berufsverbrecher, one of the criminals. And I think they caught him afterwards, either they hung him or... I don't know, but he... he got what he deserved. So we were in this camp for only a little while, and then the typhus was rampant. I mean they died like flies. This was January of '45. And roughly we were about three thousand prisoners there. And as also the Russian Front came nearer there, we were put on to a march. And marched towards - I can only say it with hindsight - either further into the Reich or - I don't know where they marched us. They marched us at night. And during the day they drove us into barns. And into forests. And always with SS guard. And our Commandant, he would sometimes say, "How are you getting on? Can you still stand it". But you could smell the liquor from him. But we hardly saw him. But who couldn't walk any more was shot on the roadside. Who was left behind, couldn't catch up with the rest, was shot. So this whole area, the road was strewn with corpses.

What did you have on your feet at this time?

We only had, as they called it, Holzpantinen. Wooden clogs. And we had taken from Milke, cement bags, and put them round us, the empty cement... the paper of the cement sacks. And nothing else. And the cold and the snow was terrible. So we marched for weeks on end. And we were licking the snow. And if we passed a hedge, an evergreen hedge, we would take little bits of green off and eat it. People

had dysentery and - and - and who wanted to be excused and wanted to go out of - step out of line, wanted to sit on the - on the roadside to pass - pass motions or - or urinate, whatever you want to say, was shot down. I mean they didn't let you even go and do your... So people were dirty, you know, and the smell and the stench and the things... We were not anymore human beings. We marched, and we think we must have marched about four or five weeks. At least. And on the 10th of March 1945, we came to Chinow. I would say C-H-I-N-O-V, or N-O-W. To a very big estate. Like a farm. A big estate with lots of outhouses, and so on, and they pushed us into one of these barns.

How many of you, would you say, were left by then?

We would say, because we talked it over years later, we must have been then about three hundred only.

And when you started?

Started, about three thousand. Because they came from all different workplaces. You know, because from all sides you saw the columns of prisoners, like ghosts, coming and joining the column.

And Schulze was still with you, the Commandant?

Yes, Schulze was very... He looked like Bing Crosby. So my friend told me afterwards. I never looked at him that closely (laughs). So we came to this - the night before we came - that must have been the 9th of March. We were driven into this barn. There were already Russian prisoners of war in the barn, and French prisoners of war. Because all the columns were marching. And we saw - before we got there we saw the German officers and soldiers on bicycles, they requisitioned horse and carts, they were all going in different directions, but we still had our guards. But we saw them all going... Later on we found out they were fleeing from the Russian Front. So we were in this barn with our Commandant, SS girls and some other... Still with our guards. And the guards from the other columns, in this barn. Then on Saturday, about lunchtime, Saturday the 10th of March, we heard distant shooting. Quite a few of us panicked inside this barn, we thought they will come and shoot us, they must have shot already others. And the noise came nearer and nearer, and the shooting was not like gunshots, but cannon shots, but we didn't know the difference. And with that we heard some terrific noise, and the Russian tanks had come. One of... I can only say this from hearsay, apparently one of the Latvian Jews, the Latvians spoke Russian, Latvian, most of them a perfect German, and Yiddish. One of the Latvian Jews looked through the door in the barn, as he saw the tanks, and he recognised the Red Star. He shouted "Tovarish". That means "Comrades". And he turned into the barn and he shouted "Kinderlach, mir seinem befreid". And with that apparently he dropped dead. But this I say from hearsay, I didn't witness it. But what we did witness, we still stayed in our barn and didn't know what to do. We heard shooting. Very close rifle shooting, not cannon, but rifle shooting. And as we then dared to go out, we saw all our guards, the SS women and Schulze, being shot. They had to stand in a circle, and the Russians just didn't ask any questions, and they shot them. Whether anybody was decent or not, they are shot. And we were told that our

Hungarian Lager Alteste was shot as well. But I don't know, because people did split on her. But my friend, Lydia, saw Doktor Aufrecht, from the Riga hospital, being hung. Amongst others, they hung him. So that was the hour of our liberation. So we didn't know what to do. My friend Lydia stayed behind. My friend Margot and a Czechoslovakian Jewish woman, Frau Reininger, she went back to Prague afterwards, and I was in correspondence with her, and we sent parcels until she died. She was a lot older than us. We went away, the moment they opened the barn doors. And on this farm there were... You see them when you see the settlers in America. You know, these big... big... You see these big wagons, horse-drawn wagons, with these rounded...

Canvas.

With the canvas tops. They were abundant, left in these... you know, on this farm. So all I know that I went, with the last of my... They were abundant. And with the last strength I went and I got a bag of sugar, a pillowcase full of sugar, because these people were intended to flee, and took provisions with them. So I had a bag of sugar, which weighed more than me, and three chickens which were killed, with their feathers on. So I thought we could go somewhere and have chicken soup or something. My friend got a bucket of jam. And Mrs Reininger, I think she got a loaf of bread. And so we went... We were afraid the Germans might come back. So we went in the direction... the Russian direction. And we stayed a night in a deserted farmhouse. I had thrown the sugar away and the chickens. We only kept the jam and the bread. And we got the most shocking diarrhoea afterwards. And we went into a deserted farmhouse where already some women were. And we... At night the Russians came. At night the Russians came, the soldiers. And we had some Latvian Jewish women with us who spoke Russian. And the Russian soldiers came drunk at night, and they were looking for women. And they took some of our Jewish women away and raped them. So as we had this Latvian Jewish woman with us, she spoke for all of us and she explained who we were and what we were, so we were always safe.

But couldn't they see what you were?

They were... It was a fighting front, you know, the Cossacks. I don't know what they were. And we... The three of us, we left those women, because they were all very ill, and we thought we don't want to... now, we don't want to die after liberation. Little did we know that most of them died, or lots of them died afterwards. And that we already had typhus. We didn't realise. So the three of us, we made our own way. We had terrible diarrhoea. But we got ourselves some clothes, but kept still our prison garb. We thought that is our identification. We didn't speak any other language but German, and a bit of school English and school French. And Mrs Reininger spoke Czech. So we came until just shortly before Bidgorsh, Bromberg, when Mrs Reininger left us. She went with Polish girls and deserted the two of us. Which at that time we didn't like very much. So we were... We felt very ill, Margot and I. And were sitting in an entrance to... in a courtyard, on the outskirts of Bromberg, when we heard somebody approaching - it was at night - approaching us. And he saw us, and stood in front of us, and we thought it's a Russian soldier who wants to rape us. We were terribly frightened after the liberation, we were more frightened

than during the camp time, because then we had nothing to lose, but now we wanted to live. We saw this little soldier we thought. He was very small. But I thought he had something on his shoulders, some stars there. And he looked at us. And he said "Yiddische Madelach?" He said, "Jewish Girls?" We said, "Yes". He had already met and seen some of the ex-concentration camp inmates. And he introduced himself, he was...

End of Fll86 Side B

F1187 Side A

Last time, when we finished, you were saying that you had met this Russian colonel.

We were hiding in the doorway of a house in Bromberg. And, as I mentioned before, this little man stopped in front of us. And as it turned out to be, he was a colonel in the Russian Army. He was a chief doctor in charge of the Russian military hospital in Bromberg. And he introduced himself as Oberarzt, which means the chief doctor of the hospital. And he said, "My name is Miron Vladimovitch Schwarzmann. In Yiddish, Meyer Wolf". So he saw that we were both ill, or sick. He took us with him to the military hospital, which was a huge building. And we were examined by a lady doctor, who was Jewish too.

Where was this hospital?

In Bromberg, in Bromberg. And we soon found out that everyone who was in the rank of an officer, either as doctors or nursing staff, they were all Jewish. Most of them. So we were treated very well, but taken immediately to a separate hospital, or separate room, or somewhere. We were isolated, because we were diagnosed as typhus. And we were taken care of and nursed very well, the two of us, Margot and I. And stayed there till the end of the war. And the funny thing was, I asked Miron Vladimovitch, "It must be Pesach soon". He spoke a beautiful Yiddish. And he said to me, "Dein Yiddish is wie Deitch". I asked him, "It must be Pesach soon". So he said, "We only have one holiday a year, and that's the 1st of May". He already tried to arrange matches for... like they say in Hebrew, Shidochim. He had a son who also was a doctor, and he already said he would be for me. And an engineer would be for Margot. And I thought that's all what we need. So I worked then later on in the operating theatre, in the hospital. But I did menial tasks, like winding, like rolling up bandages etcetera. And everybody made a fuss of the two of us.

What did Margot do?

Margot had to clean the wards. And Margot smoked a lot at that time, and she got tobacco from the Russian soldiers, and in newspaper she would make herself... Out of newspaper she used as cigarette paper, and she would make her own cigarettes.

Were you still in this isolation ward, or did they move you?

No, no, no, after about four weeks or so they moved us, and we had a very nice room for the two of us in the basement. And we ate together with the nursing staff. And we stayed in the hospital.

How long did it take you to regain your strength a bit at the beginning?

We were liberated on the 15th of March - at the end of April, something like that. We found out - I don't know now how - that in Bromberg, or Bidgosht in Polish, was at Gdansk Ulitsa - that means Dansier Street, 66, was a Jewish Committee. All those people who came in transit through Bromberg were registered at this Committee. From there you were given ration cards and travel permits, and so on. So we went

one day to this Committee, and I found some friends, and the only survivor from Berlin I met. She lives in the States now.

What was her name?

Kate Selling. She came from near Stuttgart, from the South of Germany. And her mother was taken away already while we were still in Berlin. They were taking to the South of France the Jews from her area, and she perished there. And Kate I met again six years ago in the States. She is married and has children. And we write to each other for the Jewish New Year. So we stayed in the Russian hospital for quite a while. We partook in the First of May celebrations, which existed in this hospital, of them dancing in the... outside, you know, the soldiers. And I think we got double rations, I don't know exactly. And on the 6th of May '45, the war finished. They were shouting "Woina Konshilla". "The war has finished". So I said to my friend Margot, "Now it's about time that we should think of going home".

Were you free to do more or less what you wanted after your work in the operating theatre?

Yes, but we didn't go out outside Bromberg, because at that time in Bromberg, the few times we did go out and we visited Kate Selling, who lived also with some other friends in a private house somewhere. We were waiting for the war to finish. They had collected all the Volksdeutsche, the Germans, the Russians had more or less arrested them, and put them into camps, and you saw them walking in the streets, in columns, with a Swastika on their back, like where we had the Star of David. And they were taken to work for the Russians. And they were in hostels or in camps. So as we only spoke German, we were afraid to go into the street. But I... to me it occurred, I had a very funny incident. But that comes a little later. So we very seldom went out, only visited Kate.

How did you feel at this time? How did you adapt to...?

The funny thing is we adapted very quickly to all circumstances. Don't know why. But Margot was the same. We were just hoping the war will finish and we go home. Hoping that we might find still friends or relatives. I knew my parents were not alive anymore. Hoping to start a normal life. Not in Germany, I would never liked to have settled in Germany. I wanted to go to Palestine, or to the States. Where I only had cousins, I wasn't sure... whether I did have cousins or relatives there. So this Miron Vladimovitch, he came always to visit us. And we went for a walk with him, the two... he said, "My ladies". But he always pestered us with going with them to Russia. When the regiment would move, we should go with them to Russia. He said, "No country is as good for Jewish people as Russia". So I said to Margot, "God forbid". So I told him we have to go back home to look for Krovim. Krovim means... Krov in Hebrew is blood. And Krovim is relatives. We have to look for relatives. And now the war is finished and we didn't really know what to do, because there were no communications, we didn't know how to get home. And knowing from the Jewish Committee that people did go, that they put transports together and ... there might have been a chance of us joining a transport. I don't know how Kate came home. But Margot and I, we decided on the 15th of June 1945, to say goodbye to Bromberg. So

Miron Vladimovitch saw us to the station, to the train. And we got from the Jewish Community a travel pass with lots of stamps on it. And ration cards. And some money. So we didn't know what to do with the ration cards. On the way back from the Committee we passed a dairy. And we had ration cards for cheese and butter. So I said to Margot, "I go in there and I get us our ration, our "proviant", our food for the journey. Let's start here". So she said, "I'm not going in there". I said, "I go in". And we didn't dare to speak German. So I got in, very brazenly, into this little shop. It stunk of cheese and God knows what, and presented my ration card with the cheese coupons. And I said, "Du Fromage s'il vous plait". And I didn't realise that in the corner there were some men standing there, and they were French ex-prisoners of war. And they jumped at me, "Mademoiselle Fransaise, Mademoiselle Fransaise". And they tried to kiss and hug me. And I ran out of that shop, I left my cheese ration cards there. And Margot said to me, "What's the matter". I said, "Come, come". She said, "Did you steal something?" You know, we used to, you know... if you didn't steal it you wouldn't have it, you know. "Did you steal?" I said, "No, come away, there are Frenchmen there". And I couldn't have a French conversation with them so I ran. So that was the end of that. So on the 15th of June we got onto this train. And he put us into a compartment for officers, for Russian officers. And we got to Frankfurt an der Oder. We wanted to make to Berlin first, because we were told that in Berlin is another Committee in the Iranischen Strasse, which looks after refugees. So we came to Frankfurt an der Oder...

How long did that take you?

I could not tell you anymore, how long.

But it must have been quite a difficult journey at that time?

It was a ... Stopping and starting, and off the train and on the train. And in Frankfurt an der Oder - from there we couldn't get any further. We met some French prisoners of war - we were afraid to walk on our own. So there was a column of French prisoners of war, and we said could we go with them. They were going towards France. I don't know which roads they were supposed to take, but we walked with them for a few days, so we felt sheltered in the group, because the NKVD were looking for Germans. We saw lorryloads of Germans, you know, and so on.

But did you by this time look fairly normal again?

We looked fairly normal, but we had hardly any clothes, we had a little bundle. I've got still my little bag. I had a bundle, and I had my zebra dress. I kept that as an identity. Stupid. We were ignorant and innocent, thinking that might be an identity. But anybody could have picked up these dresses on the road, you know.

You didn't have any numbers?

No, we didn't, we didn't have a number, no. Only the number is on the dress. Only Auschwitz gave numbers. So in Frankfurt an der Oder, or shortly after, we were then left alone after we went for a few days with those French ex-prisoners of war. And then went a different route, not towards Berlin. So we got to Berlin somehow. And

Berlin was absolutely... There were no two bricks on top of each other. But somehow we found this Iranischen Strasse, and it used to be the former Jewish hospital. And it was pretty orderly there. I found again my cousin, who lives in Bielefeld now. She was taken from Lauenburg, in Pommern, straight on a train to Berlin, with about twenty others. Had we waited at the time it would have been much more organised for us. She had a very bad leg, so she waited there until she was... she convalesced there. And there she found out that her husband had survived, and was already in Bielefeld. I mean the bush telegram went, you know, backwards and forwards, and people told stories, "this one is alive and that one is alive. And it wasn't true, you know, and they might be alive". And false hopes and hopes and... So we didn't stay long in Berlin. And I said goodbye to my friend Margot, who came from Dresden. Margot was an only child, like me. Her parents worked for Zeiss Ikon. And in January '42 she came to the Riga ghetto on her own. Her parents were claimed as central for the war effort, as they worked for Zeiss Ikon. They had to stay behind. And she couldn't - they couldn't volunteer to go with her, and she couldn't work for Zeiss Ikon so that she was together with her parents. So she hoped that her parents might be still alive. So after a few days, maybe a week together in Berlin, we parted. And I went with another woman, who heard that her husband was alive, she came from Bochum, her name was Ilse Graf, who afterwards committed suicide when she found out her husband had not survived. But with her I tried to go into the West zone of Germany. We swam... we walked and came to the border, to the East and West border, near Dessau Rosslau. And at night we swam through the river, into the American zone. We knocked at a farmhouse - we undressed, except for our knickers, and put our bundles on our back. The Russians were patrolling, they had a pontoon bridge, in the distance they were patrolling the... because people tried to get from the East to the West. So we knocked at this farmhouse and we said, "Open the door, we are from the concentration camp". And they were very nice to us, they gave us hot milk and hot blankets. And...

They were sympathetic.

They were sympathetic. And they said, "In the village there are three gentlemen here, and they have got labels on their lapel from the camps they were in". And they said, "One had..." - I found out afterwards - "had Riga, Stutthof, Buchenwald, Magdeburg, Theresienstadt. And he was by the name of Harry Sternberg". So the farmers told us, "They are the "prominents" in the village". And the next morning the son of the farmer took us where those three men were staying. And they had arranged like a Kristallnacht in the village. They found out who are the Nazis, they took the law into their own hands, and they were making "Ordnung".

Were they originally from that village?

One came from near Dusseldorf, or Cologne. This was Harry Sternberg. And the others were two brothers by the name of Ganz. They came from Poland. So they saw to it that I got a coat and shoes. They took me in one of the houses, you know, where Nazis lived, and opened the wardrobes, "Now help yourself". And the poor woman, the German woman, was as frightened of them like we were of the Nazis at that time. So I got a pair of shoes and a coat. And these wanted to go to Palestine, those three men. I was together with them for... and with Ilse Graf, we were together with them,

and went to Kassel. Because near Kassel was, before the war, was a Kibbutz. And these three fellows knew that there were people, and the Kibbutz was already established again, so to speak, as a reception centre. And they called themselves Kibbutz Buchenwald.

Now who ran these centres? Just the Jews?

Just the Jews, yes. Jews appointed themselves, you know. And we heard that they are in this former Kibbutz near Kassel, was already, you know, another reception centre, for people who wanted to go at that time illegally to Palestine. And they called themselves Kibbutz Buchenwald. And years and years later I visited them. It's now called Yetze Serini. Kibbutz Yetze Serini. How to spell it, don't ask me. I can only give you the phonetic... But these were the founders and survivors of Kibbutz Buchenwald. And we stayed there for... So these stayed on, those three men, and I then, on my own, started my journey home. Which took me six or seven weeks to get home to my home town, Lingen.

Can you describe that a little bit, the journey?

The journeys... There one didn't have to fear the Russians anymore. And we were already sort of very courageous. We went to the police station and asked for travel permits, for money, for ration cards.

Who was in charge of everything at these police stations at that time?

The Germans. The Germans, yes. The Germans were... They carried on as normal. Amongst the ruins, you know, they carried on. And it was a British military zone.

But they weren't under supervision by the British?

Yes, of course, but they had their own administration, yes. So we went always to police stations, from where we got ration cards and travel permits. I don't know about money, I don't know now. And... But transport was non-existent, you know, you were... For days you waited at railway stations. Germans, mainly Germans, and soldiers and God knows what, they waited for trains to arrive. And if a train arrived they went on them like... like animals. And they hung on them like bunches of grapes, or when bees swarm, you know, like bunches of bees, you know, the small... They were hanging on the engines and on the trains, and on the goods trains and... the train might wait for twelve hours and might go for three miles, or three kilometres, and then it stopped again. And then the railway lines were bombed and you couldn't go any further. Then you got a lift maybe on a tractor from a farmer to the next town. It was terrible.

Did you talk to people?

Yes, we talked to people.

How did they treat you? How did they behave towards you?

Very cold, you know, sort of very minimal, very quiet, very calm. They didn't know of concentration camps. They heard of Buchenwald, but they never saw anything, they never heard anything, they'd never seen anybody. Even so, later on we found out that all over Germany there were labour camps, where concentration camp inmates worked until they dropped dead. But they didn't know of anything, these people. And then I came to Kassel... I just got it wrong there. When I left those two fellows I went to Kassel, that's right, after the kibbutz I went to Kassel. And from there I found out that the German towns collected their surviving Jews from Theresienstadt. And mainly old people had survived in Theresienstadt. And the German towns picked up their Jews and brought them home, so to speak, into the Reich. So in Kassel I was told that Stadt Kassel was bringing their Jews from Theresienstadt, and some other Jews to Bochum, that was a combined transport. So I went with this coach from Kassel, then to Bochum. So I was stranded again in Bochum. By that time, Isle Graf, she remained in Bochum, I went to the police and found out if there are other Jewish people living there already. There was one mixed marriage there, and I spent the night with them. From there I went to Munster, again to the police. And then I went to Osnabruck. There were already Jews returned, two Jewish men older than me, who were together with me in Riga, they were in the same transport. One was Grunberg and one was Otto Stern. They had already settled in Osnabruck, after Buchenwald and different labour camps, they had come back. So I spent a day there and they told me how to go, maybe to go forward. So I had to go to Reine. And there when I came after Osnabruck, you didn't see any destruction any more. The trains more or less ran normally, not to a timetable, but they did run, they were not interrupted by damage, no bomb damage. So I arrived from Reine. I stayed in Reine a night, and at neighbours of my uncle and aunt's. And the following day I arrived in Lingen, in my home town. I arrived at the railway station in Lingen. And there I stood with my little bundle. And I didn't know where to go. I mean I can't express my feelings all along my report. You can't express the fear, the trauma, even sometimes excitement or pleasures. You can't... can't bring it into words. You can't put it to paper and you can't express it. There I stood with my bundle at the railway station in Lingen. And I went to former friends of my parents, who had a bakers and confectioners, who were very decent, until the last night before we were deported they always put bread outside our door, which we then shared with all the Jews in the Judenhaus. So I went there, and the excitement was great that I had survived, and they were very sad that I came back on my own. I think it was a Sunday. And they had plenty of food, which was very unusual.

What month was this now?

August. That was the 20th of August 1945. They had plenty of food. I hadn't seen so much food. Because being bakers and confectioners they baked for the YMCA, for the Young Mens Christian Association. Which at that time... My home town, the occupation was the British... it was occupied by the British, by the BAOR, by the British Army of the Rhine. But the occupation force was Polish. And these friends did the baking for the YMCA, but for the Polish YMCA. So they had plenty to eat, I'd never seen so much food. And the next day I had to report to the Einwohner Meldeamt. You have to report when you stay in Germany longer, for two or three days you have to report to the police and fill out a form.

Can I just ask you, was Lingen damaged at all?

Hardly. Hardly.

So everything was standing, more or less?

More or less. More or less. I had to report to the police. And had to register. And again Polizist Brandt was there, and when he saw me he nearly fainted. And when he found out I was the only one, it took him a long time to recover from the shock. I must say there were lots of decent Germans as well. He told me that he had to vacate his house, and in his house were two Polish officers billeted, who spoke perfect German. One was a doctor who had studied and lived in Vienna. And one was a captain, he was a quartermaster. I mean the doctor was also in the rank of captain. A quartermaster. And he came originally from Katowitz. So I didn't take much notice of it. The next day he came to these friends I stayed with, and said that he spoke to those officers and they very much wanted to meet me, as I was the only Jewish girl who had survived from their town. They couldn't come to see me, because at that time there was no fraternising, as I lived with a German family. So I went to see them. They had lots of parcels and lots of gifts and lots of goods sent to them from England. Because Lingen was a garrison town before the war. And in the barracks were now housed or... sheltered, lots of surviving people from Belsen. In Belsen they burned down most of the barracks, and lots of them came to Lingen. So it became a DP camp. These barracks became a DP camp. So the doctor and the quartermaster looked after some girls in this DP camp.

How many people would you say were in that camp?

A few hundred. Marriages took place, because there was a Polish Rabbi nearby. I mean they were a fighting force, the Poles. I mean they were not DP's, they were the fighting force, they were with the second... They were not with General Anders, they were with General Sikorsky. They came with the invasion to Normandy, then through France, Belgium, Holland, and ended in Germany. And my home town was near the... about ten or fifteen kilometres from the Dutch border. So they were there with the occupation army. So they were looking after those Jewish girls. And so they gave me... they had quite a shop there, quite a choice, so I could choose clothes, whatever I wanted, because up till then I hardly had anything. They gave me cigarettes and soap, because for two cigarettes you could get an egg. You could change cigarettes for food. But I had plenty, because I stayed with these friends. They offered, and they did, write to America, to the?, put in an advert, that I had survived. And I got a reply from two cousins of mine, who had emigrated in '35 to the States. And they had married in the meantime, and their wives sent beautiful parcels, 'On Active Service'. They couldn't send them direct to me, but to those two officers. And these two cousins were the brothers of my cousin in Bielefeld. So they sent parcels also for her. And I would go very often to Bielefeld, and to my relatives to Bremen. These officers would take me in their jeep. So about six months afterwards, after that, I became engaged to the doctor. And he took me very often in his jeep, with his driver, to see my cousins in Bielefeld, a husband and wife, and my cousins in Bremen. And we would take food to them. My cousin, in the June of '46,

gave birth to a little girl, and I was with her six weeks, I nursed her. And my husband always came to visit. Before the baby was born he hoped it would be a boy.

When you say your 'husband', you weren't married yet?

No. No, of course not. How shall I call him then? The doctor? (laughs). Yes, sorry, my mistake. Yes. Anyway, so I saw a lot of my cousins. And we were married in November '46.

In Lingen?

In the autumn of '46, the regiment moved from Lingen to Auerich, which is a small town in the Northern part of Germany. So we were married in Auerich. That was a civil marriage. Then we were married... our marriage was registered in the Polish register, and the German civil register, Standesamt. And then we had, on the 28th of November 1946, our Jewish marriage, at the house of my cousins in Bremen. The marriage was... two Rabbonim officiated. One was an American Rabbi. I don't know his name at the moment. But the other one was an English Jewish Rabbi, he was Squadron Leader Sanka, who originally came from Liverpool. Because the Polish Rabbi was on holiday at that time. But I had an appointment with him, my fiance and I, we had an appointment with the Polish Rabbi. And he sent me to the Mikvah before the wedding. So I had to go to Belsen. In Belsen was a Mikvah. But it was so filthy, that for a few dollars the woman who was in charge of the Mikvah gave me a slip, said I had attended the Mikvah, because I needed this for the marriage certificate.

Could you please explain to me why there was a Mikvah in Belsen?

Because Belsen still had... quite a lot of people were still living in Belsen. But that was the truth and I don't know why and how. They called it a Mikvah, you know, it was a thing. I didn't even see it. I saw the whole approach was so filthy, that you could bribe your way out. So with a few dollars, the woman who was in charge, she gave me a slip, said I had attended the Mikvah. Yes, there were still quite a few people left in Belsen. And the blackmarket was flourishing in Belsen, and between Brussels and Holland and Belsen. And Munich, you know, there was a black market.

Who were the people still left in Belsen at this time?

There was - they called him the Oberjude of Belsen, his name was Yossele Rosensaft. A lot has been written about him. And he went to the States afterwards. So he administered still those people who stayed behind. And some people had nowhere to go, they didn't come to Lingen, they stayed in Belsen. The barracks were burned down, but there were still the buildings where the SS had lived in, where the administration was. So they had offices and they had rooms in these barracks. So we were married in Bremen, they made the Chuppah. That was a nice ceremony. Sad, but nice. And then I lived in the officers' quarters in Auerich. And had my meals in the officers' mess.

Did you work at this time?

No. We were waiting to go to England. My husband went already with part of the regiment to England, in February of '47. It was a very cold winter. And I stayed behind with the women, because lots of them had married, some had met their wives, they came from Poland all the way to Lingen, and had joined - it sounds funny - the regiment. And so we were left behind. And we were supposed to follow in April '47. We were billeted in a beautiful villa. When it came to my turn, I didn't get permission to enter Great Britain, because I was born in Germany. Everybody left, all the wives and the children and the soldiers left, except a very few officers were left behind to do the...

Winding up.

Winding up of the regiment, of the legal things. And me. With a handful of officers' wives. And this time was for me more traumatic than the whole time of the camp, because I thought I start a normal life. I was married, my husband was already in England, we thought we are going to America from England, and now I was again discriminated against because... first because all my younger years because I was Jewish, and now because I was born in Germany. And I lost a lot of weight then. Eventually my husband saw to it that I got permission to come to England on the 17th of August 1947. My husband was with the Polish Resettlement Corps in Cotford, near Salisbury, in Wiltshire. He was a doctor of the Resettlement Corps. Resettlement Corps was where soldiers were demobbed. They called it Resettlement Corps. To get my permission to enter Great Britain wasn't very easy for my husband. He tried everything. And I also tried at my end to get out of Germany, but to no avail. But eventually my husband had an interview with the Chief Rabbi, Dr Brody. He was at that time the Chief Rabbi of the Forces. Later on he became the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. So my husband went to see him. And he saw to it that a law was passed in Parliament. He spoke to Barnet Janner. And a law was passed in Parliament that those who were born in Germany could join their... could emigrate. And I was the first German-born woman to enter Great Britain after the war. But the fright was still in my bones. We sailed from Bremerhaven. And we were in a big customs hall where we received our ration cards for Great Britain and clothing coupons and our documents. And my husband changed his name from Freudenheim when he came to England, to Foster. Being in general practice it was easier for the patients to pronounce. But I was still Mrs Freudenheim then. And when I went to collect my documents an English officer with an air-force moustache got up from his seat behind this trestle table, from where we were given our documents, he stood up, he must have been six foot tall, and he said, "Mrs Freudenheim", when he saw my papers. And I thought, now he sends me back. Because the fright from all those years were still in our bones, and in my bones. So he shook me by the hand and he said, "Mrs Freudenheim, when you board that ship..." - because that ship was anchored at the end of these... - "you are on UK soil". So I said, "But I want to go to England to join my husband". I didn't know what he meant, UK. "You are on UK soil".

End of F1187 Side A

F1187 Side B

So now you were on the boat, on UK soil. And then what?

That's right. There were lots of soldiers, Polish soldiers, going to... back to Britain. And families. Displaced persons. I didn't feel very comfortable amongst them. But we were six nights and five days, or vice versa, on this boat, going to Glasgow. Because the Channel was mined, and twice a day we had...

Lifeboat drill.

Lifeboat drill. The food was terrible. But that was... or that didn't matter to me anymore, I knew I was safe. So we came to Glasgow, and then by train we went to Sherbourne, in Dorset. There was a camp, a Polish camp, for Polish soldiers. And I went to the little hospital there, the first aid, and I introduced myself, I said, "I am Mrs Freudenheim". "Oh", he said, "your husband..." - this was a Dr Kummerling, who lives in... he is still alive, he is 92, I was told yesterday by a friend. And he was a doctor of that camp. And he said, "Oh yes, your husband is waiting". Because all the transports with women came to this camp in Sherbourne. Sherbourne in Dorset. So I stayed there one night, and the next morning my husband arrived with a jeep and a driver, and he had rented a cottage in Cotford. That's between Warminster and Salisbury, in Wiltshire.

How long was it since you had seen him?

I'd not seen him since the February of '47, and this was August '47. And we lived in this... He was... We lived there until the winter of '47/'48, when my husband took a furnished room in Clifton Gardens, Maida Vale. But he was still in the Resettlement Corps, and he came weekends, and I was there in this furnished room.

What did you do?

I didn't do much, no, I visited others, you know, and in the house were some refugees where we stayed, and also some people from the camps, and...

How was your English?

I had my school English. I got by with it. And in January '48, my husband got demobilised, and he paid a deposit on a house in Finchley, Firsby Avenue, West Finchley. And once we had this house I became pregnant (laughs). My husband worked as an assistant doctor in the East End, for a Dr Moss. Or rather in Hackney, Hackney, Mare Street. And we didn't have a car, it was very hard. We were very poor (laughs). Needless to say. It was a great struggle.

Did your husband have problems with English, or not?

No, my husband's English was... apart from a strong foreign accent, it was fluent. And his German was perfect, because he lived and studied in Vienna. His French was

very good, and his Ivrit was perfect. When we went to Israel, I mean he could talk to everybody there. And of course he spoke Polish.

Had you given up the idea of going to America?

At that time... oh yes... at that time the National Health Service,.. In the May of '48, that's right, in May '48 the National Health Service came into being. And the doctors who were on the foreign register then, on the foreign medical register, and who had served in the army and on active service, were admitted to the permanent medical register and admitted to practice in Great Britain and the colonies, without passing exams. So then my husband, who was working illegally so to speak, or because cheaply, he was a "Schwarzarbeiter", for these doctors, he could work openly and he got ten shillings a week more, or ten shillings per surgery more. Our daughter was born on the 13th of October 1948. Was on Yom Kippur.

That must have been a great joy.

Yes. More so for my husband. She was called Frances Caroline. Frances after my husband's mother, Fanny. And Caroline after my mother, Carolina. But we call her Caroline. She was born in East Finchley, in a nursing home. In Creighton Avenue. And my gynaecologist was a Dr Jonas, and from Berlin. And so we struggled on. A year later... My husband did locums. And a year later we did an opposite move. People moved from the East End to North West and North London. We moved from North Three to N.15. To Tottenham, N.15., near Stamford Hill. We did the opposite move. Because my husband had just enough money to put a deposit, #250 saved by then, and his money he got, I think #50 or #70, when he was demobbed as an officer from the Polish/British Army. So he had #250, and he paid a deposit on a house in Tottenham, in Broad Lane. And where he squatted. I call it squatting. He just put a name-plate up. And I decorated the house, it was a real hovel. We made a waiting room and a consulting room, and secondhand furniture and all sorts of sticks. And we waited to build up a practice, while in the meantime my husband did locums. Had a car already at that time, and he worked for three years, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Sundays all day. Thursdays and Saturdays, from six to midnight, for a Russian Jewish doctor, who engaged him because he had also qualified in Vienna - because my husband put an advert in the British Medical Journal. He worked for this Dr Statnigross in Homerton. That is Kingsland Road, Homerton, not far from Liverpool Street Station, in the East End, as a locum, three days a week. And he did night duties for a rota of twelve doctors, in the East End. So that he gradually built up his own list. Because in order to qualify for a loading - I've forgotten now what they called it - you had to have three hundred patients in the first year after you put up a plate. Capitation. Not capitation fees, I don't know. So my husband had to have three hundred patients otherwise he would not... could not exist as a doctor. He could not continue. But in order to live he did these locums and worked, and did night duties and locums. And he worked for Jewish doctors and he worked Friday nights and Saturday mornings. And they liked him very much, because he was very... he was really a... even though he was Polish. He appreciated that he got a job, so he saw to it that the doctors could always claim, that he never overlooked anything, so that his boss... For instance, if people needed certificates, for which the doctor got money, or they had to register infectious disease, he got half a crown for it. Or he took

temporary residents, always to see that the doctor benefitted by employing my husband. So generously they agreed between them to raise... He got one guinea for the surgery, so he got one and a half guineas. So that was a big deal, you know, was quite something for us.

So you were married and you settled in England, and you had a daughter. Now did you talk to your child about the Holocaust, about your experiences at all?

No, not at all. Not in the first years. Not in the first years at all.

And later?

Also not so much later, because my husband never wanted me to talk about it, because I got nightmares and it upset me a lot. And we didn't talk much about it. Even so, my husband had quite a story to tell about his own life. But we didn't talk much about it.

Did you go to visit Israel?

Yes, we went once only. During the lifetime of my husband we went in September '67, after the Six Day War. Because money wasn't... Money was quite scarce and tight, we worked on a tight budget. And three grownups and locums and so on. But we went in September '67. Which was where I saw, for the first time in my married life, saw my husband cry. When we landed at Lod Airport, which was at that time, which is Ben Gurion Airport now. And it was very impressive. And he found relatives he didn't know, I mean distant relatives, and school friends. He didn't know who had survived. And some in quite prominent positions in the government. He had a very dear cousin, also by the name of Freudenheim, who came to visit us in London a few times with his wife. He died about fifteen years ago. He was a legal advisor to the Jewish Agency. And his name was Dr Yehuda Freudenheim. And we saw him in Jerusalem. And lots of other friends and cousins of his, who in the meantime have, unfortunately, died.

Did you ever consider emigrating to Israel?

No, we never did. I did, as a youngster, wanted very much to live on a kibbutz. And even after my husband died, I said to my friends, "You know where I would feel happiest? Would be living on a kibbutz". But reality and a dream, they are quite different, different things, so...

Do you feel that other people should know about your experiences?

Up till recently it was for me a very private affair. I never discussed it with anybody, but with my friends, who were in the same boat. And with my relatives. Who were also in the camps. But not with those who haven't been in a camp, and we always felt people get bored with the subject. And for us it's very good to get it off ones chest, from time to time, to air again ones... or vent again ones feelings. Because two of my best friends here in London also led very busy lives. And until they unfortunately both got widowed, they haven't... didn't... until then they didn't have much time. And

also their husbands didn't want them to talk about it, even though they knew the stories, and had themselves quite nasty experiences during the war. But they didn't want to upset their wives, the same as my husband. But now as we come together sometimes, we talk about it and recall our feelings and experiences. But up till now it was always, as I say, a private affair of my own. My daughter knows about it. And I feel if I were to talk about it, people would think "Ugh, we have heard it so often. Why bring it up again and again?" With the remarks and seeing it on their faces, I know it has lost an interest for them. They heard it once and that's enough. And I would get very upset by talking about it, so it's a fruitless task to talk.

But you felt that you were able to do this for us now?

Yes, because I have such a nice interviewer who puts me at ease. That's why I'm quite at ease to talk about it, even though I notice that I hum and ha a bit. It's a bit difficult at times.

How do you feel that your experiences in the ghetto and in the camp, and subsequently have affected you and affected your life?

I think it hasn't affected my health. Says she. I had typhus, typhoid, and jaundice. And I have an injury on my back where I was hit with the end of a rifle. So I have my scars. I bear my scars. But I never had an emotional scar until recently, since I lost my husband. I have become hypersensitive. In everything, in my every day life. And unfortunately more so with my daughter, son-in-law and the children. I have to learn that they have to lead their own lives. I don't interfere with them. But I feel I want to belong there. And if they are busy and my daughter says, "Oh mummy, I have to go out now". I sometimes take it personally, which is not meant. You know what I mean? And she said, "Oh, it's not convenient now. If you like to sit there, it's okay. But I have to do so and so and so and so". So sometimes... I don't want to be a visitor, but sometimes I can take it and other times I just go away, you know, and I say to myself, oh, I'm in the way. Which it's only a normal thing for them to carry on. And the kids say, "Hi granny". And they go and do their homework or do their own things. It took me a long time to learn it. Because when they were small and I collected them from school, "Oh granny, and granny and granny". But now they are... The girl is sixteen and a half. And the boy is twelve. So they have their own worries and they have their own problems and they have their own life. And I feel sort of more - that is my feeling - it's not - it is logic, with everybody, that you are now more in the background, because the life belongs to the young ones. But that I have to learn to accept. And that I find sometimes very hard. Even so, I mean they are all very nice to me. You know what I mean? Very nice to me. But I feel... And also I mean that is a normal fact, except with the Asian families and the grandparents are the centre of the family. I mean now it's the young people. And I've never been a pushy type. So I take the back seat more. And as I must say, I've always been sensitive, but now I'm hypersensitive.

But you're still a strong person.

I give the impression. I might give the impression. And the funny thing is, I'm very strong... I might give an impression that I'm very strong to the outside world, because

I like to help people, and I stick up for others. And I know my own mind. Maybe I'm wrong, but I kid myself that I know my own mind and what I want. And when I'm with my family I become quite different. And it's definitely not their fault. It's me, they don't know what I expect. They couldn't be nicer, they couldn't be kinder, I couldn't be made more welcome. But I have to learn that I have to take a back seat. Which I do, but somehow... (laughs)

What are your religious beliefs now? How has the past affected them?

Beliefs? Very difficult to say.

Or to rephrase it, would you say that your experiences have affected your religious beliefs?

That did affect me the first few years after the camp. And...

In what way?

That I became indifferent towards religion. Or towards the tradition I was brought up in. I was brought up in a very traditional Jewish way. I came from a relatively very orthodox home. Where my mother, she was more learned than my father. My father was sort of a traditional Jew. But my mother was learned. If you were to ask her what was this and that, what does that mean. She would explain. Now my father would say his Brocha, he would put on Tefillim. Only because they did it at home and he carried on in the same way. So after the war I... My mother was still kosher in the camp, which was a remarkable thing. She didn't eat Trafe. And people knew about it. And they would come to my mother and say, "Can we have your soup tonight? And you have my slice of bread", or something like that. So she would say, "I mustn't ask the people to give me, or even you, to give me your bread, and you can have my soup. Because that is Neverah and I could eat it just as well myself". And even when she was taken away, she left me a note, which she gave to our Jewish policeman in that last camp. On a little slip she wrote, 'God bless you my child. Next Thursday is Tisha be'av'. So wanting to say, because from my mother's side, from the olden days, birthdays and wedding anniversaries, were always related to the Jewish calendar. My grandmother from mother's side, her birthday was on Shabbos Nachamo. And so that was always... So maybe she knew that one would end her life, and to make it easier if I should survive, knowing when to put on a memorial light. But as I say, I met my husband after the war. He was a very good Jew. And Zionist, he belonged to Hashomer Hatzair. Which was the socialist side of Zionism. But where tradition was concerned, not a believer. He was not a hypocrite. He spoke a beautiful Ivrit, which he learned at the Gymnasium. But I started more to go back to a traditional Jewish and kosher home when my daughter grew up.

You gave her a Jewish religious education?

Not really. Only what she saw at home.

She didn't go to a Jewish school?

Not a Jewish school. Which she is very sorry about now that she didn't.

So when did you begin to feel...?

When we became more settled. We were in Tottenham until 1961. The practice continued until the death of my husband. But we moved here. And we became members of the Southgate United Synagogue. Because I said to my husband, "I would like to join the United Synagogue. It reminds me, the service reminds me of home". So he said, "It doesn't matter to which synagogue I don't go, so you go where you want to go". Because he never went to synagogue. So I have a kosher home. And I can say of myself that I can follow and translate the service, the synagogue service, and the prayers. And I enjoy it. Specially when I sit in synagogue all day Yom Kippur, at least I'm not bored. For me the day goes very quickly. My mother used to say that was the happiest day of the year, Yom Kippur. She used to stand, didn't even sit down, all day. And I can't say it's the happiest day of the year for me, but I never worry about it, because for me it's very easy.

I believe your daughter married a religious Jew. How did you feel about that?

My daughter went to London... First she went to St Paul's Girls' School. And then afterwards to London University. Where she read psychology and economics. And because of the Six Day War in '67 she became suddenly very Zionist, and went to quite a few associations, and she was very involved with the Jewish student movement at the time. And at one of those evenings she met her future husband, who was already then a chartered accountant, and is now a partner in a firm. And he is very orthodox. His family are, not ultra-orthodox, but in the middle of the road. And his ways were the ways from my youth. And so for me it wasn't so strange. But my daughter... My husband knew about these things, but for my daughter it was a quite new way of life. And being a very modern young girl, she found it a little bit middle aged, out of the middle ages. Certain superstitions and certain rituals. For instance, not sleeping together at certain times of the month. And all this sort of thing. A husband mustn't see the wife without... But my son-in-law is not like that. My son-in-law is not, he is a very modern young man. Very sporty. A love for cricket. Chess and snooker. He has his own big snooker table at home. No, he is not... In spite of being brought up very strictly religious, he is very modern with it. Very musical. To the dismay of my daughter he has his Mahler and Bruckner that goes on all the time while they're playing snooker, him and his friend. No, he is not... It's a different picture of an ultra-orthodox Jew. Even though he is Shoma Shabbat, you know. I mean he observes Shabbat and Kashrut and holidays and everything, and everything very strict. But very modern with it. He wears modern dress (laughs), and so on. So my daughter had to get used to it, not knowing anything. Knowing yes, but I mean knowing of it, but... So for her it was a bit difficult. Which is now even more difficult, as her son comes up to his Barmitzvah. And she can't be of great help to him. She went to have some Hebrew lessons. And being a busy mother and housewife, and she goes to lots of courses, counselling and things like that she does. Psychology. So it wasn't very successful her learning Hebrew, to be of any help to her children where that's concerned.

Both the children follow their father? I mean the little girl as well?

They obey the tradition. Whether they do it whole-heartedly or not, it's not for me to say. And I don't think they're too young to know it yet for themselves. My granddaughter is very... is a home-bird. She is very studious. And she doesn't go out a lot. She has her friends from her school, South Hampstead High. But only sees them during the holidays. Being in an orthodox home she can't go out Friday nights, or on Shabbat, when most girls go out. And as she doesn't write on Shabbat, so she has to do her homework on Sundays. So that she is quite different to... And she is not a type that would go to Jewish clubs, to orthodox clubs. She used to go after her Batmitzvah to a teenage centre in Golders Green. But then the pressure of work became quite a lot, so that she took the easy way out and didn't go any more.

How do you cope today with memories of the Holocaust, and what happened to your family?

I think I cope pretty well. But as I told you, I lost a cousin this week. My dear cousin. So there's another link with the past gone, and we were together in the camp. So it makes it harder for me to get over things and brings it back. And in a way it shows how alone one is. I always say, in the final analysis everybody is alone. But I feel very much sort of... alone, because of having lost her now, as we were very close. We didn't see each other that often, but knowing there is somebody there who shares the same fate in the family.

Do you have dreams. Nightmares?

I used to have. Whether I have them now, I don't know. I used to wake up screaming. I have them sometimes now. Not as frequently as I had them at the beginning.

About anything specific?

No, just being chased. I mean... chased. Somebody was running after me, or I was hiding, looking somewhere for somewhere to hide. And being fairly tall, it was sometimes very difficult sort of to duck down amongst our Jewish race, which is small, or short in stature. Always sort of to... not to draw attention to oneself.

Because that's changed a lot, hasn't it?

That has changed. Now Jews today are much taller. When you see the young Sabras in Israel, you know, they are quite different. No, I sometimes feel that I would like to talk about it, as I said before, but I don't want to bore people. And if I meet somebody who is willing to talk about their own experiences, and we exchange experiences, we sometimes laugh about what happened and what we looked like and what did happen. But otherwise no. And the daily events I hardly ever think about it.

How do you feel about the Germans now, and the Nazis?

I always maintain that wherever there are Jews, wherever they are, there will be anti-semitism. In any country and in every country. Some it's more open and others it's

more hidden. And towards the Germans, they try to make amends. And I have come across young Germans, against whom I don't feel a grudge. Even so, I would like to ask, "Where was your father and what did your grandfather do during the war?" There again, I must say in my home town, people were fairly decent. I had to leave the school, but then the order came from above. I had to sit separately in classroom, that was also an order which wasn't a personal one. I mean we did not feel personally threatened. But of course the business of my father suffered, because they were afraid to have any dealings with Jews. And you could do a certain thing under cover, but not a lot. So I would say they didn't make it any more difficult for us in my home town than it was already. Where, for instance, in other Jewish towns they would throw stones through windows and so on. But no, there was nothing like that. But how I feel about it now. It's very difficult, to forgive one can't. Forgive one should, forget one can't.

Have you forgiven?

That's a very big issue, isn't it, to forgive? How can one forgive?

Have you been back to Germany at all?

Yes, I've been back several times.

How did you feel about that?

I feel anger, when I see how well they did and do. And how everything goes by the book. Ordnung everywhere. And the industry, I don't have to tell you they are on top. And it makes you really cross sometimes to see how prosperous they are. Because they did that through their own hard work. And if I compare it with England, who gave me my home, you can't compare one with the other. As regards the Germans, I only when I go over to Germany, I go to be with my family who live still there, and feel very estranged. They have no contact, except in business, with the Germans, but no German connection, only with very few people. I go to my home town. They invite me once a year to come. So I do go. But only for a very brief visit. I regard the monument for the Holocaust victims as a memorial stone for my parents. So once a year I pay homage and I go there. They have named it now Synagogenplatz, because the synagogue stood there. There is a stone which commemorates where the synagogue stood there, and this stone for the Holocaust victims. So I go there and just say a little prayer, put a pot plant there, and I come back more or less the same on the second day.

How many of your family went back to Germany after the war to settle?

Not many of my family survived. And from mother's side I've got this cousin who died this week, and her husband. They were married before the war. They were together with me for part of the time. And afterwards my cousin met her husband again, who had survived somewhere else. And so they settled in Bielefeld, where he became, through hard work, very prosperous. And they stayed in Germany. They have two daughters, and they sometimes have, in front of me, confronted their parents, "Why after what you lived through, could you settle in Germany?"

But the daughters have stayed there as well.

They became quite... specially one daughter, became very resentful towards their parents. So I said to her, "Look, it is not fair to reproach your parents what they did. You now have a little girl of your own, your husband is a doctor of medicine. If you feel so strongly about it, why are you still living in Germany and enjoying the fat life and the easy life?" So the father was very grateful to me afterwards, he said, "I never wanted to tell her this. But you gave her the right answer".

And what did she say?

She couldn't answer. She is a head of WIZO in Dusseldorf. And she is very active in the community there. And she reproaches her parents. So I said, "It's not fair. You enjoy the good life as a young girl and young woman, and even now good luck to you. But if you feel so strongly and reproach your poor parents because of that, then now is your chance to emigrate".

You say they went back to Bielefeld and they've become very prosperous, but they have no contact really...?

With the outside world, except in business.

Them, or the outside world?

I think it's more them. They feel more safe in Jewish... amongst Jewish people. They always still look over their shoulders. In business they come in contact with the outside world. But as regards making friendships, I don't think... as an observer, that's my opinion.

How many Jews are there in Bielefeld?

There's only one full Jewish family. Only one family. And there is one mixed marriage, where he is Jewish and she is German. And that is all.

I should think they are very lonely?

They are very lonely. And that's why they were always pleased when I came to visit them. But my cousin's husband was always in business, and still is. So he didn't feel it so much, except weekends, and that's when they went to Dusseldorf.

And what about his wife?

End of Fll87 Side B

Fl188 Side A

I'm very interested in your cousins in Bielefeld, because as you say, her husband had a busy life...

Still has.

In his business. But for his wife, if they didn't socialise, except with the Jews, and there were only two other families? One other family. Then she must have been immensely lonely and isolated?

She was lonely, she was lonely. She smoked a lot and did crossword puzzles. And she was a fantastic mother. And the children came a lot visiting. And that was her life, what she had. That's why she was always so pleased for me to come there.

Did anybody else go back?

Yes, and from mother's side I had a cousin, and her husband and daughter, they survived Theresienstadt. They lived in Bremen. And they went back to Bremen after the war. I called them uncle and aunt because they were over twenty five years older than me. And I was very close with their daughter, who is two years younger than me. They went back to Bremen. In Theresienstadt their daughter got to know her future husband. He came from Czechoslovakia. He was in Theresienstadt, then was sent to Auschwitz, and to Kaufering, which was from Dachau, was a camp from Dachau. And he survived and they survived. They went back to Bremen. And Inge and Sam married in '47. The daughter. They lived in Germany, and became very successful, they called him 'The Uncrowned King of Germany', my cousin's husband, whom I called uncle. They were in scrap metal before the war. And after the war they even became bigger and bigger and bigger. And when Inge's children, Ruth and Hannah, when Ruth was five and Hannah was seven, they decided to leave Germany and go to the States. The parents still stayed in Germany and the business was carried on there. And he became a representative, the son-in-law of the firm, in the States, because they already had business trade with the United States, being in scrap metal. My so-called uncle died eighteen years ago. And my cousin couldn't cope with the loss of the husband and the business etcetera. So she went to the States to live with her daughter and son-in-law, but her home, her house, is still, up till now, today, still in Bremen. Because they have lots of business interests still in Bremen. Which used to be their warehouses, they are now let to Mercedes Benz, so that gives you a little picture of how big it... I would say the complex is as big as Brent Cross. The whole... And so it's let now to Mercedes Benz. And they have got other properties. So twice a year they come to Bremen. In their house they have got for twenty five years, already a housekeeper couple. They look after the house while they are not there, and she comes as a charwoman and he drives the car, the husband, when they are in Bremen. And I go over there to be with them. And they are fairly religious. Especially their son-in-law, my cousin by marriage, even though he's a second cousin. He's very religious.

Has your daughter gone to Germany?

No, never. My home town has invited them. And my daughter was... Specially in '86, or '87, when the memorial was consecrated. They wanted her to come, so they had already booked a seat for her and wanted to collect her from Eingeweiht, Amsterdam, which was near the airport. But my son-in-law put a stop to it because it was on a Friday and it would run into Shabbat before she would get to my home town, so she didn't go. But they have an open invitation and say, "Why don't they come one day, don't they want to see where their grandmother comes from?" So - no, they've never been.

Your grandchildren have been to Israel you say?

Yes, about three times.

How do they feel about that country? Would they like to settle there do you think?

That I don't know.

Would you like them to?

I also would like to. But...

You would like to?

I don't know. I couldn't give you a straight answer to that. I would like them to settle there, but... because after all it's our homeland.

I was going to ask you how important you think Israel is for post-Holocaust Jewry?

Oh, it's very important. I mean that's where we belong and I should say every Jew should really live there, but they need the help from the Diaspora, you know, from the Jews who live in the Diaspora. But it is very important that you have a country where... which is your own, where nobody can call you a dirty Jew. And you feel sort of safe amongst your own. And you're all sort of painted with the same tar, with the same brush. You're all sort of, it's one of us, you know. So one doesn't feel an outsider. One doesn't have to pretend so much, as being one of, let's say, being British or being English or being French. Because there you are a Jew and that is your country, and there you live and there you belong.

Do you think it could happen again?

It's going on all the time. But I don't think to such an extent that one wants to... that one wants to do away with the whole... group of people, the whole nation of people as a whole. With Jewish people, I don't think that can happen again. I don't think so.

End of Fll88 Side A

Fll88 Side B is blank

End of Interview