

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MARGARET BOWMAN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: March 5, 1984

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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MB - Margaret Bowman¹ [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Date: March 5, 1984

Tape one, side one:

NL: Now Margaret, would you tell us a little bit about your childhood, where you were born and a little about your family and what you remember of your first eight or ten years.

MB: I was born in 1914 in Dresden, Germany, which is now eastern, the eastern part of Germany. My parents came, my mother came from Poland. My father came from Romania. And they moved, I think they immigrated to Germany in the late 1890s because all we children were born already in Germany. My brother, he was born 1901, and he was born in Germany, so they must have come around the end of that 1890s. We had a little store, like, I guess like most of the eastern Jews had first. And...

NL: Dry goods, or grocery?

MB: No, it was dry goods.

NL: Dry goods.

MB: Yes.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MB: And we children, we, my father passed away in 1920, and my mother kept the store. My father took, my brother took on him to raise us children. We were three sisters and my brother took really care of us.

NL: He was an older...

MB: He was, he was 1901, I was born 1914, so he felt, I was the youngest, I was the baby. So, he was raised with us, and, I have to say, my brother wanted to be, I think, in the beginning at least, he wanted us to be not immigrants in Germany. He wanted us to be German Jews.

NL: Was he educated in Germany?

MB: Oh yes.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MB: We all were.

NL: You were all educated in Germany.

MB: Yes. And I believe he didn't want us to talk with an accent, which he then here did, too. But he really didn't. He felt we should talk German, and be educated in the right way, and have the right manners.

NL: Interesting.

¹née Harnik.

MB: He wanted...

NL: Where did he work, and what sort of work did he do?

MB: He was a buyer in a very big department store.

NL: I see.

MB: He had a responsible job.

NL: So it was mother who took care of the store by herself.

MB: Of the store. Right.

NL: Yeah.

MB: And that was until, I, in 1930s I was working as a sales girl. We had to finish naturally our education, then that was already 1928. I took a job and went part-time to work and part-time schooling.

NL: And, what was the nature of the schooling up til 1928?

MB: I would say high school.

NL: *Gymnasium*.

MB: Yes.

NL: And then a special course after that?

MB: I did not take it, no.

NL: But you...

MB: I was working.

NL: But you...

MB: I was a sales girl in a big department store, the biggest in Dresden. And I was working till around 1933. In the meantime, in then, I left 19-, that was the end. And then we moved to Hanover. And we bought shoe stores there.

NL: All right, now, we'll go back a bit and talk about your life in Dresden a little more. Did you live with an eastern European community?

MB: Yes. Absolutely.

NL: In Dresden.

MB: In Dresden.

NL: You didn't have much contact with native-born German Jews?

MB: Only, see, Religion, you didn't take, because I was a Jew. We didn't, Jewish kids did not take Religion in schools.

NL: Right.

MB: We had to go. That was mandatory. We had to go to the Jewish school, to take, religious school, *Religious stunden*. We had to go there and take Religion. There I came in contact with German Jewish kids. Not the eastern ones.

NL: And...

MB: The eastern, too...

NL: Did you become...

MB: But I, but the German kids mostly.

NL: And were they sociable...

MB: No.
NL: Or were they somewhat patronizing?
MB: No. Not at all.
NL: They were not sociable.
MB: No.
NL: Because you were...
MB: We were Easterners.
NL: So you made most of your friends with eastern Europeans.
MB: It was [unclear]. Already, see, the neighborhood alone, I mean like, yeah, let's say, oh, when the Jews came to New York, Hester Street, the Lower East Side.
NL: The East Side.
MB: You were together.
NL: Mmm hmm. And did you belong to a *Kultus gemeinde*...
MB: Yeah.
NL: Made up mostly of eastern European Jews?
MB: Of eastern Jews.
NL: Of eastern...
MB: We had for German Jews and for eastern Jews.
NL: Ah. So that was separated.
MB: We were not allowed to go to the other one. We weren't wanted.
NL: You, and didn't want to probably.
MB: I guess so. It didn't even occur to me.
NL: Mmm hmm. And was it...
MB: Now we had...
NL: Conser-...
MB: We...
NL: Conser-, excuse me, go ahead.
MB: We had the sports for awhile. Bar Kochba.
NL: Bar Kochba.
MB: Right. Now I think we had German Jews there, too.
NL: Ah, and when did you join that?
MB: I was a child.
NL: Was that an athletic...
MB: After school.
NL: Group.
MB: Athletic. [unclear].
NL: And was that part of a Zionist movement?
MB: No.
NL: It wasn't.
MB: No. No.

NL: It was just a sports...
MB: Just a *Sportsverein*.
NL: Club.
MB: Right. But we had them separated. I mean you had them in all cities. We had our games between the cities, you know. Like the playoffs.
NL: Yeah. Interscholastic.
MB: Absolutely.
NL: What did you play? Volleyball.
MB: No, I don't think I played ball. That was probably too boring for me.
NL: [laughs]
MB: We were running.
NL: Running.
MB: You know, like, I forgot the name.
NL: Jumping?
MB: Yeah. It, all athletic things. But not ball.
NL: No playing ball.
MB: But it was a football...
NL: There was a football.
MB: German football, not American football.
NL: Like we would...
MB: Soccer.
NL: Call soccer.
MB: Yeah, it's soccer. And my brother was very much active in. I think, most Jewish people were very active in the sports for awhile.
NL: Is this something we generally don't realize? And I...
MB: Yes, we were very, very active.
NL: Yes.
MB: We had games, too, with Gentile clubs.
NL: Mmm hmm. Do you remember your childhood then as being a happy time?
MB: Very happy one.
NL: Very happy.
MB: Very happy one.
NL: In school too, Margaret?
MB: I, yes, I would say so.
NL: And you didn't encounter anti-Semitism particularly? Or...
MB: I don't remember that.
NL: You don't remember.
MB: No I don't, I really don't. But don't forget it was only the school. I mean, otherwise I didn't, no neighbors. I, we...

NL: Yes, I was going to ask...
MB: We lived in a mixed neighborhood.
NL: If you knew some children...
MB: Yes, I think...
NL: Of non-Jewish parents.
MB: Probably in the building I was living, which was not a one family, it was a, like a small apartment house. I remember, I think, we were probably the only Jews living there.
NL: And so, eh...
MB: I was together with Gentile kids.
NL: You didn't feel anti-Semitism?
MB: No. No.
NL: When did you first notice a change?
MB: I was shocked 1933 or before, in the election of Hitler. Before, when it started, like you said, they were standing on the street corners and actually collecting money and they were very cynical and very sarcastic. They said. "We are collecting money to send. Give me a *Mark*. A German *Mark*, so we can send all the Jews to Palestine."
NL: That was part of...
MB: Right.
NL: Electioneering.
MB: Right. Right.
NL: And you remember that.
MB: Right. I remember. Actually I was...
NL: You were already a...
MB: I was not a child.
NL: Grown. And in school, did you begin to feel a...
MB: No. I could not say. I don't remember.
NL: But you left in '28 actually, didn't you? The *Gymnasium*.
MB: Yes.
NL: So that would have been prior to the election. How about in the department store? Did you feel...
MB: I didn't really feel it.
NL: You didn't.
MB: No. It just, employees, it wasn't, you know, business was still geared more to Jews. Now it was a big department store.
NL: Was it owned by Jews?
MB: Yes.
NL: I see. Mmm hmm.

MB: I think that the biggest percentage of the employees absolutely were Gentiles, but, I didn't, no...

NL: You didn't feel...

MB: We didn't feel that.

NL: Any...

MB: No.

NL: Eh, prejudice.

MB: Afterwards naturally we did.

NL: So, beginning in '33...

MB: I left.

NL: There was...

MB: I had to leave then.

NL: You left the store?

MB: I left. I had to leave, yes.

NL: And the man, the Jewish owner, had to give up the store?

MB: That was then later.

NL: Later.

MB: If I'm not mistaken.

NL: But you had to leave.

MB: I had to leave.

NL: And other Jewish...

MB: And Jewish employees had to leave.

NL: Employees had to leave.

MB: Right.

NL: And your family then moved to Hanover.

MB: To Hanover, and we purchased some shoe stores, which we kept til 1938.

NL: And why Hanover? Was that supposed to be a...

MB: We were looking for business.

NL: Better...

MB: No, we were, it didn't occur to us to move out, to leave Germany. So we knew in Dresden we couldn't. There were no stores available.

NL: I see.

MB: And then there were some stores available. We traveled around first a little bit in Köln, in Cologne, and we, we didn't buy there, and then we finally bought in Hanover. And then we purch-, in the meanwhile, my brother moved away to Vienna. He had his, his bride was living there.

NL: Mmm hmm. This is the older brother?

MB: Yes. He was from [unclear]. She was from Dresden, too, but she got married. There was a divorce involved, and he thought he can do it and manage it in Vienna, but then Hitler came to Austria, too, you know.

NL: So-...

MB: But he left before he couldn't make a living in Vienna, and we purchased two stores there.

NL: Did you know some people in Hanover?

MB: I don't know.

NL: You don't know.

MB: I must have been there, let's say, 1934 to 1938, and it was already under Hitler, and my family was there. We were closer together then.

NL: Did you work in the stores?

MB: Yes. Yes.

NL: And obviously it was possible for a Jew to...

MB: Absolutely.

NL: Own a store still.

MB: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's why we purchased two. My brother had one and we had one.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MB: And that's the way it was.

NL: And you were able to make a living.

MB: A very good living.

NL: Until...

MB: No, we made a tremendous living.

NL: Even after '33.

MB: I didn't have it as good before as I had it after '33.

NL: Is that, how do you account for that, Margaret?

MB: I don't know.

NL: Was there a liberal regime in the city? A liberal mayor?

MB: I don't know, I don't think so. My father was beaten up in Hanover.

NL: He was?

MB: Very badly. But it's, I don't know, we had, see the manufacturers, we, you had, to be in retail business you have to be a good buyer.

NL: Sure.

MB: And you have to be a good sales girl or sales man.

NL: Right.

MB: And I think we were that. We had good merchandise with a smaller profit; see, you can have a store and you say, "I don't want to sell so much..."

NL: Mmm hmm.

MB: And I had a bigger profit. We always were the opinion-low prices and a larger volume of business.

NL: And a smaller margin of profit.

MB: It was very good. We had tremendous business.

NL: And lots of non-Jewish customers.

MB: Absolutely. Especially where we had it. We had to, one was in the center city of Hanover, and one was the working class. And it was very good.

NL: Many non-Jewish customers.

MB: Mostly.

NL: Mostly.

MB: Mostly.

NL: And you had some Jewish employees?

MB: Yes. Yes.

NL: But also some non-Jewish employees.

MB: Yes. Yes. Yes.

NL: Very interesting. Were you aware of a strong Nazi party, eh...

MB: Oh gosh, yes.

NL: In the city?

MB: Oh gosh, yes.

NL: But they never, they didn't disturb your business?

MB: Later on they did.

NL: But not...

MB: I mean I remember our windows, they were broken in and...

NL: Yes.

MB: They were, you know, it's early already, but it, they, I had to scrub the street.

NL: But you were able to maintain the business until '38.

MB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

NL: All right, now...

MB: And then it was sold, just for the money to get out.

NL: Now before we come to that, how did the Nuremberg Laws affect you, the laws of September, '35? Did that make any difference in your life?

MB: We were living in an apartment building. We had a Gentile janitor there. The owner of the building was Jewish. She was a very well-to-do woman.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MB: I think she was a widow, if I remember right. It was in a very elegant neighborhood. It was kept very nice, and I, except I wasn't in contact with Gentiles except during, no, not, eh, during the day I were, naturally the customers were Gentile. But I just remembered, then, later on, what, I guess it was after '35, we were not allowed to go to restaurants any more, and Jewish people opened like in their apartments, like, *Pension*, we went there to eat...

NL: I see.

MB: Because we were busy with the business. We didn't cook at all. We went out to eat. So I, we went to their homes and they had...

NL: Where they served meals.
MB: These people, they served meals.
NL: That's interesting.
MB: And...
NL: Do you remember anything about the life of the *Kultusgemeinde*?
MB: Yes. Yes.
NL: Was that still active?
MB: Very active.
NL: Through the middle '30s?
MB: Absolutely. I heard singers which I'd never heard before, and it was very cultural. We still had our life. I think more probably than before. Because we were, Dresden was a very cultured city. But we were very together. We felt probably better, too, because we were together.
NL: Yes.
MB: We weren't exposed. The fear naturally was in us already.
NL: But...
MB: And we weren't exposed. We were together with other Jews.
NL: You were united, yes. Do you remember anything significant about the rabbi? Was he an important influence in the community, or any other leaders?
MB: I was not that religious.
NL: But you remember the cultural activity.
MB: Yes.
NL: And that was...
MB: I remember much more the Orthodox or the, we, the little *stiebel* we attended to in Dresden.
NL: In Dresden.
MB: That, it was tremendously impressive.
NL: It was.
MB: Tremendously. And as a fondness, I look back in fondness on this.
NL: Is that so? Because it was warm, informal...
MB: Warm, and it was like a family.
NL: A family.
MB: The men were sitting there. The women were sitting there. I remember very well...
NL: But even as a child you liked that.
MB: I loved that.
NL: You loved it.
MB: But I think it was more the surrounding, the closeness, than the religion.
NL: Yeah.
MB: I guess.

NL: Well I think that's probably true for a lot of people [chuckles].
MB: [laughs with Nora]
NL: But did you attend, or did your family attend the synagogue at all?
MB: Yes.
NL: Yes.
MB: Sure, yes. Not in Hanover.
NL: But not in Hanover.
MB: No, not in Hanover. I guess we did everything like, I do it here, too. I mean, I have Yom Kippur, I have Rosh Hashanah...
NL: But you didn't go to services.
MB: I, I, no.
NL: You don't remember.
MB: No.
NL: Uh huh.
MB: Now we weren't that often, we children, we were anti-religion, really.
NL: Yeah, I understand.
MB: And we...
NL: But your family had to belong to the *Jüdische Kultusgemeinde*, didn't you?
MB: Yes.
NL: You had to pay taxes.
MB: And we did. Absolutely.
NL: And so...
MB: Otherwise you weren't a Jew. You had, I mean, we wanted to be Jews.
NL: Yeah. You wanted to belong.
MB: We didn't want to be non-Jews, gosh, no.
NL: Now, in this latter period, let's say '35 to '38, during those years, was there any discussion of the possibility of leaving Germany?
MB: Absolutely.
NL: There was.
MB: That was the main point.
NL: And how did you come to that decision?
MB: I couldn't. I had in Dresden, which were very distant relatives. One girl got married to a fellow in South America. That was already after '33, shortly after '33. And they moved to Chile. And she had, this girl had two sisters. And the youngest one was my girlfriend. And after '33 they moved, I think it was 1936. They moved, the sister, asked them to come, on account of Hitler already or the Nazi Party, and they moved to Chile. Then they moved from Chile to Peru. And 1937, I couldn't live any more in Germany.
NL: What bothered you especially, Margaret?
MB: I was very bothered by it all. I was bothered by the Nazi Party, the fear which was in a person, the, some people saw it, and some didn't see it. I guess I saw more

than other people did. I felt very, very uncomfortable. And I saw the pogroms in Czechoslo-, not in Czechoslovakia, in Austria. We picked somebody up. My sister-in-law's sister was married in Vienna, and we drove to Vienna. They didn't have the money. We couldn't send it any more. This was just the *Anschluss*.

NL: Mmm hmm.

MB: And we went to Vienna to pick that, pick them up. I saw it. I was scared to death.

NL: You saw the actual violence against Jews on the streets.

MB: Yes. Yes. Yes.

NL: But in Hanover itself...

MB: There was violence.

NL: There was some violence.

MB: But still they did let us live.

NL: But, you just had a sense that things were going to get worse?

MB: I couldn't take it any more. After we came back from Austria, that was it for me. I just didn't want to. And I went to my girlfriend in Peru. That was 1937, and came back...

NL: To...

MB: To Germany, 1938 I left.

NL: You made your first trip in '37?

MB: '37, to visit her.

NL: To visit her.

MB: Right.

NL: Now what was happening to the family in Hanover?

MB: They had the stores.

NL: Were they thinking of leaving, or did you have to try to persuade them?

MB: I think in '37, no, because I didn't want to come back. And they sent me a false telegram to come back.

NL: You didn't want to return to Germany.

MB: No, no, I didn't.

NL: And what was the telegram?

MB: That my father is fatally injured in an accident,² and I have to come back right away.

NL: Oh my.

MB: And I did.

NL: But you didn't...

MB: And on the boat...

²MB stated at beginning that father died in 1920, and that children were raised by oldest brother, who she may refer to here.

NL: I see.

MB: I had a telegram waiting for me that it wasn't so. But un-, by that time naturally I was on the boat and sailing back.

NL: Imagine.

MB: And I had this tremendous fear in me. Tremendous fear. The border, crossing the border into Germany.

NL: From...

MB: From, we landed in England. And then, I just, we went back to Holland, from England to Holland, and from Holland by train to Germany. And I had a tremendous fear.

NL: Did you have some problem getting back in?

MB: None whatsoever.

NL: Your passport wasn't yet stamped with a "J", was it?

MB: No, no, no.

NL: That didn't happen til later.

MB: No, no, no.

NL: But you didn't want to go back. And the family still believed it could survive in Germany, or by the time you...

MB: I remember, my father³ was the one, you know, he was the main person in the family, yeah, that time my mother wasn't active any more in business. She was sickly. She was a very sickly person. She had a broken hip, and she couldn't walk very well. And it was more my father. And it was financially very rewarding to us.

NL: He still, he was in control of the business?

MB: And he told us, "I don't want," how did he say it, "I don't want to be somewhere and feel I made a mistake by leaving." He felt it will...

NL: Pass?

MB: Pass. A lot of people thought so.

NL: Yes. Sure.

MB: And that was his opinion. He always said, "I don't want to be sorry that I left." By 19-, after I left, by 1938, he was the next one to leave.

NL: Ah hah. So he had changed his mind.

MB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

NL: Where did he go, Margaret?

MB: He, in account of his wife they came to America while I was in South America, in Peru.

NL: I see. So he wasn't even home when you returned.

MB: No, when I returned he was home. It was 1937.

NL: Oh, 1937.

³See note above.

MB: 1938 he left, shortly after me.
NL: Now what did you do in those few months, between '37 and '38.
MB: We still had our business.
NL: You still had the business.
MB: Absolutely.
NL: And your other, your sisters remained...
MB: My sister remained in Dresden. My, one was married, had children, they remained in Dresden.
NL: And...
MB: It was my brother and I who had the businesses in Hanover.
NL: And so, when then did you leave for the second time?
MB: 1938.
NL: And what month was that?
MB: I think it was in June or July.
NL: Before *Kristallnacht*?
MB: Yes. De? -, *Kristall*-, yes, because I couldn't read Spanish, and the newspapers were full. And the people, I stayed my girlfriend's, I stayed with, she was married and had a little child; and they were always trying to hide it that I wouldn't see it, but I would never understood it anyhow, unless they talked about it. I didn't know anything about it, Nora.
NL: Did you return to South America by yourself, Margaret?
MB: Yes. Yes.
NL: What...
MB: 19-...
NL: What happened to Mother and you-...
MB: They weren't, the businesses were sold in 1938.
NL: Mmm hmm.
MB: And they were then all in Dresden.
NL: In leaving.
MB: [pause]
NL: Oh, in Dresden.
MB: In Dresden.
NL: I see.
MB: Right.
NL: In Dresden.
MB: In Dresden.
NL: I see. And you went to Peru yourself? And you wrote to the family, I suppose?
MB: Gosh, did I write! I wanted them out. My uncles and aunts were deported to Poland.

NL: From Germany?
MB: From Dresden. From Dresden.
NL: From Dresden.
MB: Right.
NL: And...
MB: My mother was not. My two sisters were not. One was married, with the two boys.
NL: Mmm hmm.
MB: Because I, I couldn't stay in Peru either, Nora. I had, I could have stayed. I had the permission to stay. Peru was one of the strictest countries around that time.
NL: Mmm hmm.
MB: In Bolivia, we heard that they let people in. I went alone to Bolivia.
NL: I see.
MB: And tried to get my family out. And sending them already some papers, which were not, that I started the immigration papers.
NL: Mmm hmm.
MB: Gave them a leeway to stay.
NL: I see.
MB: They weren't deported.
NL: I see.
MB: They had those papers. And there wasn't permission yet to immigrate, not emigrate, immigrate...
NL: Right.
MB: But it gave them some leeway.
NL: So that saved them.
MB: Saved them.
NL: From a deportation.
MB: And I have to say that the HIAS saved them too, Nora, because they did, by that time they did not have the money any more for all those airplane tickets, but the HIAS said, "If you can give us half, we give you half."
NL: I see. This was HIAS in Germany.
MB: HIAS here.
NL: Here.
MB: Here in America.
NL: They were in touch with HIAS here?
MB: I was in touch with the HIAS.
NL: Ahh. You made contact.
MB: I was living in Bolivia by that time. I was in touch.
NL: But you were in touch with the American HIAS.

MB: Absolutely. Not only here, I was in touch with the, somebody said China gives money. I wrote to China. Somebody said France gives money. I wrote to France. I was in touch with the world to get them out.

NL: You had the...

MB: Tremendous, tremendous.

NL: Political wisdom, really...

MB: I had to.

NL: To see what was coming. Amazing.

MB: Nobody, I, I, here it was impossible to get people out.

NL: Oh yeah.

MB: You couldn't get a quota in 1938 yet.

NL: But I mean you had the insight to know that it was time.

MB: I had, yes.

NL: Now, did you hear from your aunt, or did mother hear from your aunt in Poland at all after she was deported?

MB: No, no. It was the end of them.

NL: Did mother have some vague idea as to what might happen?

MB: My mother came with my sisters, or my family I should say, except my brother who was here. They came 1939 to Bolivia.

NL: Once the aunt was deported...

MB: That was the end. That was the end.

NL: Did your mother have some feeling that that might be the end? Did she ever talk to you about it?

MB: I don't know if my mother realized it. She was very sick.

NL: She was sick.

MB: That actually was the main force behind me to get them out.

NL: Sure.

MB: I thought, if they are transported, which, I knew they are, or going to be, in cattle cars, you know, in the railroad...

NL: Yes.

MB: And I always thought if she can't walk, and then when they say, "Get out," and she can't run, they will shoot her. They will kill her. And that was constantly in my mind.

NL: So they were finally able to get out in '39.

MB: Mmm hmm, 1939. And it was one of the last.

NL: One of the last.

MB: One of the last.

NL: This must have been, what, before the war, of course. In the summer of '39?

MB: I think, no, it was the end of the year of '39.

NL: After the war started?
MB: I think so. It was after the war in Poland.
NL: My, my, you were lucky.
MB: Yup. I was very lucky.
NL: So the fact that you had some papers for them, that must have saved them.
MB: And I say, too, that the HIAS, too, I really do. But, because they got, the HIAS here got from all over [laughs] all the countries.
NL: Yes.
MB: Who is Harnik? Who is Harnik? Who is that family Harnik? We got the letter here. Then finally they said in Bolivia, "Give them the money!" And that's how we got it. They had to pay it back, naturally.
NL: Yes.
MB: They did pay it back.
NL: But they at least loaned you part of it.
MB: They loaned us the money. And I think it was a very good policy. And then this way you could get more people out.
NL: Were you aware of others who were going through the same process?
MB: Yes.
NL: And were there many Jews from Germany in Bolivia?
MB: Yes. Not many, I mean, I don't know how many. They just, it was a small community. It is a small country. But I think it was a nibble⁴ in their immigration laws. And they were able to come in. We will be always very thankful.
NL: And you lived in what city there?
MB: First I lived in La Paz.
NL: La Paz.
MB: Then we lived in, then I met Herbert.
NL: Oh, you met Herbert there.
MB: In Bolivia. In Bolivia. We got, then after we got married we lived in a mining camp.
NL: He was already an engineer?
MB: Mmm hmm.
NL: And he had come through his travels...
MB: Through Poland.
NL: From Switzerland, I...
MB: He was born in Switzerland, but he was raised in Germany.
NL: And had his...
MB: And then left, like other people left. He left to go into Austria, Austria, where he was caught again. And then he went back to Germany, but already it wasn't...

⁴Speaker may mean "loophole".

NL: Safe?

MB: Legal anymore. He, without papers, he went back to Germany, and went then to Poland. His nationality was Polish, cause his father was born in Poland.

NL: Yes. We'll have to get his story.

MB: Yes.

NL: Of course. So you stayed in Bolivia then with mother?

MB: Yes, and my two sisters, and one was married, with the two children.

NL: Ah, the sister with the two children also came.

MB: Yes, yes, yes.

NL: And your brother had already come to America...

MB: To America.

NL: With his wife.

MB: Right. End of 1938 he came.

NL: Now were any of father's parents in Germany?

MB: Yes.

NL: Father's relatives, rather?

MB: Yes. Yes. Yes. They got killed.

NL: They were all trapped.

MB: I could not do anything any more. Yes. My mother's, too, by the way. My mother had brothers, and she had sisters. They all got trapped.

NL: All trapped.

MB: Yes, absolutely. My mother had three sisters, one brother-in-law, one brother, and with children, naturally. They all got killed.

NL: And you stayed in Bolivia then for a few years?

MB: From 1946, '45 actually.

NL: '45. Mother died there, I gather.

MB: Yes, in '42.

NL: And what happened to the other two sisters, did they...

MB: They are here.

NL: They eventually came to America.

MB: They are here. Yeah. We got them papers, too. Yes, by that time we, first my nephew came, where, I'm very close to him. My oldest sister's son. And he came first because they didn't belong to the German quota either.

NL: I see.

MB: My, they did, my sister did, but not my brother-in-law. He was born in Romania.

NL: So he came on the Romanian quota then?

MB: No, but he came because Marvin was here.

NL: I see.

MB: He was able to get his parents here.

NL: I see.

MB: He didn't have to wait for the quota.

NL: And you came...

MB: Under the German quota.

NL: Under the German quota.

MB: Herbert came under the Swiss quota [chuckles]. He had number one, I want you to know.

NL: Number one? Really, really.

MB: Number one, yes.

NL: Well, that's some saga.

MB: Yeah.

NL: Now, life in Bolivia was fairly pleasant, and you felt safe? Or did you feel..

MB: I feel very, I felt very...

Tape one, side two:

NL: This is tape one, side two, continuing our interview with Mrs. Margaret Bowman. Were you able to find work fairly soon after you got there, Margaret?

MB: In Bolivia?

NL: Bolivia, before you were married?

MB: I, no, that was impossible. I wasn't able to speak the language.

NL: Ah.

MB: But we did manufacture, we did, it was marmalade jam, [unclear], all those things, we tried to, and there was really nothing, kerosene cookers, you know, those little...

NL: You did this from your home? From the apartment?

MB: Absolutely.

NL: Ohhhh.

MB: We worked very hard, Nora. We worked very hard.

NL: The whole family did this?

MB: Absolutely. I did most of the [unclear].

NL: Where did you buy your raw, your sugar and your flavoring?

MB: Oh that you got. You got it.

NL: Locally?

MB: Oh absolutely.

NL: Whose idea was marmalade?

MB: I don't really know.

NL: [Laughs]

MB: I don't know.

NL: From a shoe store to marmalade.

MB: And we hired a man. He was the salesman. He went from store to store.

NL: Very enterprising.

MB: But you had to, you had to, you had to.

NL: You had to, but some people...

MB: And there were some Jews, too, who sold their Judaism. Catholic Church was very active there.

NL: In, eh...

MB: In South America especially.

NL: Ah, yes.

MB: And we were Jews were without money, without any profession. It was not easy.

NL: So they went after...

From the collection of the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive

MB: After them, and they gave them money.
NL: The refugees.
MB: They gave them money.
NL: Made all sorts of appeals.
MB: Absolutely.
NL: Ah huh.
MB: They took the money, too.
NL: Yes. You know.
MB: It happens. Yeah.
NL: Sure. When you're desperate.
MB: And when we got to Bolivia, I was talking about it how tough it was; we were living in this big hall, all the people together.
NL: The refugees?
MB: The refugees. They didn't have rooms, or they didn't have...
NL: And there was a Jewish...
MB: Apartments...
NL: Welfare agency...
MB: Yes they gave, took care...
NL: And how long?
MB: The *Hilfsverein*.
NL: The *Hilfsverein*. And how long did you have to live there?
MB: I don't think very long. Maybe a week, two weeks.
NL: Oh. Uh huh.
MB: And they gave us food, too.
NL: And then, did you have to find your own apartment...
MB: Yes.
NL: Or did they help you?
MB: Yes, I think so, yes.
NL: And then soon after that you started the marmalade business?
MB: Yes.
NL: And it took? It was successful?
MB: Yes. I don't think it was very successful.
NL: But you made a living.
MB: But we, we were able to eat.
NL: Yeah.
MB: I had to sell a lot of things always to pay the rent. But we managed.
NL: You managed.
MB: Furniture we didn't have, no...
NL: Oh, I can imagine.

MB: We used crates, and we put little material in front of the crates. It was pretty. We thought it was very pretty.

NL: You were thankful.

MB: You can go from the top to the bottom and think it is awfully nice.

NL: Yes, in adversity.

MB: But, I think it had something to do, too, because you were with all the other people who didn't have. So...

NL: In the same situation.

MB: So, it was all right. There was nothing wrong. Socially they had a marvelous life. Absolutely marvelous.

NL: A sense of comradeship and togetherness.

MB: It was nice. But I can't look back. If Bolivia wouldn't be so high, the altitude...

NL: Oh.

MB: I would love to go back to see it.

NL: Yes, I can imagine...

MB: I really would.

NL: You would.

MB: I would be very thankful to Bolivia.

NL: And Herbert got there by virtue of his work.

MB: No, not really. That was the only [unclear].

NL: Oh, that was a refuge for him.

MB: Where he could get in.

NL: Of course, a refuge for him.

MB: Yes. And there we met.

NL: And there you met.

MB: And he was already working, I think, in the mine when, it was the first time he really had a job where he, in Austria he wasn't allowed to work, you know. He was very proud of his job.

NL: Of course. He felt professional.

MB: Very very very proud. In a mining camp. It was so, you know, I guess maybe it was a little bit of German too, with the boots, he had boots [laughs].

NL: And a special uniform?

MB: No, that he [unclear].

NL: Or some insignia?

MB: No, no, just boots.

NL: Did you work after you were married, in the mining town?

MB: No.

NL: No.

MB: No.

NL: And you were able...

MB: There was no work...

NL: There was no work.

MB: For women, no absolutely.

NL: So you must have felt very isolated there, Margaret.

MB: Oh, we had a lot of other refugees.

NL: There were in that...

MB: Absolutely.

NL: In that, in that...

MB: In one mining camp we had a lot of refugees.

NL: From Germany.

MB: Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia.

NL: Interesting.

MB: And then in, Herbert changed jobs, and there were still from Holland, Dutch people were there. That mine was really managed by Dutch people, and still a lot of Dutch Gentile people. That was Petillo Mine, and the other one was the Hochschild Mine. That was the Jewish mine, the other one, the first one.

NL: Interesting.

MB: And it was Dutch people, and being a gringo, and poor enough, you were sticking together, and you had a lot of American Gentiles there, too.

NL: But there was a community that you could feel attached to.

MB: Absolutely, of foreigners, you felt, you were different than the natives.

NL: Yeah, obviously.

MB: And so you were together...

NL: With the other...

MB: With the gringos, and you were, you had a close relationship with them.

NL: Interesting. Now, would you want to say anything to the new generation, the younger Jews and non-Jews who will be listening to our tapes in future years? Is there some message you would like to leave for them?

MB: I would like to tell them to be aware...

NL: Of?

MB: Of evil. Of dictatorships. Of any movement to the right or to the left. And value your freedom. And watch for it, that you have it.

NL: Yes. That's the most fundamental message that you can give to any young person.

MB: I thought you wanted to say that's the message that almost everybody gives.

NL: No, not necessarily.

MB: No?

NL: I think that's the basic message.

MB: That's the only message.

NL: Thank you very much.

MB: You are welcome, Nora, my pleasure.

NL: Lovely.