HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ELIZABETH J. LEVY

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Eileen Steinberg
Date: August 12, 1983

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EL - Elizabeth J. Levy[1] [interviewee]
ES - Eileen Steinberg [interviewee]
Date: August 12, 1983

Tape one, side one:

ES: Side one. This is Eileen Steinberg, interviewing Elizabeth Levy, August 12, 1983. Mrs. Levy would you please tell me where you were born and when and a little bit about your family?

EL: I was born in Ludwigshafen am Rhein in what is now western Germany, in 1927. My father was a teacher at the high school of that area, and my mother was what you call a homemaker. And we lived in an apartment.

ES: Can you tell me a little bit about your life before the war, or before your life was changed by the Nazi victories in Europe, your day to day life?

EL: Well I, when I was six I started elementary school, which was, in Germany at that time divided into two religious groups. There were the Protestant classes and the Catholic classes. When I started school, I believe it was either at the end of '33 or the beginning of '34, and my parents put me into the Catholic classes because they were supposed to be more friendly toward the Jews than the Protestant ones, which is something I never was able to determine which is right or which is wrong. The teachers were very nice to me in the classes I did attend, up to, and probably including the third grade.

ES: Were there no specific schools for Jewish children? You had to attend the...

EL: Ludwigshafen was not a large place, and even for Hebrew school we had to go to a place across the Rhine River, which was called Mannheim-- you may have heard of that-- where they had classes for the Jewish children in Ludwigshafen, which amounted to about six children. I was the only child in the particular school I attended that happened to be Jewish.

ES: Did your family experience antisemitism before the Hitler period?

EL: You mean since my parents were born? We, what shall I say? They had the usual antisemitism that you find in any country.

ES: Could you give me an example?

EL: Well, if they walked past certain schools they were called "Jews." You know, they lived in small places. They were, I, specific examples are, probably many are not really significant ones. They went, no, what I'm trying to say is that there was no more or less antisemitism in Germany before the Hitler period than I experienced in France or in England, or for that matter in the United States. It was just like anywhere.

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[1]nee Dreifuss.

ES: You said...

EL: I can't say that there were none, because there are. They are here and they were everywhere, unfortunately, except maybe Israel.

ES: You said that you were the only Jewish child in your school. In your little town, about how many Jewish families were there?

EL: I couldn't tell you that. I don't remember that, but I know we had a synagogue. However, it was probably too small to support a school. However, it was not that small a place because even though I was the only one in my school I would say maybe in Ludwigshafen there were 25 to 35 public schools, including the high schools. So, it wasn't that small.

ES: Did you or your family belong to any Jewish organizations, or to the synagogue, before Nazism changed your life?

EL: My parents belonged to the synagogue. My father belonged to an organization which is similar here in the United States. It was a Veterans organization. He was a soldier in World War I and he belonged to the Jewish War Veterans. But my mother may have belonged to some other Jewish organization. I don't recall that.

ES: Okay, and you say your father did serve in the army in World War I?

EL: Yes, and he happened to be wearing, he put on his Iron Cross because he was wounded twice and also a prisoner of war when they took them off to take him to Buchenwald. He made a point of putting on the Iron Cross, which would have cost him his life, but he did it anyway.

ES: Do you remember how you and members of your family reacted to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January, 1933? First of all, how old were you at that time?

EL: In '33? I was six. And that's also about the time I started school. My family found it expedient not to say anything to me about how they felt-- of course I found out later-- because of what I might have told in school or anywhere else, which, again, it was dangerous. The Gestapo was listening anywhere. If you've read *1984* you know what I'm talking about.

ES: Yes.

EL: And I was brought up without knowledge until I was old enough to ask questions, which of course happened right away in school because the children of the Nazi officers were not allowed to play with me. As a matter of fact nobody played with me except one friend that I had before we started school, since the age of two. And we're still in touch with that family today, in 1983.

ES: Did you have any contacts with the Council of German Jews?

EL: My parents did. Of course I was too young, but I know what this is all about. I personally was not involved.

ES: What did your parents' participation consist of?

EL: Well, they went for information. They got information. There was a Jewish paper. There was, you know, whatever information they had and whatever information my parents had were exchanged at these places. And there was a, well it was sort of headquarters for every Jewish concern.

ES: Were you affected by the boycott of April 1st, 1933...

EL: Yes, I remember it because...

ES: …or by the Aryan Paragraph?

EL: There was shooting in the streets. It wasn't only for the, about the Jews. It was also with the Communists and they, there were, the Communists were shooting. There were actually times when we had to go into, or run into a department store or something, just to get out of the way of the shooting. And I remember that part. I also remember broken windows, which I found out later were Jewish stores.

ES: Between 1933 and the passage of the Nuremberg Laws of September, 1935, how was your life changed?

EL: Just that strangers, mostly strange, non-Jewish families, wouldn't have anything to do, not with me in school or with my parents or in general. We were ostracized.

ES: During this early period, did you or any member of your family discuss the possibility of leaving Germany? I realize you were young.

EL: Yes. Yeah, but I still remember my grandmother and my uncles, who were business people and who sort of didn't want to have that happen again, what happened on the day in '33, emigrating to France, at the time.

ES: They discussed it. Did they do it?

EL: Yes, they did.

ES: When?

EL: Somewhere between '33 and '35.

ES: Okay. So that was your uncles and your...

EL: … grandmother.

ES: And your grandmother left.

EL: Yes, yes.

ES: Okay. But you, your family decided to stay, your parents?

EL: Well, my father was working at a school. And he was not dismissed until '35.

ES: Okay. How were you affected by the Nuremberg Laws? Did you think that this would be the worst that you'd have to endure?

EL: I was too young to have an opinion, but certainly we were affected. Suddenly, I had been taking swimming lessons in the summer, and skating lessons in the winter. And we were no longer permitted to enter the swimming pool or the skating rink, because there were signs up, "Jews Forbidden," or "Jews Not Wanted," or "No Jews

Here." It depended on the owner how the particular, everybody had to have it. There was no question. If you had a non-Jewish business, you were not allowed to admit Jews. But depending on how the owner felt you know there were such things as, I don't use this word very often but I'll just use it, "Jews, Niggers and Dogs Not Allowed," which gave you an idea of how these people felt before Nuremberg or any other time. Not that there were any black people particularly in Germany, but this is the way the sign read.

ES: You were a very young child. Did you question your parents about what was happening? Was it difficult for you to understand?

EL: Yes, especially in the beginning when they didn't tell me, because they were afraid of what I might say. Later on I, when I understood that I was not to say anything in public, which was when I got to be a, close to eight, I understood better what it all meant because then I was told the truth. Before that they just didn't sway me in any way.

ES: During the period from 1933 to 1938, did your family have any contact with non-Jews? And if they did, how would you describe their behavior? I know you've already covered some of that.

EL: Well, again, if they were friends, we had contact, sometimes very surreptitiously, depending on who else - if the family members were, you know, there were some people who were totally against it, others who were somewhat against it. And the ones who felt Hitler was a temporary thing, couldn't last and was of no importance really. And with them we had full contact. However, it was considered dangerous for both parts. So as the time progressed we lessened our contacts. We made them, rather than meet in anybody's home we met in a restaurant or something to that effect. It became more and more difficult. Finally, this family I mentioned that we are still in contact with, their son was my age and I went to school with him. And he was my protector and defender so to speak. I went home with him and kids were calling names and throwing stuff. And when he was with me they didn't do that. However, it was dangerous, after we moved away from Ludwigshafen. So what we did, we exchanged a child's magazine. We sent it to his address and they sent it to our address. And we put some sort of unsigned communication in the leaves, and of course no return address on the mail.

ES: What happened to your family during *Kristallnacht* in November, 1938?

EL: Well...

ES: You had moved from your home?

EL: By that time we were in Leipzig, because my father had been dismissed from the German high school. And...

ES: What was he, what did he do when you moved to Leipzig? Was he able to get another job there?

EL: Yes, in Leipzig there was a large Jewish parochial school, and all the

Jewish teachers that could go there went to Jewish parochial schools, the one in Leipzig. And there were others in large cities especially Frankfurt and Berlin that employed Jewish teachers because there were Jewish schools.

ES: And what happened to your family during *Kristallnacht*?

EL: Well, the synagogues were burnt and I remember our synagogue burning. They were supposed to come and smash our apartment like they did our next door neighbors and all the others, and all the stores of course. However, we happened to have a cleaning lady on that day and when she opened the door, the people who were about to come in took one look at her and said, "Oh no, this is not a Jewish home," and they just left it alone. We were lucky. It was not smashed because they thought that we had moved away and somebody else had moved in. They were given the addresses of which apartments to smash, and of course the other people living in that apartment building who were obviously not Jewish and they thought they had hit a non-Jewish apartment. We were hiding that day, in public parks and things like that. We did not come home, but the next morning at 5:00 my father was arrested.

ES: What was the reason given for his arrest?

EL: Well the, this is very unusual. The S.S. man who accompanied two unifo-, he was in, wore a civilian outfit. There were two S.S. men in pajamas-- my father was in pajamas-- in uniform. But this other one said that if he was innocent he'd come back the next day. It was just a routine investigation. And of course being that it was 4:30, 5:00 in the morning, we had not heard if that happened to anybody else. Of course later on in the day we found out it happened to every Jewish male.

ES: When was your father released?

EL: That was, all kinds of things happened. We finally were able to buy a ticket to Lima, Peru, which turned out to be, well, not the ticket, a visa to Lima, Peru, and tickets, boat tickets. And a lot of these boats were turned around and sent back or sunk or whatever, or went to other places. See if - you're familiar with the book, *The Voyage of the Damned*, that happened to, this would have happened to us if we had, probably happen to us if we had gone that way, which we didn't. But that was the thing that let my father out.

ES: How long was he actually, what was the period of his arrest?

EL: About three weeks. About three weeks. When he came back I didn't recognize him. And it was my father, and it was three weeks later. I couldn't pick him out from the other men that were released.

ES: Had he undergone physical torture?

EL: He never, absolutely *never* discussed this, until the day he died. And he discussed other things, like I had mentioned he was, or maybe I didn't mention it here, that he was a prisoner of war during World War II [she means WWI]. You could listen to him from morning till night he talked about it. He never mentioned one word about the

concentration camp, never.

ES: Where was, do you know where he was while...

EL: Buchenwald.

ES: He was in Buchenwald...

EL: Yeah.

ES: For the three weeks.

EL: Yeah.

ES: Were you...

EL: And...

ES: Go ahead. Go ahead.

EL: After, the unusual thing that happened is that this same man who said, "If he's innocent he'll come back the next day," gave us a card, and said, "Come to see me if he is not back." And we did just that. I think my mother and I were the only couple who were ever-- Jewish people who entered the Gestapo building in Leipzig. They let us in with the card. We went to see the man. He said, "They're not finished with their investigation. He is in a suburb of Leipzig. If you want to go see him I'll give you permission." And he did. And we went. And we took a suitcase along of warm clothes and some oranges and some bread, which probably helped him to survive. And we were there. And I have nightmares about what it was like there. But we did see him, and we did have permission. And I think, I-- know of nobody else to whom this happened.

ES: Were you or any members of your family able to work after *Kristallnacht*? And how did, you I know, I realize were not of working age, but how did your parents support themselves if they...

EL: The Jewish school did certainly not dismiss him, and there were still enough Jews to go to school. The school was destroyed.

ES: Oh, he continued to work?

EL: The school was destroyed, but not to a point where you couldn't use the building. They didn't burn it. I mean the inkwells, which were still fashionable at the time, were thrown against the walls. The pictures were cut in pieces or, anything that was movable had been moved and destroyed. But it wasn't burned, so it was usable. And he taught until we left the country. He also, and this probably has been brought out before, from the day he was dismissed by the German government or whatever, from the public school, began to receive a pension. This is proper and in order and of course whatever the Germans did they did properly and in order. And my father got his pension till the day he died. After World War II they restored this to him in a lump sum, from Germany.

ES: They did some very strange things.

EL: Yes, they certainly did.

ES: All right, you left Germany then after your father lost the job in Leipzig?

EL: And as soon as we found a way out.

ES: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about that?

EL: We were ...

ES: About your leaving.

EL: Yeah, well most of our relatives had left, and between them they went on a, I guess they must have made a written or gotten together, I know, there are letters now that I have from my grandmother and other people where they were trying to figure out what they could do to get us out of Germany. And what evolved was that my mother has a sister in France who were able to get us a visitor's visa to France. And the British people let you in if somebody guaranteed your stay. You were not allowed to work in England, not allowed to take a job away from anybody, but you could stay there physically, if somebody guaranteed your maintenance. And of course we did have a quota number. But if we had waited until that became valid we would be dead, like a lot of our friends and relatives who waited for the quota to come up and it wasn't coming up at that time.

ES: When did you actually leave Germany?

EL: In February, 1939. We went to France, and from France to England, and from England finally when our quota number came up, to the United States.

ES: If you were separated from your family, were you able to maintain contact with them? Now you said your grandmother and your uncle had left before.

EL: Yes.

ES: What about other members of your family? Did they stay in Germany?

EL: And the ones that stayed, nobody survived. I mean people who didn't leave when we left or within the, after, once we got to England my father became very active in the Bloomsbury House in London, which existed more or less, I think it was sponsored by HIAS, to get people out of Germany who weren't out yet. And he did get some out, but not everybody.

ES: Did you lose many members of your family?

EL: That's a relative term, depending, you know, how many we had left. Oh, whoever we had left, let's call it a dozen, but I, it was more or less. I'm not quite sure. I could, you know, if I think about it I could come up with a proper number. And friends, of course, at least hundreds of friends, including most of my schoolmates that were still there when we left, nobody got out after we got to England, except for who my father got out.

ES: You said you went to France first.

EL: Yeah.

ES: That's where your mother's sister was?

EL: Right, right.

ES: And how long did you stay in France?

EL: About a month or six weeks. I know we got to England sometime either

the end of March or beginning of April.

ES: And why did you go to England next?

EL: Well, for a couple of reasons. You weren't allowed to work in France either. They, it was difficult to get provisions, and my father was being somewhat prophetic in France, as he had not been in Germany. In Germany he didn't believe it would get to any point in...

ES: It's okay. Go ahead.

EL: That Hitler would be in as long as he was, and he didn't think there would be any real damage done. But in France he said, "It's not going to take very long until France will be invaded." And from what we saw in France, they were totally unprepared and everything else. He said, "There will be no way France can defend herself." He implored my, his brother-in-law, my uncle, to come with us to England, but he wouldn't do it, and he had some hair-raising experiences. My whole family in France, well that's another chapter. But most of them survived the German invasion. But we were in England at that time.

ES: So just your mother, your father and yourself left for England?

EL: Right.

ES: Did you know anyone in England?

EL: We had some relatives in England but, you know, like second cousins or, not very close.

ES: How long did you live in England?

EL: We lived in London until the war broke out. And after the war we were in a small town in Wiltshire in England.

ES: Did your father teach there?

EL: Well, he did do some teaching, especially of the police of that small town, because they were afraid of German invasions. And all the people who had public office wanted to learn German. He did not accept any payment for this because (A) it wasn't permitted, and (B) he just didn't feel he should. We were living on borrowed money at that time from people in the United States.

ES: How did you finally arrive in the United States?

EL: Well we were permitted to, we had bought the tickets in Germany. We could only leave with 10 *Marks* but they did permit us to buy tickets, because we said our destination was the United States. So we had our tickets. And when our quota...

ES: You had bought the tickets in...

EL: We bought the tickets in...

ES: In Germany before you left for France?

EL: Right.

ES: I see.

EL: So we had the tickets. We also had whatever was left of the belongings

that we had. You know they took away anything of value such as silver or carpets or cameras or anything, except used furniture and things had really no intrinsic value.

ES: Could you give me some idea of how the Jews in England were treated during the time that you were there?

EL: Well, of course the Jews that were native, the British Jews, were treated like anybody else. However, England permitted quite a number of German Jews to come in unlike most other countries. They had, you had three ways of coming into England, either on a children's transport where British families "adopted" you, or you could come in on a domestic permit which meant that you had to work in a domestic situation as a maid or a butler or something like that because as probably in all western countries those people are hard to come by, and it was an interesting way to get some domestic help. And finally, if you promised, or signed a statement that you would not do any physical work or any kind of work such as teaching, in other words, not take a job away from a British subject, then you could live there as we did, on borrowed money. However, once the war started the British interned all the Germans, German nationalists, because they were afraid of an incoming German invasion. And of course they didn't want to be exposed to any German fifth column or whatever you want to call it, from the inside. So they interned all the Germans and they absolutely made no differentiation between German nationals and German refugees from Hitler. And they interned them all in, I guess if you wanted to call it concentration camps you could. They did not have any cruelty or any death part as the German concentration camps, but you were deprived of any freedom. You had to stay there for the duration. We -- there were a few relatives that had come after us. They were all interned, and all the friends that we had made were interned. But my father, partially because he instructed the police, and also because we stayed with people that had an outstanding reputation, well our family was one of the few German Jewish families that had come in recent times to England that were not interned. Most people were.

ES: Where did you, if you were not interned, where did you and your family live?

EL: Well, it was a funny thing. My father had been active in the Bloomsbury House. We lived in a couple of rented rooms in London. And through the Bloomsbury House he found out about this couple, missionaries, who, they had been missionaries in Africa. And because of declining health they had to give that up. So they were interested in adopting or bringing in some German Jewish children from Germany to their home to give them a home and to naturally get them out of Hitler Germany. And he was working with this man at the time, at the end of August. And while they were in the middle of negotiations, it was September 1st and of course the war broke out and the German borders closed and the British borders closed and nobody could be brought over anymore. And at that point in time they began the evacuation of British children from

London to escape what later turned out to be the *Blitz*. And he wrote to us. The first thing, if my parents wanted to, to send me, because they had established a relationship, you know. They knew about me and my mother and so forth. And he said if it's not just me they would welcome all of us because they had just fixed up their home to welcome two teenage German Jewish girls and he said, "Now that we will have no opportunity to use it, why don't you come out of London and escape further threats of your life? It seems to us you've had enough." So we did just that. We moved whatever we had. The furniture incidentally that I mentioned before was sent on to America. We did not have it in England. We sent the moving thing, it was called the lift van, directly from Germany to the United States, and it was in storage there. So we...

ES: So you were able to take some of your belongings from Germany out.

EL: Yes, the used furniture, things like that, but nothing, as I said before, of any value such as jewelry, silver, what have you. And we did go and we did pay them some rent. I mean we didn't live there free. And they were among the nicest people. They were I guess evangelists because their activities in Madagascar in Africa were strictly missionary.

ES: Did they try...

EL: They were some of the nicest people. But yes, they tried to convert me. That was the wrong period of time, if I was ever Jewish it was at that time. I mean I've remained that way, but I was adamantly Jewish in those years and nothing, and they were very persuasive, could ever have...

ES: Was it just you they tried to convert or was it your parents too?

EL: Well, they knew better than to try to convert my parents. You know, it was, but I was more impressionable.

ES: You were what, about 10 at that time?

EL: Eleven.

ES: You were 11 at that time.

EL: And I think I turned 12 while we were there. But, that's neither here nor there. We lived with them and they had a very strong reputation in this small town - the name of the town was Warminster, which brings memories of Northeast Philadelphia or vice versa. And we spent, oh, September to March we lived in their house. And it was a very nice time. We, I went to the parochial school. They didn't even try to send me to the public school because of course there was no difference between, the children certainly didn't know any difference between German nationals and the German Jews. And it was considered too dangerous to send me to the public school because spirits ran very, very anti-German and I had a very strong German accent. I mean, I wasn't perfect in English by any means, and they were afraid. So I went to the English High Church School in that town, which was to all extents and purposes Catholic, except that they don't believe in the Pope. And they had also taken in four girls from Germany, one of which they had

succeeded in converting. Now we, my parents tried to invite these girls to our house, or rather to the house of the people we were staying with, especially on Saturdays or Friday nights. And when they found that out, when the sisters found that out, they refused to let them come and visit anymore, because they wanted to convert all of them. I don't believe they were successful. I was able to follow up one of the three who finally ended up in the United States also and as a matter of fact was married at a-- I can't think of the name, there's a particular Jewish sect...

ES: *Chasidim*?

EL: *Chasidim, Chasidic* wedding which I attending. So that one they definitely did not convert. I don't know what happened to the other two. They did get one. And well, I mean it shows that people have different motives for doing different things. This was, otherwise England was uneventful. We enjoyed being there, and of course we did not enjoy living on borrowed money.

ES: Did any of your-- you said you had a few relatives in England at that time?

EL: Yes, yes.

ES: Were any of them interned?

EL: No. They had been in England for long enough to be considered part of, I mean one of them was a physician in a la-

Tape one, side two:

ES: ...einberg interviewing Elizabeth Levy, August 10, 1983. Side two, talking about the time that your family was in England. Can you tell me when and how the family decided to leave England and come to the United States?

EL: The time to leave was when our quota number to the United States became valid, which happened at the end of February in 1940. We had bought tickets on a Dutch ship. I believe the name was *Veendam*, but I had a terrible, terrible cold with a high fever, and we couldn't go. And that proved to be lifesaving because that particular boat ran into a torpedo and was sunk. The one we did take-- now I happen to forget the name of that one although I could probably find out-- got here. We survived it. It was a pretty rough journey at the beginning. We never ventured at night. They sank an anchor wherever they could, and the boat was stationary at night because the mine sweepers were not able to light up enough. That was, of course the ocean around Europe was dotted with mines. If you looked down you could see them, actually. They were swimming on the water, just under the water or whatever, and it was very dangerous. We could only walk around in life jackets. They didn't permit you to take them off until we were pretty well out in the ocean, at which point we went day and night and you didn't have to wear a life jacket unless there was a drill. But...

ES: Did the passengers consist mostly of refugees?

EL: I would say 75%.

ES: How long did the trip take?

EL: It took much longer than it would today. I think it was at least 11 days that we were on the boat.

ES: Who met you in New York?

EL: Relatives that we had appraised of our coming. And at the beginning we stayed at the house of one of these relatives, before we made further arrangements. Of course in America you were allowed to work. That was providing you could find a job. And in the 1940s it was very much of, like it is today. You could not find a job. So what happened is that my father applied to 200 schools and colleges and was turned down by 200 schools and colleges, which was more of a crushing experience for him than having been in concentration camp, because he was not depressed then, but he was depressed now. Of course it was the second year in which he wasn't working because he wasn't allowed to work in England and he wasn't allowed, he couldn't find a job in the United States. And my mother worked as a sleep-in domestic. I was farmed out to an aunt. It was not the best of times, but certainly a lot better than people experienced in Europe.

ES: How long was it before you were able to get back with your parents?

EL: More or less I would say about six months till they and my aunt and uncle, the one I was staying with, and another, oh, I think we were seven people that moved into a New York apartment together, to save rent and so forth. It was a large apartment, six

rooms and two bathrooms. And we all moved in together. And that's when I was back with my parents. However, we were not alone for many years.

ES: When did your father eventually find work again?

EL: Approximately a year later when one of the relatives who was working for a button and badge factory where they made such things as buttons for elections and campaigns and what have you, he found a job there, first in the factory part and then in the office part. He had been of course a professor in Germany, and it was kind of difficult for him. But it was better than no job. And it paid $15 a week, a small fortune.

ES: Did he ever teach again?

EL: Well, after he-- went to-- no, he didn't go to night school, he had a correspondence course-- taught himself accountancy, bookkeeping and things like that, at night, he tutored at night, and finally got a job as an accountant in a firm in Manhattan, which he worked in until the proprietor of that firm asked him to cheat on the income taxes which he refused to do and he was fired. And then he found a job in a synagogue in uptown New York where mostly German Jews congregated. The name of the synagogue, it still exists, is Beth Hillel. And he was the executive secretary and the head of the Hebrew school, and that's when he taught Hebrew. But actually a teaching job in any of the schools, he never did get. Of course he stopped looking after a while, after the 200 times of having been turned down I think somebody would have had to offer him a job.

ES: That must have been a very difficult time for him.

EL: Yes, very. And of course he was over 50 when we came here.

ES: Where did the family learn English? Did you know English in Germany?

EL: I had had a couple of English lessons. My English consisted of a few phrases, the same as my mother's. My father, one of his teaching subjects was English. He had been interned in World War I as a British prisoner of war. And already at that time having, I think he was finished with the university where he was a, he graduated with a Ph.D. in modern and ancient languages. He knew Greek and Latin and English and French, as well as German, when he graduated. And his English came in very handy as an interpreter for the British German prisoner of war camp. So he was pretty fluent in English, in England already. The American children in the schools which I attended at first thought I was British because certainly my English was totally British. They didn't realize I was from Germany. They thought I was born in England. Also I came to school with the uniform that we had to wear, which was the British school uniform. And I guess they knew something about it from movies or whatever. They definitely thought I was British, as well as my teacher.

ES: I'd like to go back now and ask you when, whether it was while you and your family were in this country or before, that you actually became aware of the extermination of Jews that was going on in Germany and Poland.

EL: Well, about as far as extermination goes, well I was aware of that since November of '38. But in Poland and I don't know if Russia was involved at all, well it

was, later.

ES: Later.

EL: Yeah, the families that moved together, like my aunt and uncle -- that was my father's sister and her husband -- he had all his people in Germany. When we left they were people that we, my father tried to get out and couldn't. They had let their American quota number elapse. They didn't go when they were supposed to, and they got a new one which was much, much too late. We knew from a Red Cross letter that the grandmother, my uncle's mother, was in Theresienstadt, or Terezink or...

ES: Terezin.

EL: Yeah, yeah. So we and she hinted. You couldn't actually write it because the letters were censored. But she hinted that her daughter, which was my uncle's sister, and her husband, and her daughter, who was my age, had been taken to Poland. Because she wrote something about a vacation in a cold area. That's how she put it. But we knew what that meant. That they weren't gonna ever come out of it we really didn't know until it was made public. We did not know the nature of these camps until everybody knew. It was not common knowledge.

ES: You mentioned before that your father was arrested on *Kristallnacht*.

EL: Yeah.

ES: Tell us where he was interned.

EL: He was in Buchenwald, and I think I mentioned some of the surrounding circumstances. Or did I say that he...

ES: Not on the tape. I'd like...

EL: Yeah.

ES: …you to tell us about that.

EL: Well, the arresting, there were two S.S. men in uniform and one Gestapo man in civilian clothing. And, first they asked me to open all the cupboards and closets and cabinets. And they made a pretend search for concealed weapons, which of course they didn't find because there weren't any. But this was part of the arrest, while my father was getting dressed. They had come at 4:30 in the morning or 5:00 and he had still been in bed. They didn't find anything. My mother asked when my father would be back. The Gestapo man said, "If he's innocent he should be back tomorrow. If he's not back," he gave us a card and he said we should come to see him at the Gestapo building and he would see us. And this actually happened, and as I said to Mrs. Steinberg, we may have been the only couple on this, or couple of Jewish people on, in that situation. We went to see him. We were admitted. He said that my father was in a place near Leipzig and if we wanted to see him, he gave us permission and he, in writing, and we went there and we saw him. It was a dreadful place to be.

ES: It was ...

EL: I can't really talk about that, what it was like, but we did see him, and we did give him a suitcase full of food and warm clothing, which he said caused him to

survive.

ES: And you also mentioned that your father would never talk about the experience.

EL: No, when he came back. And I didn't recognize him after three weeks. He never, never, at least not to me and not to my mother, spoke about his experiences in the concentration camp. At some time in the United States already I asked him why he concealed this information and he said that he had been made to swear an oath that he would never reveal it. The Nazis made him swear, and that anybody who had anything to do with him or his relatives or anybody would be killed. They would go so far as third, fourth, fifth or sixth cousins and kill them if it ever was discovered that he had talked about it. And, but this is really not the actual reason. He said he swore an oath on God and he would not break the oath, because he swore it. It didn't matter to him to whom he had sworn it. He would not break the oath. But I know other people who have-- well of course they have probably sworn the same oath-- who would not reveal anything. I don't know, this was probably not true of the exterminating camps in Poland.

ES: Mention for us please, because I don't think you did it on the tape before, how your father, or why they finally released your father from Buchenwald.

EL: We bought a visa to Lima, to Peru and we were supposed, and we bought tickets to Lima. As far as I know we would never have made it because the visa was fake. It was just a money matter. People were selling them and we bought them. And that's how they got him out.

ES: But that was enough to get him out.

EL: Well as long as you could prove that you could leave the country, and I guess we could have left the country, it's just that we could never have gotten into Peru on a fake visa, at least I don't think so. Some people did, but not many. We had one set of people in Bolivia whose descendants still live there.

ES: Another thing I'd like to ask you about is, do you recall any people that were particularly friendly or helpful to your family while you were still in the two towns you lived in in Germany?

EL: Three.

ES: Three towns.

EL: Yeah. The average citizen was not permitted to have any dealings with Jews and did not, because it could have cost them their lives or their liberty or whatever. However, we did have this one friend, his parents, who kept in touch the whole time we were there. Once we could no longer do it openly we did it by sending papers and magazines and enclosing a personal note inside these messages, which were sent without return address, and if possible, away from where we lived so the post mark wouldn't give it away. And they did the same. And other people, well Jews, you know, the food was rationed in Germany even before war time, and there were groceries where we had shopped at before Hitler time, the people there, especially if my mother sent me shopping

by myself, used to slip us such things as butter or eggs or whatever, under the table. So we had something similar to the food provisions that other people did. Jews were not allowed to buy certain food items that were scarce.

ES: Did you have any contact with your family or friends between 1942 and '45?

EL: No. None except here and there a Red Cross letter from Terezin [she says Terezink]. We had all these relatives and friends, my mother's sister and her whole family, and we had no contact with them until after France was liberated. And they had all been hiding in different parts of the French Alps. There was a family, my aunt had four children, so there was a family of six and they were all in different places. They were hidden in monasteries and in the equivalent for women. I can't think of, what is it?

ES: A nunnery?

EL: A nunnery, if you will, yeah. They had a non-Jewish friend who kept, who was a partner in my uncle's business. They tortured him to death because he would not tell where they were, and they figured he knew it. But he would not tell them. My uncle was instrumental in the building of munitions against Germany. So they had a number on his head. They were very interested in finding him. But because of this guy they never did. And they actually killed him.

ES: Were...

EL: Now there was a non-Jew who was responsible with his life for six Jewish people remaining alive.

ES: Oh he's the one that was...

EL: He was the one who was killed. Of course we have contact with my mother's sister. My uncle was a very rich man, a millionaire. And as a, whatever, he felt he should dedicate his money to the survival of others. And when there was the time of the killing of Moroccan Jews, he imported maybe 500 or whatever number from Morocco to this town in France. And he built them a synagogue. And they are now the main Jewish population of that area in France. They are now third and fourth generation from that time.

ES: During the time when you were here and you did not know what was going on with the rest of your family that was still in Europe, did you and your parents feel strengthened by religious faith or by any ideology such as Zionism or Socialism or by hope in a speedy Allied victory?

EL: Well, most of these things you mentioned had some significance. We always belonged to synagogues. My father toward the end worked in a synagogue. I was at first free when we couldn't pay and later on a paying student both in the regular religious school. I was confirmed. I was not *Bas Mitzvah* because we didn't have money for a *Bas Mitzvah*. And confirmation, my mother made some food and invited the closest relatives. I remember I had no money for a white dress but somebody bought it for me, because you were supposed to be confirmed in a white dress. And later on when I went to

college I also went to the Hebrew Union College in New York for, because I had been a Sunday School teacher for a while for the synagogue in which I was confirmed. And I needed the courses. It's very similar to Gratz in Philadelphia, that type of school. At night you learned Hebrew and you learned teaching methods and that sort of thing.

ES: Did you and your family feel that your faith helped to sustain you?

EL: Yes, I would say so. I still feel that way.

ES: What do you think is important for young people today to remember about this terrible period in history that you lived through?

EL: Well I think it is the duty, or at least it is incumbent upon every Jewish child, never to forget. Not only because of the people who lived then, but also because of their own fate if they should forget. I'm totally against intermarriage or inter- anything because there are not enough, I'm also, maybe I should say this is off the record but it's not. I'm against abortion, particularly of Jewish children. I think we have to make up for the six million that were killed. And there are too many Jewish girls who have that sort of thing. I know I'm one of few who believe that. I do believe it. I think the Jewish people should try everything to make up for all the ones that were killed, whether this is in Israel or the United States or anywhere.

ES: You mentioned to me before that you and your family traveled back to Germany one time?

EL: Well, only I went back. My parents did not. As far as that family is concerned. I went with my husband and my children and looked where I used to live and some other places. And I visited that friend that I mentioned, with his family. He of course is married now and has children and his mother is still alive, who was, his father had been a friend of my father's. They went to school together. But he had passed away and of course my father passed away in '76.

ES: When did you go back to Germany?

EL: '71 or two.

ES: What were your...

EL: I believe it was '71.

ES: What were your feelings when you got back?

EL: I got very, very upset, and may never go there again, but then again I may. I don't know. I got very, very excited and upset and had nightmares and all kinds of things. We had also visited the family in France at the time. I hadn't seen them since we were first in France in 1939.

ES: The family with whom you stayed?

EL: At least I, let me put it this way, I hadn't been at their home. They had come to the United States once or twice.

ES: Was this the family with whom you had stayed?

EL: Yes.

ES: But are you still in contact with them?

EL: Oh yes, yes, definitely. They have now turned into what I call a tribe, because each one of these children had children and one of them is a grandfather. And my aunt is a great grandmother, so there is a large amount of people there.

ES: A big family. I want to thank you very much, Mrs. Levy, for taking the time to share your experiences.

EL: Well it certainly, I can't say exactly it was my pleasure. But I certainly would share these experiences because I think it's important that everybody knows what happened.

ES: I agree.

EL: And they should not forget.

ES: Thank you very much.