

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MARGOT FREUDENBERG

Transcript of Self-taped Memoir

Date: February 11, 1981

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MF - Margot Freudenberg [Self-taped Memoir]

Date: February 11, 1981

Tape one, side one:

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MF: ... but philosophy and that was what he wanted to teach us. Therefore, we had to look for our parents or friends to teach us a great deal in Jewish history, and I had a wonderful father who taught me that, because he came from quite an Orthodox family but turned later on Reformed and educated my sister and myself as Reformed Jews. My father was a scholar and we took long walks in the woods or by a lake or where--or we took our bicycles. In the morning we had to, before went to school, we had to ride our bicycles for one hour, my sister, mother and I and father, and father went then to the hospital to make his rounds. My sister and I, we bicycled to school and mother went home. But during those times in our--in the morning and sometimes when we came home from school and father went free we went again for a little ride or we walked. I, like all German people are great walkers and I'm just one of them, because I was raised like this. And father taught us a great deal about Jewish history, about literature, about music, and father was one of the people--one of the few doctors in Hanover. We had a royal opera house in Hanover where father had his own box and was once or twice a week the physician on call at the opera house. There was always one physician on call. But my sister and I we were like his shadows, we just trotted along and we sat in the box. Therefore, we grew up very early with music and when we didn't understand it, we asked father and it was just like opening a drawer that it spilled out, was it music, was it history, was it literature, was it anything else about religion. And this way I grew up and it's a wonderful memory with very intelligent parents. They had a great amount of knowledge. Hanover had a small Jewish population; Hanover was about three and a half hours ride south of Hamburg in the northern part of Germany, very flat country. This was a way how we grew up. We had friends, Jewish and non-Jewish friends, but there was always the feeling of a certain underlying antisemitism. And I'll never forget my sister came home from school one time crying and Father said, "Why do you cry?" "Well we talked in school about newspapers and one of the girls said, 'Oh the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, that is a newspaper that was printed in Frankfort, is only for the Jews'," and my sister said, "What's the difference between Jews and non-Jews? We all are people." Well, we all are people, that we thought, we all are people alive, is that true, has that been true, has that been shown, is it now today? Well! We came to a rude awakening and that awakening was just like a bomb shell. During the late '20s Mussolini in Italy was really the one where Hitler copied all his work from. Mussolini was a simple man; he got up to terrific power in Italy. He got up the goose stepping which he learned from the Germans and he tried to elevate the Italian people to better, to bigger, to broader, to wider things.

But Hitler was Mussolini's friend and those two together were just a pair. And I hope that no other history will ever record another pair like Hitler and Mussolini, and Hitler was a much bigger person to copy more things and to invent more things. Well, Mussolini had the fascist uniform that was black, Hitler had the uniform for the people in brown, and for the elite people in black, the SS. The brown ones were the SA. And everybody just had to belong to it but Jews, and there we knew we were different. And we were very different because finally we could not do this, we could not do that. And when Hitler was elected *Reichs* Chancellor by the aging von Hindenburg who was at that time the main figure in Germany and he had to resign. He was a man about 84 years old. He was a field marshal in the Second World War, in the First World War, I'm sorry. And Hitler was elected as *Reichs* Chancellor. Well! Hitler had written several books, *Mein Kampf*, *My Fight* and that book was read by many of us, but then we thought: Oh my, that can't happen! That's impossible! We are in Germany as Jews! We can go back to 1700 and we have lived here longer and Hitler is not even a German, he is an Austrian, that's quite different, and everything what he wrote in those books is just not possible and we put the book away and we said, *ach*, now that happened, that can't happen, that just is impossible. Well, some people had a great foresight and we thought they are *Fahnenflüchtig* [desertion] and that means they do not like to live in the country where some trouble may be brewing but it will all be overcome and they're just running away, that means *Fahnenflüchtig* but that were the real clever ones. And I never forget when my father gave me a circular that was sent to him as a physician in case Hitler will be elected what my father can expect in his profession. That was: he cannot treat non-Jewish people; he cannot treat people under 45 in case they come to him in emergency; that he might not have sexual advances with a woman up to 45, and all this. My father fought in the First World War. He had charge of a Meningitis Hospital in France. My husband was a very high ranking officer in the First World War and he even had this EK, *Eisernes Kreuz One* that is rather rare for exceptional work he did during the war. He was at the front in Russia and in France and he was, got all those honors because for his exceptionally good work as a soldier. I still have the EK One, Iron Cross One. The Iron Cross Two, he got that too but many people got that. But the Iron Cross Number One was hanging from the neck collar while the EK Two was fastened to the side on the uniform. Well, and then father was told that he can not treat anybody but Jewish people, and when finally Hitler came--and I will never forget that date, the 30th of January 1933--I went downstairs to get the paper and I still see the letters in front of my eyes, "Hitler Elected *Reichs* Chancellor," and I put my head against the wall and I said, "Oh no! Good Lord, it shouldn't be happened, save us!" That was in 1933. In 1944¹ it finally came that father was not able to treat gentiles anymore but one of his very old patients, a lovely gentleman who was a Rear Admiral in the German Navy came and since the SA people

¹Although Ms. Freudenberg says 1944, the German government forbade the treatment of non-Jews by Jewish doctors in 1937-38. [USHMM.org]

were standing outside guard that nobody could enter father's office, he gave the man a bottle of urine and said, "You bring it to Dr. Strauss and tell him if my diabetes is under control or not." Well the SA man did not touch it and the Rear Admiral retired, dropped it right in front of the SA man's boots. Whatever happened that day, I do not know, but it wasn't good. If we had any foresight to leave--yes I had, I really had. I was a young woman, I had a young child, my husband was 18 years older than I was, and I really wanted to leave Germany. My sister immigrated to America early with her three boys and husband, and in 1934 I went to England where I had relatives and I went to the Woburn House in England that was a settlement where, which you could go if you wanted to apply for overseas residence and wanted to leave your country. And I had everything arranged to go to South Africa, for my parents, for my husband and for my little boy. And when I came back to Germany I was so elated and told my parents that we are packing up, that we are going now, but my parents said, "Oh no, we lived much longer in Germany than Hitler and this is something that passes by and you shouldn't have done that and we are not going and if you do that again, we are going to punish you." Well, I lost out and I'm eternally sorry now that I was not stronger but how could I be against a husband and two, and parents? But I must have had more foresight and I think I was a coward that I did not take the bull by the horn and just was insistent that we go to South Africa. But in 1934 everything in Germany was roses. Do you remember why? I remember. The Olympic games were held in Berlin, and Hitler could not afford that people said, "Oh look at that, that what they do to the Jews." Everything was just like it was before, like nothing happened. The book *Mein Kampf, My Fight*, by Hitler was just not to be seen. The Jews could walk around, everybody could go about their own business. The stores were the same, full of beautiful merchandise. A lot of Jewish stores, owned by Jews and it was just great. But then Jesse Owens, do you remember that great sprinter in 1934 who won the gold medal and Hitler was there to congratulate everybody but he refused to shake hands with Jesse Owens. And Hitler said, "Jews and Negroes are the same race. They have to be eliminated." And Jesse Owens was a Jew--not a Jew, but a Negro and therefore, Hitler did not shake hands, but remember Jews and Negroes have to be eliminated, they are second, third, fourth class citizens, and he did not shake hands with Jesse Owens when he had the gold medal. Well, that was another thing just to think it over and don't let us forget. The children a little while later after the Olympic games were closed, went to school with the other ones, but later on they had to leave the schools and had to go to Jewish schools.

My little boy at that time developed a wry neck where during the operation one neck muscle was torn and when he grew--he was nine then--that muscle did not grow and his little head was tilted to one side. I could not find an orthopedist in Berlin anymore, where we lived, who would operate on my little boy. It was impossible. But then I heard of a nice matron in a small hospital who just came back from America and took over this very small hospital and I went to her, if she could take my little boy and if he could have

the operation in her private small hospital. She said, "Oh yes, by all means and I know a young orthopedist who just came back from England who took his training there and I'll call him and we'll take your little boy and you bring him on that and that day." Well I brought him on the 4 of December--I never forget that day, it was my mother's birthday--to that hospital and had him on my lap and explained to him the small operation that had to be done and when he wakes up he will be in a cast from his head down to his hips and I will come for him and we go home and it will, he can go to school and after six weeks the cast has to be removed and another one has to be put on and then his neck will be straight and he will not be teased anymore like the other children did it now. Well everything was just fine. I knew he was to be operated on the next morning but all of the sudden we heard that no Jew was allowed to enter the street and I could not go to see my little boy and we thought we all will be rounded up that day, because for weeks and months and years we heard the big trucks at night rolling as they rounded up the Jews and brought them back to so-called stations to be taken by cattle train to the concentration camps. All of the sudden the phone rang and this nice matron of that hospital called me and said, "Your little boy was operated on," and I had no permission to be there in the hospital, "now at midnight, you come back the back steps and get him. I had to put on a private nurse for him because some of the doctors saw that this is a Jewish child and did not allow that anyone of my nurses is going to touch the Jewish child and the other patients. Therefore, I had to put on a nurse. But the other doctors gave me the ultimatum that by midnight the Jewish child will be out of the hospital. Do not come up the front steps, just come up the back steps, I will hand the child to you and the physician will let you know where to meet him to change the cast." Well it was midnight--in December it was cold in Germany and snow--and I got my little fellow and the cast wasn't even dry yet and the very nice matron put an extra warm coat around him, and I walked for two hours, two--because we could not take a street car and we were not allowed to take a taxi for two hours until I came home. There I put the little fellow to bed, and a few days later the physician send me word, it was not a letter written, send me word by a very mysterious person, to be that and that day at midnight at that and that church around the back steps, down in the cellar to meet him there. I met that surgeon at that same time and it was a day, a very cold night, nobody there. He brought a knife along to take the cast off; he brought just the other material to reapply another cast. I paid him for all his services and he said to me, I had to help him and I had to help him how to put the cast on and the little boys head in my hands because we had to do it between two chairs, and when he was through, he said "You never will see me again but here is a knife that will cut through the cast and after six weeks you take the cast off and your little boy's neck will be straight." He was right, the neck is straight but I cannot say thank you to that very nice surgeon. I really would have liked to see him again. But like I said, we were not allowed to take a streetcar and we had to have our *Mogen Dovid* printed on us, the front and on the back, and when--and our passports there was a "J"

stamped in and our names were Margot Sarah Freudenberg and my husband was Walter Israel Freudenberg. All of the women had to take the name, second name Sarah; all the men had to take the second name Israel. And when we went to a store or to the post office and said, "May I have a postage stamp? My name is Margot Sarah Freudenberg. My number in the passport is like this," and I handed them my passport with the "J" stamped in it, like Jew, *Juden*. It got worse and worse, "It can't happen! It couldn't have happened! Oh no, never!" That were the words people said. We wanted to get out. Now it was very late and it was very difficult to get out. My sister was in America, fortunately she was safe and with her three boys but now, as you remember, America has a quota system and you can, every country has a certain amount of people that can emigrate to America. Our number was quite low and we were waiting then in Berlin to be called to the American consul. Well, my parents finally went to England. I had two uncles that went to England as young, young boys and they were English subjects and they got my parents out, and I'm eternally grateful to them. We were still in Germany and we tried to get out, but we had to wait until our number to enter America would be called. And it looked like war would break out any day and it looked like we'd never make it. Well, my uncle wanted to give us a visa to Uruguay but my parents heard through the grapevine that those visas were false, and they did not let my uncle give us a visa, and my parents were so right because so many of the boats went to South America and they were turned back. Either they were sunk or they went back to Germany and a lot of the people they right brought to the concentration camps and gassed or murdered. And among those death ships--they were called death ships--because the people had all forged visas, they were not allowed to enter, to land in Uruguay or some other South American countries. They were not allowed to enter Palestine like the *Struma* among the death ships were the *Struma* and that was *Struma* in 1942 already and in 1944 the *Mefkure* which both sank in the Black Sea with over 700 people onboard and all sank in the sea, none survived. While we were waiting and waiting and finally my uncle came from England and he went to the English consul in Berlin but he said we just have to wait our time. But he tried to get us a permit to enter England until we come to America. Well, that permit was granted the end of June 1939 and we entered England and war broke out September 1st 1939. How grateful we are to my uncle, but our papers were still in Berlin and since England and Germany were at war the papers had to be transferred through a neutral [noise on tape for short period of time] agent and it took until March 1940 until our papers were transferred via Switzerland to England. Our stay in England was so nice and I never forget my little boy got his nose flat against the show window because he saw so many eggs, and he saw chocolate, and he saw oranges. Because in Germany the last few years we were rationed, one orange a month--who got it? the little boy--and one tablet of candy, who got it? the little boy--and one egg, who got it? the little boy. We could go on with out it but all we wanted was to get him not undernourished and strong. And I'll never forget that little face flat against the show window and

looking at all those goodies inside the store and he said, "Oh, how can one have them?" And I said, "You can buy them if you have the money." He said, "You can buy them?" I said "Yes! And if people have the money they can buy lots of things and they can eat two eggs a day." Oh no. And one lady heard our conversation and she went, got in, inside the store and got him a candy and she said, "Here, what's your name?" and he said, "Henry." "Here Henry this is a candy bar and I want that you eat it right now." And that lady said, "I just have to see the face." And it was just like a tree burning. He just ate the candy bar and said, "I never have eaten anything that good," and he thanked the lady. It was so nice. But that was how a little boy and all the children grew up because you couldn't get anything. But I'm so lucky he grew up. He was not the one with six million precious little children killed.

The public schools in Germany were closed to Jewish children on November 15, '38. The Crystal Night was on November 10th 1938 and the Crystal Night, I might have to explain a little more. It's called Crystal--the *Kristallnacht* because that is where the SA and the SS smashed store windows, went into the apartments, slashed with their swords pictures, threw good furniture around and slashed. That Crystal Night, some of the synagogues burned and we know who tried to burn them, but I had the feeling that I just had to go to synagogue and only a handful of us was there in a tiny little room upstairs it was burning, but the fire brigade was there and just trickled a drop of water on it and the photographers were there from all over the world to see that the synagogues burn but Hitler tried to save the synagogues. And when the service started, it was a short service because we could not stay long. The rabbi only said that more things are to come, but he would love and like for us to be strong, real strong and that we will not commit suicide because we heard left and right our neighbors, our friends they committed suicide. And when I went home and then the next day I saw the rabbi when I was hurriedly in the street and he said, "I'm glad to see you," and I said, "Why?" and he said "You are the only one." And I said "Oh, no!" And he said, "Oh, yes and please keep your courage." Well that Crystal Night was, when one Jewish man, he was Polish killed an embassy employee in France and that triggered it off and more people were rounded up and more people went there, sent to concentration camps, and more people were killed. I had my husband hidden. He was ill, very ill because he was gassed in the First World War and he was very ill and by the grace of God, his illness at that point had to--he had to have an operation. And I'll never forget I took the surgeon's hand and said, "Please cut very deep, it might be that he is saved one more day." Well I was asked the next day to come to the police station. I do not know and there are things you do not know and you never will know because they happened so fast. And I was ordered to appear and I hid my little boy and I arrived there and I said, "I am Margot Sarah Freudenberg. Here's my passport with a "J" and my number and my *Mogen Dovid* in the front and my *Mogen Dovid* in the back." And they said, "Sit down." Well I sat. It was very early in the morning and then they asked me questions and they called me names.

Inside I was trembling but outside I must have been extremely calm and I answered all their questions and I was very quiet. I didn't beg for anything. I didn't beg for mercy. I didn't say anything, only answered what I was asked. And all of a sudden one of those SS officers looked at me and said, "Woman you are too strong for us. Get out of here!" and I got up slowly, got out of the door and walked home, and this is a nightmare to me still. I do not know what happened but I know God was with me. We had to bring ourselves, all our silver, our jewelry and it was taken in front of my, our eyes and broken into halves and put into heaps of other silver and was melted into ammunition. The jewelry was just thrown away into heaps of other jewelry and we never saw it again, but when it was found, it just was death instantly. And therefore, you gave it away and it was handed over to the police and just was broken in little pieces in front of your eyes but if somebody cried, they got whipped. There again, I was stone-faced and didn't utter a sound. We got drummed into us, and that was what Adolf Streicher [she probably means Julius Streicher] one of the, Hitler's hangmen said, "The Jews are vermin, carrier of germs and diseases and undesirable to human races." Through medical, biological experiments mostly by injection of [unclear] used the Jews as guinea pigs, skin used to make lamp shades and therefore all the Jews that were rounded up in concentration camps were either used as guinea pigs or either used as the women as lamp shades or for other medical experiments. It was a horrible experiment. It was unbelievable and the world was quiet. If the people knew it, I do not know, and I think nobody knows, but I have the feeling they did. I really cannot imagine, they had seen the big transports, they had seen the trucks, these people, they had seen the people taken from, the children from parents and parents from children and they never saw them again, and I really cannot believe that everybody just says, "I didn't know." I have never been back to Germany, I can't. I lost sixteen of my family in concentration camps and I can't, I just can't go back because so many people go back now and they say, "Oh, you have a beautiful country." And I say, "Pardon me?" "Oh your country is just lovely," and I say, "I know America is beautiful," and then they stop and look at me, I say, "This is my country, Germany has thrown me out. And Germany has made me scrubbing the streets when there slash show windows and wrote *Sau Schwein* or *Juden Schwein*, sow pig or Jew pig on the pavement, on the street, on the show windows. We were hoarded up and herded up like cattle and we had to kneel on the street with brushes and had to scrub it up, that it was not seen anymore. That all to be my country? Oh no, no, America is my country," and Germany, I have not gone back and I will not go back because this is where I belong now. Germany had half million Jews in 1933 that is really not a great amount of Jews. Most of Jews were more in Poland and in Russia. How many Jews are now in Germany? I do not know and I think it's very hard to say that some of them went back after the war had stopped. Some of the old people, they could not get accustomed to another country, to other customs and to another language, and they must have been dying out now because if you realize that the ones that have lived through the Holocaust are old people now.

And it is not easy for any of us who is really stand out as a survivor to talk about all the things we went through. We cannot forget, that's impossible, nobody can forget and you really live from memories, and you live from beautiful memories, and you can't forget the memories, they are like nightmares. What passionate memories and thought this absolute and emotionless number of six million Jews killed, evokes within us. For who among us is not filled with emotion at the near mention of five million and one million children? Our thoughts are visions ranging over the full spectrum of human behavior. Our minds accept only the reality from the depth of this bestiality to the heroic heights of utter disregard for personal survival. Such thoughts are bitterly painful. Why should one endure the anguish of remembrance? Why should not the painful past be forgotten in the warmth and security and loveliness and happiness of the present and the comfort of a bright future? It is precisely for the present and the future that we must recall our past. As a poet wrote, "He who ignores the past is condemned to relive it." And what about the six million Jews shall they have suffered and died without the perpetual living memorial? We are their memorial; we are their legacy and a legacy that has to be. If you realize that people now living in America...

[tape one, side one ended]

Tape one, side two:

MF: So that in the Germany of the late '20s and the early '30s does both sides set the fertile ground for a convenient scapegoat in which to vent economical collapse and strong naturalistic aspirations. The right of the Nazi party gave this period under Adolph Hitler terminated in his grasping control of the German government in 1933. The years 1933 to 1945 marked a period of growing attacks on the Jews, not only in Germany but also in those areas under German interests.

Antisemitism was a good element of Nazi doctrine. They were riding on antisemitism. After 1933, implementation of the policy to make Germany and German controlled areas free of Jews was intensified. Jews were stripped of their citizenship, removed from public office and barred from practicing their lifelong professions. Economic measures the objective of which was to lead to the economic destruction of the Jews were bitterly and ruthlessly pursued. [phone rang and tape paused] Registration then outright seizure of Jewish owned businesses in combination with violent acts of blatant destruction became routine. Crystal Night, *Kristallnacht* in November 9, 1938, which derives its name from the white bright smashing of the glass windows of Jewish owned businesses, was typical and perhaps signaled the final economic disintegration of the Jews. From then on it got worse and worse. It was so bad that every day we thought is the last day. We were taken away to concentration camps. How we survived I cannot tell you, I do not know anymore because when you are in the stream of hate and destruction and anger and fearfulness, all of a sudden you just keep on going and what do you accomplish finally, a great deal, you survive. You have such a strong belief in God, something has to happen, something has to be done for you and your loved ones, that some how you are going to live. I don't know. I really don't know how it happened. I only know that Hitler wanted to be the conqueror of all Europe and I was in 1970 to a meeting in Warsaw. I didn't want to go but I was in Copenhagen and they said the final meeting is in Warsaw, you better go. Well I was with all the other people and I went. We were quite a lot of Jewish people and it was most interesting. There are quite a number of Jewish people still in Warsaw, I had not seen too many in the open but I was determined to find a little synagogue and I found it, and somebody said left and right and right and left and turn around and so on. Well I finally found the synagogue. They said it looks like you have to part the junk yard and then you see a few Hebrew letters and then you open a door, which I did. And I went with a priest from Wisconsin. I told him I was so eager to see a synagogue in Poland and he said, he goes with me. He was a lovely person. We opened a little door and there was perhaps a handful of people, not any more. And a woman came to me and spoke to me in Polish and I said, "Oh no, speak in German," and all the very high educated people in Poland at one time spoke German extremely well, German and French. The high class people there spoke three languages very well and that women spoke in a beautiful German to me and her name is Mrs. so and

so and please forget it, and I said, "Where is your family?" They all are killed and then came a gentleman, old, and he talked to me in a beautiful German and I said, "What's your name?" And he said, "It doesn't matter," and I said, "My name is Freudenberg," "Oh yes, but you will not know our names because we are a handful of survivors from the Polish ghetto," and then all of the sudden one man turned around and he was a Mongoloid and an old Mongoloid perhaps 50-60 years old, and I said, "Oh, what is he doing here?" "Well the family immigrated but they were not allowed to take the defective child with them and since I would not emigrate," that very nice lady said, "I told them I take care of him." And since I knew what Mongoloids are--I work here for the Department of Mental Retardation--and I spoke to this little man but his language was not mine and even Polish was not understandable, only this nice lady who said she takes care of him, she can make sure that his wishes are met. And then I saw a beautiful woman sitting there, very quiet, and I said, "What is that lady there?" [pause on tape with no sound] "...family left. She is blind and a deaf mute. Isn't she beautiful?" Oh I said, "She is just gorgeous. May I talk to her or feel her?" She said, "Yes you can, if you are very gentle," and I knew and I felt her and she stretched her hand out and she felt my face and she nodded. And I said to that lady, "How do you feed those two?" "Well I told the parents when they left that their children will be well taken care of. That was many years ago. That was when the Warsaw uprising was in 1943 and 1944, they were escaping, the family, and I said, "Leave those here, I stay with them." And now about 25-30 years later they are still in my care. We did not have much money in Poland. We were not allowed to take it, but what we have the priest and I, we just dumped our billfolds out and gave it to them. The synagogue was beautiful, just very, very small. They do not have enough people for *minyan* [quorum of 10 men] but they come every Saturday morning and pray and every Friday night and I guess during the week. I have the feeling that the synagogue is their meeting place. I left and shook hands and that nice lady there embraced me and since the priest could not speak German I had to translate into English what they said. And they said, "Tell the free world we are living here. We have survived the Warsaw Ghetto and we are Jews and we remain Jews." I parted, the priest's eyes were not quite dry but mine were wet, believe me. [Tape became garbled like it was being fast forwarded for a little bit.]

I went back, I had to go back, and I asked the priest if he would like to go back with me since I was attending the First International Seminar on Special Education and Rehabilitation of the Mentally Retarded. I really didn't care about lectures anymore. I had to go back to talk to this lovely, lovely old lady. The priest went with me but he told one professor, a physician from the University of Wisconsin if he would like to join us and he asked me my permission and I said, "Oh yes, do come on," and I went back. And this nice lady said, "Tell me, how did you get out of Germany?" and I said, "Well there were many obstacles but finally we made it." "No, I want to know exactly where and when, how you got out." And I said, "Well, we had tickets to America the 28 of January

nineteen hundred and thirty nine [1939] but we only went to England because we knew our visa was not ready for America but we had the tickets. We went to England and from England to New York the tickets were lost. That's alright but we escaped to England." "But how? The last hour I want to know." And I said, "Well, my husband, my child, ten years old then, and I, we were doing exactly what the people told us to do. We went through customs. We went to immigration and then we were told, they said over the loud speaker, "Family Freudenberg left behind." We had to go here and there and since I told my little boy never to whimper and not say a word unless he is spoken to. He didn't say a word, he just was told what to do, sit down, get up, go here, go there. We were searched from top to bottom and everywhere. We were undressed completely. They thought that we might have had some jewelry with us and they searched every little hole humanly possible. Fortunately, we didn't have anything and we did not try to leave Germany and have something hidden. If that would have been found, we would have been shot on the spot. We heard the whistle blow, we heard the signal gangplank go and we were still sitting in the rooms. My husband and the boy in one room, and I in the other room with a typical Nazi matron. Finally, I was dressed again and my husband, the boy, must have been dressed, either. We heard, "Connect the gangplank again," and the door, my door opened and said, "Freudenberg, get out of here and now go and you are ready to board right now," and I saw my husband and my boy come from another room and this is the final hour of our leaving. My boy I must say has been behaving just beautifully. He did not utter a sound unless he was told to and he never cried, because they could not see, the Nazis, that we as Jews can cry. They were not allowed to see it because if we cried we would have been hit, hit hard. "Well, is that enough for the last hour in Germany?" I asked that sweet woman. She said, "Yes, I just wanted to know how you got out." And then she said, "Let me tell you. You know all the people that were in concentration camps, like Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbruck, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Westerbork, Theresienstadt, Babi Yar, Jasenovac, Birkenau, Pithiviers, Gross, Beaune-La-Rolande, Compiègne and many more." And she said, "Those concentration camps have stories to tell and those concentration camps will talk because the dead one will talk. That this never happened again, and let me tell you somebody came back who was in a concentration camp and he was there when the Americans came and took over and he told me this. By sheer chance, we entered Dachau concentration camp only hours after it was liberated by the Seventh Army. We had been jeeping through the area, an Army Criminal Investigation Department agent interrogating witnesses in a rape case, when he stopped at a camp near Osburg for some hot food. The lunchtime talk was not about the war or rape. Curious and unbelieving, we drove the short distance to Dachau to see for ourselves. What we saw that afternoon, he remembers, was a frantic and hideous jumble of images and noise but beyond the jumble two images remain clear, fierce and indelible in his mind. The steel door adjacent to the crematorium was open just a crack so we pushed it and inside

reaching to the roof were bodies stacked like logs, skulls piled, piled on top of skulls, feet piled upon feet. Outside a circle of men in gray awning striped pants and shirts were kicking up the brown dust with rocks and sticks. Inside the circle on his hands and knees crawled a solitary man in the same striped outfit trying unsuccessfully to dodge the rocks and blows--a collaborator, now the victim, vengeance now the weapon. These two sites would stay with people forever and often during sleepless nights when one is too tired or too frustrated to sleep, one would think back to that afternoon in Dachau and one finds himself energized." I made notes when this nice lady said it and as far as I could and as carefully as I tried, I tried to translate her words from German. She was such a well-educated person and when I asked her what her husband did, she did not answer. And when I asked her what she did, she did not answer. And she only took my hands in her hands and was holding my hands so tightly like she wanted to hold onto me, to somebody from another world who knows her heartache. Heartache we all have and there are so many books out about the Third Reich and about the concentration camps and about the people that survived and about the people that did not survive and about the Eichmann trial. And this nice lady said again that she heard that some children when they were liberated even asked their mother or father or somebody who was with them to, "Is it right for us that we can cry now?" Because I know so well how I drummed it into my little boy, never to cry. I know so well what a good cry can mean for some people, but those little children could not cry and they asked only when they're liberated, "Is it alright to cry now?" and they told me of the one lady where the child cried, tried to cry so, to cry so much and she put her hands over her child's mouth that nobody would hear the child cry, and finally when she was liberated the child did not talk anymore and the mouth was frozen in the position the mother held her hands over it. How many months and days and years that little child was quiet we do not know but even her mind was gone and she was just vegetating. The mother knew it long ago down in the concentration camp, but she did not part from the child, the heart was only beating, nothing else, the child was dead. Well this are things this nice little lady in Warsaw and I exchanged. We talked about many other things, how wonderful the people were in the Warsaw Ghetto. We talked about the other young people that were there. People she did not know, she did not know about Anne Frank and I told her, and then she said, "Oh we have our own Anne Franks. I can tell you a lot about our young people, about how heroic they were, about how the Germans pushed them so they had to dig their own graves and there were machine guns and fell in the graves and then the next people came in and had to dig another grave or had to put sand over the dead people and they were machine gunned and fell, fell in. Oh yes, the young and the old and the children, the children, they were just little heroes. Nobody ever knew what the children could endure. We knew they were hungry, we knew it but we had no food, and when we got some bread, we shared it that our children could get some more. Our children, our precious, most precious goods we have, we tried to save them." I parted now for good with that nice lady and the professor

from the University of Wisconsin and the priest; we went outside after collecting enough money from other people. I was really a beggar and people gave me a lot of money, and I gave it to that nice lady to buy food for the little Mongoloid and the lovely, lovely blind, deaf mute. The priest, the professor and I, we went downtown and we were told that we just are sitting above the Warsaw Ghetto and if you have ever seen three grown people crying their hearts out. It was the professor from the University of Wisconsin, the priest, a psychologist from Wisconsin and I, Margot Freudenberg, just a physical therapist, just somebody who escaped and just somebody who is so grateful. I met a lovely boy here and he wrote an essay and he got a prize for that essay. His name is Mark Litvin. His parents were born in America and the grandparents and the great grandparents were born in America, and in my mind he ought not to have enough interest whatever happened in Europe because he is just six, 17 years old now but I was very wrong, and what that boy wrote really, I want to share with me, with you, because it brought up my conviction that our youth will not let forget, what Hitler and the Nazis did to six million Jews, and all the ones that were hiding Jews and were killed as well, all the unsung heroes, nobody will ever know about them and we ought to say special prayers for them. But Mark's essay, I would like to share with you because it reflects a thought of a young person much better than I might say to you. The essays, it's called *The Winds Bring Change*. "It ended on a quiet summer's day. I did sit back to watch the leaves swim down from their home in the trees where they mingled with the branches and twigs. Far too late to regret though I often dream of how it was taken for granted. It hurts now ever so deeply to smell and even taste that feeling I experienced of thoughts, saying things will always be as now and they are expected to be. Yes, the end was upon us, for that night was later to be realized my last in that era. I lay in bed contemplating awake and asleep over whether the sun or the moon was a greater light. The winds smiled down as they galloped by leaving an empty echo. The children of mother hour frolicked and jollied as they danced briskly by, a short long night to be envied for years afterwards. The sunrise that followed brought more hidden darkness than light. The beginning drew nearer and nearer with hints now and then which were flippantly shoved beneath the carpet. It's silly we cried, it's totally absurd, mass crematories which labor camps, not in this age and day. You must be insane. The stories seemed impossible as well as ridiculous. This attitude has been upheld until a few hours later. I found myself in a grand line waiting my turn to board a marvelous train which would take me to paradise, no doubt. Reality was quite rude to interrupt my fantasy and tell me to get on the train Kike. Wait! Stop, I am surely in the wrong place. This is a cattle car. Yes, it certainly is a guess what are you are? You cannot be serious of course. All of us are traveling in one small car. There were 200 of us in one small car. The fragments of cow manure tickled our nostrils. Such a long trip it was, about two weeks we spent within the four great metal barriers dividing us from the universe and our place in the framework of eternity. We would stop every second day to throw out the corpses of true men and women who had been disqualified from the race of

life. Oh how the winds are laughing with all the cruel might all through each day and half the night. The children still danced by. They seemed out of reach yet so close. We reached our destination with the census of 96; 104 had ceased to be. Many has lost all faith, save a few. The night was overriding her power in that she chuckled and threw down the snide remark or two. I will stay as long as I like but she sunk and faded after a period of time. The glorious sun launched itself into a mellow sky and looked down to see if we were in health. Through it mattered not if it really were, the words said, bye. Is this the same sky I felt yesterweek morning? How could it be? Yesterweek's was so serene. As I looked around myself, I was told that we had arrived at our new home, Auschwitz, 'What does extermination camp mean daddy?' 'Son,' he said with a tinge of terror, 'the world is sometimes very unfair and cruel. You need, you see some people have more power than others. They think they are gods. These people enjoy sending people to places like this. It's an awful, awful situation and we are merely ants beneath a terrible giant.' This was an unsatisfactory answer to my question but I said, 'Oh,' and left it at that. I have never known another human being with as much care for mankind as my father. Our love and compassion were an unbreakable tie. Suddenly a sharp voice punctured the eerie silence that had befallen us, 'Over 50 to the right, under 50 to the left.' 'No Daddy please I want to stay with you. Oh please Daddy don't let them split us up. Tell them we are father and son, Daddy please.' My father reached around his neck and removed the chain and *mezzuzah* that he had worn longer than I could remember. 'Here,' he uttered, 'put this on. Remember this my son, our love cannot be taken away, cherish me as I cherish you. You have made me proud to be your father. Whenever you look up into the sky and see the beautiful sun giving warmth and light to all, think of me. I love you.' 'Alright, move on old man. We don't have all day, we do have a quota you know kike.' They pushed him away, he grew smaller and smaller until finally he disappeared into the elderly flock of men and women. 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,' I did not know it then but that was the last time I ever saw and heard of my father. From that time on life was rough, so very rough. A year later, I found myself a member of bunk 507A. It was a special group of boys who cleaned out the valuables. We had to cut off hair of one's lovely ladies' corpse. It would be sold to Volkswagen to stuff automobile seats for a profit. Some days we would be forced to remove gold fillings from the dead mouth, the tongues were dry and crusty. What was our reward for all this vulgar coutures? We were to be shot by firing squads instead of burned to nothingness in the crematories. I vividly remember the last day, the last fatal day. That morning we happened to be near the shower room. We saw 98 pound men line up nude to go in. Once they were inside this room with no windows a man casually flicked a switch on the wall. I heard the water coming from the spigots and I wished that I were in the shower being cleaned too. It was then that I began to hear blood curling screams and cries of agony. The noises were terrifying. Soon all the moans stopped, 400 human beings were no more, the water was sulfuric acid. 'Ready! Aim! Fire!' I was sure that these were the final words to enter my

ears. All the other boys were dead on the spot. I was in a state of shock then something beyond my human comprehension took over my body and made me fall too. Some fluke of fate had called the soldiers to miss me with their bullets. I was taken for dead on the pile. They left us there. Night came, late, late after dark. I winched and crept up ever so carefully until I reached our old bunk house. It was empty. I hid beneath one of the wooden beds in the corner for two weeks. I ate and drank nothing. Eventually the camp was liberated by the allies and I was discovered. I was transported to a hospital in France where I received expert care. Forty five years came and went. I'm old now and very tired. Whenever I look up and see the beautiful sun though I think of my beloved father and cherish his memory for he lives on in my heart and by the acts of goodness he performed. I love him." I think that this young boy, when none of his people ever was exposed to it, got the right schooling and got the right introduction. He is a Jew. He is a Jew in the good meaning. He cares for others. I spoke to him several times and I said, "How did you know? How did you do it?" He said, "I read so many books." But everybody can read books. If you go to the library about the Holocaust you'll get books after books and people have written about it, and people have thought about it, and people have written more about it and more and more. And he said, "I feel better that I wrote it. I too, I born as an American, I want to know the world that other Jews in concentration camps were hanged, were gassed, their beards cut off, they were kicked, they were thrown, their books were burned. They had nothing and I as one of a young man with another generation, I am the one who has to be responsible that this never dies. I am the one who will tell the world and the younger people and the younger people that whatever happened in Germany, in Poland, in Russia, in Holland, in Belgium, in all the other European countries that they never repeat. And then again," he said, "let me tell you I was in Holland last year and the Dutch people they told me that the Germans opened the *Zuider Zee* and salt water ruined their precious soil. Holland is small, they can't afford an inch of soil to be ruined but they have it back now, and they told me stories how the Dutch people tried to hide the Jews. How they tried to get them over to Denmark and the great Danish people tried to get them to Sweden at night by the boats." He said again, "I did not go to Sweden and Denmark but the Dutch people impressed me so much and the old, old synagogue in Amsterdam, I spent there quite a long time and I talked to many people and quite a number came back from their concentration camps, some of them there in Mauthausen and they told me, but the Dutch people themselves, a very strong, wonderful race, they themselves told me how very important it is that we do not forget what the Nazis did to Europe and to the whole world. We know that some people are still hunting, some people that are responsible for rounding up the Jews, get them to concentration camps and so on. We know now Adolf Eichmann was found and Adolf Eichmann was tried and Adolf Eichmann was hanged in Israel. It did not bring the people back but for the survivors they came to Israel to testify against Adolf Eichmann. It was just like holding hands with the dead, just having them one more time and say

again one more time, it's we who are dead but you, you are the ones that are responsible that it never will happen again."

Alright, let me close with a real short acceptance speech I made when I was taken into the Hall of Fame. That is, the plaque is at the City Hall and people that did beyond their duty for the betterment of the city, their name is inscribed. And I said this--that I got my honor in 1967. "It really is not I who ought to receive the honor for the Hall of Fame by the Federation of Women's Clubs. No my friends this honor belongs to five million murdered Jews and a million of precious of Jewish children who had not committed one crime but were born as Jews," and that was my acceptance speech in 1967. By the grace of God, we were the very lucky ones who escaped that inferno to come to this blessed country to breathe, to work, to live and worship in freedom, and when I'm asked over and over again, "Why do you knock yourself out so much or what do you do for a hobby?" I reply, "Work and help others and that is it." And that was stated very simply because I had a debt to pay to this country...

Tape two, side one:

[This sounds like a continuation of Tape one, side one.]

MF: ...and that was stated very simply because I had a debt to pay to this country called America and to the many people who greeted us as warmly. This debt could not be repaid in money, but in hard work, kindness and understanding to the countless men, women and children deserving a helping hand. I am a good listener and my hand was stretched out 24 hours around the clock that through civic and community work I would be able to be of service in numerous ways and that is done from the bottom of my heart, and I still repay for this debt, and I hope for a number of years to come. I have looked destruction, humiliation, disease, oppression, persecution and death all too often in the eye, and I was reborn as a better Jew into a wonderful community in nineteen hundred forty [1940]. America did not owe anything to us but we owed America a great deal, FREEDOM with capital letters. So tonight may I honor America and the people of Charleston and KKBK to have given to us, so-called survivors from the Holocaust, a place to establish ourselves and may all of us work and pray together that history will never, never repeat itself. Six million slaughtered Jews and I are grateful for your honor tonight and we thank you.” It was really my pleasure to record this, if you can call it a pleasure. It encompasses many sleepless nights and many thoughts and many ideas I had cherished for a long time and dreaded for a long time, but like all of us the more we talk about it the better we feel. The more the world knows what we went through the better we feel, the world will go on and people come and go, like trees lose their old limbs and new ones are coming, but what we went through we hope that nobody else ever has to go through that. It is too gruesome to record everything we know. There are some things we just can’t talk about it, but the more we try to express ourselves the better we feel. The more the world knows about it the better we feel. Let us hope that with your work you are doing in Philadelphia and my work I am doing here that we keep the flame burning and many more people will know about it then we really will realize. Thank you for giving to me this honor to record it. I cherished it greatly. Goodbye.

Tape three, side one:

MF: ... taped ten minutes of last, let me try to tell you what I said at that time. I am Margot Freudenberg and I was born in Hanover, Germany on August the 8, 1907. My father was a physician, a pediatrician and he was born in a small town near Nuremburg in 1873. My mother was born in 1881 in a small town in Westphalia, it's in the northwestern part of Germany. I had one sister who died at the age of 41 of a brain tumor who was born December the 25, 1903. We lived, as I said before, in Hanover in the northern part of Germany. I really had a wonderful upbringing because my parents were just very exceptional fine people. It doesn't sound conceited, I hope so, but when one gets older, the memory remains, and you can really distinguish between very important things and not so important things, and realize now what has been your schooling. We went to a school in Hanover, a *gymnasium*, my sister and I. It was like a high school. It was an excellent school as I remember now. It's entirely different from the schooling here in America, but if you realize that I'm a seventy year old woman and my grandchildren are in their early twenties and the schooling now is entirely different. I have not been back to Germany since I left in 1939. Therefore, I really cannot say how the schooling is and I can not compare. I will not go back to Germany but some things you might like to know, I cannot answer anymore. We had our bicycles, my father had a car and at that time nobody was allowed to drive that car because it was only for father to pay his house calls, but wherever we could go we went on our bicycles, we took long bicycle rides, we took long walks. We went to a small chain of mountains not too far from Hanover. Hanover is, you might know, was a town of about 600,000 mostly known by a rubber factory and a cigarette factory, a rather large city, about two hours drive we had a lake where we could go sailing. Now everything was roses until Hitler came. We had the feeling there is a certain wave of antisemitism by all means, but we could not realize how much it was because you lived in it, you breathed in it and you just were not so much sure of it that I would be nowadays. We had our friends and Hanover had very, very few Jewish people. We had one synagogue and it was a rather Orthodox synagogue with one rabbi, he was old. And it was not like it's in America, that a rabbi comes to visit you or you can go to a rabbi to ask for advice, or for counseling or you see him at a little party and he laughs, no. That rabbi was a scholar, who was having his services, high holidays, he did funeral service, and he did a wedding ceremony but you never were close to them. Like it is here, they are your friends here. And we have now a very excellent rabbi, a man about 50, world-wide traveler. Whenever, I try to go every night, Friday night to service because it's like a lecture, I might miss something, because he is extremely well read, well traveled and has a wonderful deliverance. Therefore, I go mostly every Friday night and I really enjoy it. I enjoy it even more because it's an hour of solitude; it's an hour of deep prayer. It's an hour to be with your God. Nobody talks to you; you don't talk to anybody else. It's quiet, you read your prayers or you pray by

yourself. Therefore, I am a very deeply religious person. If this relig--if you would call it a good Jewish religion, I do not know. My religion is very simple: you just live, love mercy, walk humbly before thy God. We were brought up in a good Jewish upbringing but my father came from an extremely Orthodox family in southern Germany, but he raised us very liberal. We went to the High Holidays, we had no Friday night services, they had some Saturday morning service and then when my grandparents died, my father went every day for *minyan*. He was a very religious person, but why he raised us completely liberal, I wished I could ask him, he must have had a reason, but we took it for granted. This was my upbringing in Hanover and it was a wonderful way until I said before, we all of the sudden realized that we don't belong there, or we do not, the people do not want us there. And therefore, we just had to stay.

[End of Mrs. Freudenberg's self-taped memoir. Additional questions submitted by a student are read and answered on audiotape.]