HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ELLEN TARLOW

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Natalie Packel
Date: November 19, 1993

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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ET - Ellen Tarlow[1] [interviewee]
NP - Natalie Packel [interviewer]
Date: November 19, 1993

Tape one, side one:

NP: Friday, November 19th, 1993, and this is Natalie Packel interviewing Ellen Tarlow, for the Gratz College Holocaust Archive. Ellen, could you tell me where you were born, and a little bit about your family?

ET: Sure. I was born in Gütersloh, in Westfalen, Westphalia to you, in Germany. It is northwest Germany.

NP: Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

ET: Certainly. My parents in particular. I'm an only child, and I was born in 1927, December 18th. My father was Paul Meinberg. My mother was Ilse Meinberg, nee Cappel in English, I suppose. I might have had more siblings, but times being what they were, my parents made an early decision that that was it. And we lived alone, my parents and I, for about five years, and then joined the family home with my grandparents in a very, very large, beautiful home. I think of it now as very, very beautiful. When I was young, I thought it was a very old-fashioned house. And now I appreciate its beauty greatly. It was a three-story house with seven bedrooms. And it was a wonderful place to live. I did miss not having siblings. There were too many adults in my life. But there were a lot of cousins who visited every summer, so that made life a little more exciting for me. And that's the immediate family.

NP: What was your life like before the war?

ET: It was wonderful, and it took me many, many years to be able to say that it truly was wonderful. Because, I think that when one has escaped and is so grateful to have gotten out and to be living in this country, one tends to say, "Well, it wasn't so wonderful." But it was. And when one matures, one sees its beauty. It was a very small, magnificent little town. My son, on, during his visit there described it as a garden town. It had a lot of physical beauty, and the area in which we lived might have been compared to a small town Rittenhouse Square. There was a triangle park. The house was about a hundred and, I'm not sure, 120 or 30 years old. And, there was a maid—a cleaning lady—and a house man, and all the wonderful little extras one had then. And life was leisurely. And I enjoyed it very much. And the overtones of the Nazi regime did not become evident to me until I was about six. So having been born at the age, at 1927, at the end of that year, for me it was about 1933 or '4 until some things in the air told me that there was trouble. And I was a very articulate child and I perceived very quickly. And I quietly understood things, such as Hitler's election, quite well. My parents did not receive a gold button during the election,

[1]née Meinberg.

which indicated they had not voted for Hitler. And I didn't understand it, but I knew that we were different. But it was an elegant life, a cultured life, a leisurely life.

NP: If we could go back a little bit, your father's occupation?

ET: My father was a, it's an unusual term, I guess. He exported cattle from Bavaria to Westphalia. The cattle in Bavaria was very docile, and very easily used by farmers to plow and till the fields. And so he would travel to Bavaria every winter and obtain these animals, and they would come by cattle car to our home, not...home, but two blocks in back of the property we had huge stables. And it was always a very exciting time in the winter when all the farmers came, made their purchases, and we would have twelve people to dinner every day, and there was a lot going on, and that was his livelihood. And it was third or fourth generation.

NP: Very interesting.

ET: Yes, it was.

NP: Your school experiences. Did you feel any overtones, undertones and trouble?

ET: Yes. In Germany, I'm sure you are aware, you attend public school for four years, and then you enter *Gymnasium* for boys and *Lyceum* as we called it for girls. And my first years were in public school and I do remember when I was eight that someone on the way to school called me a Jew, a young girl and...her friend. And I was very angry, and I hit her. And, when I came home from school my father took me into his study and he said, "You will not be able to do that again, because her father is an S.A. man, and he said that she can call you a Jew and you'll have to live with that. So just be passive and accept it."

NP: S.A.?

ET: S.A. *Sturm*...that was the Brown Shirts. They were the Brown Shirts. They were the rabble of Germany, and they were the Brown Shirts with the swastika. They were really his first little band of looters who ran around. They were not the refined S.S. troops, the elite. It was real-, they were really, basic citizens who dressed up in uniform and became strong men at the end of the day. So that was my first experience, and I learned then very quietly that even though I would be called a Jew, that I could not retaliate. Then, in 1938, in March, I entered *Lyceum*, which is your equivalent, I imagine, of a...well, I, it's private school and, but it is in preparation for college. You cannot enter college unless you attend a *Lyceum* and *Gymnasium*.

NP: Excuse me, that, in English that's L-Y-C-E-U-M?

ET: Yes. In French I imagine *Lyceé* would be it. Today, the schools are called *Gymnasium* for both sexes.

NP: All right.

ET: But they were separated girls and boys, and situated in different parts of the town. I loved that school. I found out later in life that when it was founded at the end of the 19th century, my aunt was the first "Jewish daughter" of the town to have attended. I was

the last. And, it was a very refined atmosphere. The teachers were hand chosen, hand chosen [chuckles] personally chosen, and I learned, I had the beginnings of language. You needed to learn two languages to graduate. You would be 19 at graduation, and I started English and the education was elitist. I loved school. I imagine that's unusual. Most kids say they hate it; I really adored it. And I did not feel any overtones there. I was the only Jewish child in that school. It was a small town. The town consisted of about 32,000 people, and there were not that many Jewish families there. So there was always an age difference of who was attending where and what. I didn't feel anything until the summer of '38 when, this was probably the most traumatic experience, other than Crystal Night. We had prepared during gym class, with swimming exercise, and we would be taken to the public pool in the summer and actually learn to swim. And I was so excited, because I really wanted to go. And the day we were to leave, the gym teacher, who was quite a lovely lady and I don't perceive her now as having been really anti-Semitic, took me aside and she said, "You will not be able to go. You know why." And I said, "Yes, I know." She said, "Jews, as you know, cannot go to public pools." Which I had known. I always thought that I could sneak through because I was with the school. And I thought maybe, and I would not be noticed. So, I went home. This was every Wednesday. The first time I went home I...just cried. And I was so lonely. And I could not believe this was happening to me. And at the same time I felt that if I would tell my parents, if I were to tell them what...had happened to me, they would feel so awful. So, I mitigated my little message and I said to my mother, "I really can't go and I guess you know why, because Jews can't go to these places." And I saw in her eyes a quiet desperation. I don't know which was worse, to see the secondary pain, or my primary pain. She took me out to a little bakery and bought me a chocolate puff. And every Wednesday this continued through the summer. I quietly walked home, and I cried, and everyone went out to swim, and my mother went out to the bakery with me. And I have never, ever gotten over that experience of total isolation. I learned to swim in this country in my early 30s. A friend taught me. And that was my greatest personal victory. And when I saw my children swim, beautifully gliding through the water—in this country—and my grandchildren, I can only think of myself as having been denied that one little thing. And that then was the major beginning. And my schooling was terminated at the end of the year. Crystal Night took place November of 1938, and two days later an edict came forth terminating all Jewish children from German schools. That was the end.

NP: Did you have any, did you attend a religious school?

ET: Oh yes, very much so. I don't know how I could have forgotten that. We had a small, lovely little synagogue. And outside the synagogue was a little house, I guess it'd be like the Little Schoolhouse on the Prairie [chuckles]. And we attended that with our rabbi one day a week, from 12 to almost 6. And at the age of 6 I was taught Hebrew, and all the stories of the Old Testament. And we also had what we called *Ivrit*, which is the Hebrew of New Israel—then it was called Palestine—just in case that we might go to Israel. So that was an in-depth education and it was reinforced at home by my grandmother, who

could read Hebrew and practice all the *b'ruchas* with me and the reading and I very much enjoyed that. And of course in 1938 the synagogues were burned and that was another termination.

NP: Did the family belong to any Jewish organizations that you remember?

ET: Well, they were all part of the synagogue.

NP: Yes.

ET: And everything went through what we called the *Chevra* in those days. The organizations were with the women, contrary to what anyone, I imagine, practices or knows about here, were the...funeral directors when someone died. The women washed the bodies.

NP: So that was the *Chevra Kaddishah*?

ET: Oh yes, absolutely. And we had a quiet organization in each town. When, very often eastern Jews traveled through destination I imagine this country or whatever, and they were quietly tended to by the women of the synagogue. They were given food, shelter, and clothing, and sent on with names to other congregations. So it wasn't as organized as I would perceive it to be here such as the Hadassah movement. It was a quiet, I guess you would call it *tzedakah*, it was just something that you, it was taken for granted that we did. And the men had what we know here as a men's club. But it was functional. It had to do with administration.

NP: And then you were saying in 1938, I...think I interrupted you.

ET: Let me think...

NP: You were talking about, then the schools were closed to Jewish children.

ET: Yes. There was an edict. And no Jewish child could attend a German school. And so I went, well, our house was burned and I think that should be covered by a separate chapter by you because it was the most intense experience of my life and...

NP: However you wish to proceed...

ET: Well, I will, maybe we should do that now because my life so radically changed after that.

NP: May I first ask you a couple of questions.

ET: Please.

NP: Did any of your family members serve in any national army? Well, I know your grandfather did. Your father, anybody else?

ET: My father volunteered at the age of 19 in World War I to fight for his country. That is a very difficult thing for my friends and relatives to understand now. But one has to realize that in 1914, one was a German Jew as one is an American Jew here, and that was our country. My family, dating, both date back a long time. My father's family dates back to 1692, and my mother's possibly the same. I have record of early 17, 18 or so. So one was German, and one fought. My father volunteered. He was in the thick of it in France. He was in the trenches. He was heavily wounded. He almost died. He almost bled to death. He had shrapnels in his back, and he was nursed back to health for one year, and he survived it. He was given the Iron Cross First Class, which is one of the highest

decorations. He was very proud of it. He thought that that would save his life eventually. Well, it did not. He was fiercely German until it was proven that he was not considered a German. But then, in our town there were two men who died for that country, actually two brothers. So everyone partook. My grandfather, too, was a cavalry officer in, he served in Russia for two years fighting the Cossacks in World War I. That was what one did.

NP: And your family's reaction then to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in '33?

ET: It was different. My mother seemed to foresee doom, black doom. [chuckles] My father was very confident. He felt very secure in a town where he had been an important person and his family had been known forever, and he thought nothing would ever touch him. The invasion of the Nazi years was a very slow insidious one. It was chipping away at one's life in ever so small an increment per day that it was not one fell swoop. And it, somewhere around the beginning of 1938, my father was called to the town and local authorities to resign from his profession because he was dealing with German farmers, and he was "contaminating their lives." I think that was his rude awakening. It was difficult for him. And so he was without a position in life. Luckily one had money to go on there, because life was so much simpler then. One didn't need all the extras that one uses today, and one could go on. It was just such a disillusionment. And then, also during the period of 1937 there was very strong anti-Semitism in the streets at night. There was singing in the streets by the S.A. and the S.S. There were songs sung that I'm sure all of you have heard, and I...can only translate them. They would sing marching through the streets at night, "When Jews' blood will run from our knives, the world will be free." One would say that we should have known at the time that it was time to go, in 1937, but not everyone had the foresight. My father still firmly believed that it was a transient kind of a thing, that it would go away. And lots of people did. He was not the only one. My mother did not think it would go away. She kept saying, "They'll kill us, all of us." And he said, "No, they will not." The final reality came in 1938 during Crystal Night. And we knew who we were, and who we were not. I don't know why our town was hit so terribly hard. It was not one of the most "anti-Semitic" towns. There were other areas, in Hessia for instance, which were known to be highly anti-Semitic.

NP: Could you spell that please?

ET: H-E-S-S-I-A. That's the American word for that province. In German it's Hessen. H-E-S-S-E-N. Kissinger's from that area. That was always considered a, an anti-Semitic area. I don't know why, but I do remember that. Our town was just mildly so. But the night of Crystal Night, oh, somewhere during, somewhere after midnight, we heard a violent crash, and we ran downstairs and we saw that our huge oak door, which is really very heavy, had been thrown into the house, into a Dutch tiled hallway. And a cold blast came in, and in came about four or five I think tall, six-feet tall, black elite guard, elite S.S. guards, the Death Brigade. They have a skull and crossbones on their lapel. Tall, young, blond. They had huge axes with them, and with the axes and with their boots they had

crashed the door open. They came through the house, tearing, banging, crashing, destroying. I think it took ten minutes, but I think it was ten years of my life. I stood on top of the stairs with my parents holding me. Luckily my grandparents were not home. They were at a rest haven in a hospital, just sort of being taken care of, a little arthritis and a little that. They were not there. And my parents held me. We were in our night clothes. We had pajamas and etcetera on. And we watched from the top of the stairs as they systematically destroyed everything that we owned. The axes were, it seemed to me, ten feet long. I don't know how long they were, but they appeared it. They raised them high, they crashed the china closets. They crashed my father's desk. They cut the wires to the electricity. They destroyed all there was. I just remember my mother cringing and screaming as every tea cup rolled by, as her life was slowly decimated and destroyed. The only room not destroyed was my room. Oh, I forgot to mention. When the first assault came, an S.S. man appeared on top of my bed, with his hand raised, with a, an axe in one and a Luger in the other. And I was not quite 11. And that is really, other than the crash of the door, which woke me. And I screamed as I saw him and I said, "Don't kill me!" And I remember, I was not quite 11, that he was a very handsome, tall blond man. And he was probably no more than 21 anyway. And he said, "I won't kill you. Just do as I say. Get up!" And that's when I joined my parents on top of the stairs. He did not touch my room. That is the only room that was untouched. But they absolutely and totally crashed and destroyed everything that not only my mother's lifetime, my grandmother's lifetime, but mothers before them had collected and favored and loved. It was a shamble, and hence the word Crystal Night. The windows were crashed, the furniture, the clocks, the pots, pans, all that there was. Wires were cut. And they left. And we were numb. There was no light. They had cut everything, the electricity. And we were in shock. My father was a very together person. My mother was more tender, I would say, and tended more towards hysteria. Of course that's understandable at this point. I was very calm. I internalize a great deal. We went into my room because it was untouched, and we said, "Well, we'll get ourselves together in the morning. We'll get out of here and we'll see what we'll do." And my mother, who always saw as my father said, "Everything is black with you," said, "You know what? I think they're going to burn this house." And he said, "Why do you say that? You always think the worst." She said, "Well, the worst has happened." So we huddled in my little bed, and about an hour-and-a-half later we heard steps in the back. We had a two-block property. It was the main house, a garden, and then a play garden and beyond that two blocks at the end of that were the stables and a huge meadow. We heard them in the back. And the next thing is what we smelled. We smelled gasoline and flames. And the staircase had been decimated to a point that there was no railing. They had cut that off. And it was strewn with glass and crystal. And there was no light. So, we smelled this suffocating odor of burning gasoline rags. What they had done is they had set fire to the drapes in each front room of the house, and the blaze was really encroaching upon us. And they laughed at us. "Jews, if you can get out, go ahead." And I remembered having just gotten a beautiful navy

camel's hair coat and I really wanted it. I ran into my closet and I got it. And I don't know by what luck God made me do it. I pulled my father's coat out. My room was the moth closet. I pulled a coat out for my father. He was in his nightshirt. I threw it to him, and I got one for my mother. I really had wanted my coat so badly that I found theirs. And we somehow got out of that burning inferno. There we were in the street around four, four-thirty in the morning, and looking back I knew that the whole thing had really...been orchestrated, because there was the town head policeman, and there were people assembled, and the fire engines had come to extinguish nothing, but to just be there and protect the neighbors' homes. That's what they were there for. And more S.S. men. And as we just had come running out of the house and the flames were really licking at it, my father was taken away, in front of my mother, and in front of me, and handcuffed, by a policeman who my grandfather had taken care of all his life because his family needed money. And, I ran up to the policeman and I said, "Why are you taking my father? He hasn't done anything!" Being not quite 11, one equates arrest with a violation. And he just smiled at me and he said, "There's nothing I can do." And my mother at that point was at near collapse. And, my father was removed. She was 36 years old. She had lost all her physical possessions, her husband taken away, and she and I stood in front of the house. Everyone removed themselves, took my father, and it was a quiet, cold, awful night. We looked at the house. It was burning. No neighbor came out. And we stood, and we were dazed. And I think, and I've said this very often, that at that point I became my mother's mother. I was the stronger. And we thought that we would go to the hospital where my grandparents were, my father's parents. And on the way to the hospital we had to pass the synagogue, which was in, absolutely engulfed in flames. That had been totally set on fire at the beginning of the burning of our house. And we knew then that this...was it, this was the time in the night that we were no longer Germans. We were nothing. We went to the hospital and Mother Superior, who we knew very well, let us in. The reason we knew the Sister so well is that my grandfather supplied them during World War I with meat for the hospital, which was hard to come by, to feed the Sisters. They had a cloistered order there, and they ran a hospital. And so they were very kind to us. They let us in, and they gave us shelter. And we joined my grandparents, and told them in guarded terms what had happened to the house. Early in the morning Mother Superior came in crying and she said, "I can't keep you. I can and I can't." She said, "The Gestapo was here. They know you're here. They said if I harbor you there will be no food supplies to my hospital, to my indigent, to my sick, and to my cloistered order. But I will do it if you want to stay." And we said, "No, we can't let that happen to you." So, she said, "I have another plan. I will give you clothing, and I'll put a veil over your head, and I'll dress you up, and you can go to the closest biggest town." Which is what we did. In our town we could never have remained anonymous, but in a larger town you could. I did not look Jewish. I had blue eyes. I had blonde hair. My mother looked French. She had spanking black hair, and a turned up nose. There was no way we would have been sighted as looking Jewish. So we went to a town

called Bielefeld, which was a major town. It's spelled B-I-E-L-E-F-E-L-D. It was a lovely town. It had about 80,000 to 100,000 inhabitants. It was a place we went to for theater and for culture. It was our New York. And we had friends there. And we were not known. So, Mother Superior gave us money and some food. And, it was only a half hour by train. We had friends there who, Jewish friends, and we went to their home. There only the department stores were burned, and the synagogue, but not a personal home.

Tape one, side two:

ET: We arrived in Bielefeld, a very beautiful town nestled in surrounding mountains, an exquisite little town. No, not town, big town. And we went to our friends who gave us shelter. They were Jewish, good friends who we had known a long time. And people began to give us some clothing. We did find out that all the men had been rounded up everywhere in Germany, anyone over 16, and taken to three different sites of concentration camps. The one designated for our area was Buchenwald. Now Buchenwald at that time was not an extermination camp. It was a camp for people who were politically opposed to Hitler, to homosexuals, to dissidents, to Gypsies, and so on. And they were simply confined there. But they had not started the killing process, as I'm sure you know, until the early to middle forties. So it was an internment concentration camp, and all the men had been rounded up. And we did find out that my father, too, had gone there, with all the men from that particular region. So we remained living with friends there for about a month. And I was taken care of very sweetly by a lot of wonderful Jewish people. Because what had happened to us was singular. None of them had their houses burnt. And having researched this later, it was very rare. Why in my town, I don't know. Another house was burnt in my town, and it, too, was an old, magnificent structure. It had served as a city hall 300 years before it was burnt. My hus-, I'm probably digressing but as I think of it, when my husband went back to Germany with me in 1985, he looked around and he said, "I can see why they hated you, and hated what you owned. This area is so beautiful where you lived, and the other area where the other Jewish house was burned was exquisite." He said, "I think it was jealousy that you owned that, and that you lived in such a little garden spot of the town." But coming back to the fact that we were singular in having had a house burnt, we did live in Bielefeld for one month. My mother was slowly wasting away, because my father was at that time gone for one month. And then the HIAS, a Hebrew International...

NP: Aid Society.

ET: Aid Society.

NP: Society.

ET: We called it HIAS.

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: Rounded all of us up, and the local chapter was in Bielefeld where we were then living. And they told us that we could go back to our hometown, that two houses were designated as Jew houses. And that's what it was known as, *Judenhaus*, Jew House. And so we went back and there were two houses that had belonged to Jewish merchants that were given to us. The Jews who had lived there had, one had escaped to Holland and consequently the Germans found him in Holland then sent him to his death later on. The other was by a former merchant who had emigrated to the U.S. and it was still available. They were stone structures, and they obviously couldn't burn them. They had destroyed the

inside, but they had not been able to burn them. So, we were given a house and...we stayed in that house from 1939, January, until we left, August, 1941. And I lived as the only Jewish child. It seemed that right after Crystal Night a lot of the people in the town were able to go to Australia, Chile, Argentina, and so on. And we had a visa pending with the Consulate, the American Consulate. And our number, our waiting number was so high that it was not called until 1941, which made it, unfortunately, impossible to emigrate. So, we were stuck in the Jew House. And they were all older people, and I was the only child. And I grew up in a very strange world, because having been alone and only being able to relate to adults, was somewhat like the man who wrote *Rebel Without a Cause*, the psychiatrist. He also wrote *The Jet Propelled Couch*. And I always felt some identity with the people in his book. I was in an unreal world. The girls with whom I had gone to school had been forbidden to ever speak to me again. When I passed them in the street they avoided my glance. No one spoke to me. And so, at that point I was being educated in the Jew House by quite a few elderly people. And it's funny, everyone perceives education to be, one man decided that if I did not learn Roman numerals I'd never go on in life. So I learned that. My grandmother taught me geography. One little old lady taught me how to cook and bake. Someone taught me how to crochet and knit. My father thought I could never go on unless I learned Shiller and Goethe and some very fine, still quote "German literature."

NP: So he had been released.

ET: Yes, oh, I forgot.

NP: That's O.K.

ET: Sorry.

NP: No, no.

ET: All the Jewish men, if they had not died in the camps, were to be released within six to eight weeks. My father was released after six weeks, because he was the proud owner of a, an Iron Cross First Class. And Goering, at the time, decreed that, if you had been heavily wounded and had been an outstanding war hero you could get out earlier. That meant my father was able to crawl through the wired juiced up fences of Buchenwald, and take a chance of getting electrocuted or watching whether he was going to miss that precious little moment. He did make it. He was a very strong man, emotionally and physically. He was very unusual. He was an up man, too. His spirit was always up. He did, he was told he could go. He was still in his original night shirt, and the coat which I had given him. He had lost about 45 pounds. Tales that he had told us of Buchenwald later were rather awful, but he survived it. He ran through the woods of Thuringia, which is a...[unclear], a...province. And very, very cold. It's extremely cold up there. It's near Weimar, and it's a very, very cold area. He made it through the woods, and he said there were people peering out through their windows. And he said, "If ever you think they did not know what was going on," he said, "the screams of some of the people, and the escaping prisoners coming out such as I, you had to know." He hit Weimar, which is of course as you know, a major city. And he made it, there were people who whispered little things to

him again—it was HIAS who was present under cover—and said, "Go to the railway station and we'll take care of you." And there was a, an underground concourse, as I remember his tale. It's been a long time. And there were S.S. men standing there with clubs, clubbing all those who would come out to try one more time. And he dodged through. He was not hit too badly. And he was sort of shown by HIAS by a little wave of the hand which train to take. And they quietly gave him a little broth, just to sip through his mouth. It was one of the few nourishments he had had. He did make it home. One man from our town had died there, in, within a four week span. Another one came home, he was never the same. He died soon afterwards. My father was strong. He got out, he came out. He came home one night in January to the Jew House. I did not recognize him. He had a big, black beard. He'd lost about 45 pounds. But he smiled, and my mother collapsed upon him. And during that night I heard screaming. He was delirious. He had pneumonia. And without antibiotics, without any attending he got through it very nicely. And, he told about his experience there, and how they let them live in, there were layers of five slabs of wood, five high, five across. They slept there in the...dirt. And it was just like the concentration camps that you have seen later on, but they were just internment camps at that time. But they...gave them whale fish soup, with high salt content, and it made them very, very thirsty. And then they denied water to them. So they stood in the rain and they opened their mouths, and they had a "public toilet," which was a hole, with slats of wood across it, which were intermittently juiced with electricity, so that people would fall in. And these were tales he told us. And that the dead bodies were thrown to zoo animals there. And I did hear all this, at a very young age. And that if you didn't comply with rules, you were put in solitary confinement, which was a slab of concrete in which you were encased, straight up, and you could not move. And one night the Vienna Choir, I guess young men's choir, it couldn't have been boys, were at, it was actually at Christmas, sang. And my father said they had to stand outside in the cold and listen. The voices were exquisitely beautiful, but the songs they were made to sing were dirty ditties about Jews.

NP: Oh my.

ET: And they were very funny, and a lot of the Jews laughed. And the moment they laughed—they began to howl with laughter—a prison guard came from behind and hit them over the head. Because this is exactly what they wanted to elicit. So they put whispers down, "No matter how funny it is, don't laugh." So those were some of the things he had gone through. That was just part of it.

NP: Did...you hear your father talk about the Council of German Jews which was known as the *Reichsvertretung*?

ET: The *Reichs*-...

NP: R-E-I-C-H-S-V-E-R-T-R-E-T-U-N-G, and it was known as the Council of German Jews.

ET: Yes, all things were talked about.

NP: O.K.

ET: Yeah.

NP: And the Nuremberg Laws?

ET: Oh yes, I knew about them. Not in depth. I was too young.

NP: Right. And the Aryan Paragraph?

ET: No.

NP: That was in 1933.

ET: No. I have read since.

NP: That's fine.

ET: I was only five then, in '3-, no I had not. But one senses one doesn't have to know the history. The history I read afterwards. I lived through it, but I read later on.

NP: How did anyone support themselves at this time in...

ET: Afterwards?

NP: Eh...

ET: O.K.

NP: After your father came back.

ET: Right.

NP: And he was in the Jew House.

ET: O.K. Hitler confiscated all Jewish property, monies, belongings, investments, period. Because "the Jews had to pay for Crystal Night." I'm not sure how one can equate that, but we had to pay for it. So, we, and everyone else had nothing. We had nothing. We were not alone. We were then all equalized as nothing. What happened again, HIAS stepped in. We had a collective agency for clothing, because we could not buy anything in Germany. We, (A) we had no money, (B) they were going into rationing. We had no rationing cards. So we collected clothing items from each other and we rotated them. My shoes were stretched so they would last longer. Old clothing was made over for young clothing. Men's suits, for women's suits. My father was doing forced labor. He was work-, he was told to work in Bielefeld again, and this is now our concourse, our centralized place to be. He became a worker in a cement factory. He got up at five in the morning to take a six o'clock train to go to the town of Bielefeld, where he made cement blocks. He was at that time, '39, 46, -7 years old. He was doing very heavy labor. Then when that was finished they put him into a—this is the German, this is not the HIAS, this is the German authorities—he was making cigars and cigar bags in a factory. And he got paid minimally, nothing. If it hadn't been for HIAS, and Jews helping them selves out, I don't know how we would have really lived. There were always a few good Germans in my town who helped. There always are, everywhere, and they were definitely. They brought food at night and left it at our doorstep. There was one very courageous couple who didn't care what anyone said about them, a German couple who would have us over to dinner. And consequently, after my parents and I left, and I'm jumping ahead, but this particular couple took my grandmother, who had to be left in Ger many, and put her on the boxcar, to send her to Theresienstadt. They had the courage, the grace, and the humanity,

to take this woman between themselves and kiss her and walk her up. They were in grave danger of being killed. They did it anyway. Many years later my son, as a twenty-year-old, with his fianceé, visited them, in gratitude and with love. They were pure people, which was very unusual. And they did give us sustenance in the Jew House. I don't really know how we lived. There wasn't much, as, I don't...

NP: And...

ET: Is...

NP: They took your grandmother...

ET: Well...

NP: To [unclear].

ET: No, the assembling place for the remaining Jews...

NP: After you...left.

ET: This is after we left, and I think this was the earlier part of 1942, all were exterminated in the camps. We were the only people who got out of the Jew House—my parents and I. In both Jews Houses the people who inhabited these houses all died in the camps, including my grandmother. And, they were rounded up at different times and told to come to the railway station, where the cattle is. Not where people go, but where cattle is put in—a very familiar site to us because we were in that business, and always watching for cattle to disembark twenty or forty heads, and this is eventually where my grandmother went, into a cattle car. And she did not know her destination. It's a good thing she did at that point not know it. But they knew she had to go there, this couple, and they walked her there, right through the streets. These are acts of courage that you hear about once in a while, as you know in France and in Belgium, they happened everywhere.

NP: Very Righteous Gentiles.

ET: Oh very much. They were just pure, godly people. That's it. And there were a few farmers who left food at our doorstep. There was a wonderful doctor, who bought the Jew House we were in, so that we wouldn't have to worry, and we lived free. He was our doctor. He was wonderful. There were some, there was a delicatessen which, when we would go with our little stamps, rationing stamps, they were marked "Jew." We got very little of anything. They always threw something in the bottom of the bag for us. There were some good people. But they were in such a minority. So then my life in the Jew House took a different turn. For the first three months, and then my father's...eventual return, we settled into some order. We had one kitchen and we had one bathroom. We were all assigned rooms. And we had to cook together. That's a tough thing to do. We managed it, and on top of it, HIAS called us and said that the Baltic Sea coast was being freed of Jews because Jews could have possibly have some power as spies. And we had to incorporate those people into our houses. We had very little room. So we inherited a couple from the Baltic Sea. And they were put into the Jew House, into the one remaining room that we used as a community living room. So now we no longer had a living room. We only had our bedrooms. Somewhere in 1939, about three or four months after Crystal Night, the Rabbi

in Bielefeld, again the central town for us for all activity, started, a school for the remaining children of the entire area. A brave young man he was. He took an old storefront that had belonged to a Jewish family and he made a school for us, eight grades. He had a wonderful idea what he thought should be taught. It was all his idea. And, first of all, the older children had to teach the younger children, so I, being 11, was sort of in the middle but I took the six-year-olds. He taught us Hebrew again, very severely so, and the Sephardic Hebrew, too. He taught us Heine, the poet, some math, wonderful writing samples. It was very important. And then he took us into a little corner, and he attempted to do some gym with us. When I think of it now it's really funny, but he was great. He did a wonderful job with us. And when I finally arrived here in 1941 and I started school in October, I would honestly say I missed three years of school. But I had some very eclectic learning in my brain [chuckles]. Many people had put forth some great thinking, and thoughts. And I lived by that.

NP: Excuse me, did you, there was, you knew that you were coming to the United States. There was no other destination ever considered?

ET: You say I knew. I hoped.

NP: You hoped.

ET: I lived for that hope. We had gotten a registration number[2] in Stuttgart, which was the regional American Consulate for our area, in 1938, in August, when Germany, Czechoslovakia and the world was on fire. My father said, "I think we better get a waiting number." And I remember our number. It was 16,527. The people who got out in March of '39, their number was 5,000 and 6,000. So that will give you an idea. And I still facetiously thank our President Roosevelt for not enlarging the quota, and I would like to say to him if he could hear me, "You cost me three terrible years." If he had enlarged the quota the way we had done later for Hungary, for Vietnam, and for Cuba, I would have been out of there sooner. But we had to wait for that number to be called. This had nothing to do with Germany. This was purely the U.S. Immigration. It had to do with that. You could go to what was called a transit country, somewhere else, and wait out your number. Your number would always be a German number, a German waiting number. No matter where you went, you were under the German quota. We had relatives in Haiti, and my father wrote to them, "Could you get us to Haiti?" We had a cousin in the United States who was well monied. He'd left Germany in '28. He was a banker. He must have foreseen things that no one else foresaw. He left Europe in '33 and settled in the U.S. He was one of the few clairvoyants, I would say. We approached him. He needed to send money to Haiti for us to go there. He sent money to Haiti. We had passage on a ship. This was '39, in May. And then we got the glad "news" that the Haitian government had taken the money and had a big party with it, and had a drinking party. There was no more money, and there was no more passage. *A propos*, not much has changed in Haiti till now, has it?

[2]Quota number

NP: Are they still there in Haiti?

ET: They're dead, but their children are living here now. Their daughters are a bit younger than I. I am, I'll be 66 and their daughters are probably in their 50s. And there's no one there any more. They made a literal fortune there, in the mahogany industry, Sisal and Mahogany. So, no Haiti.

NP: Were there relatives that remained, other than your grandmother, in your town, or, I mean, in Germany?

ET: Oh yes. I have given a rough count. That I know of, about 45 of my relatives died in the camps. But there are only a few who count, and the only one who will ever count is my grandmother. I'll never get over it, ever. She raised me. She was more, my mother was a very bright, intelligent, vivacious woman, but my grandmother, actually it was her mother-in-law, was my sustaining force in life. She was my security. She was my everything. She was bright. She was tri-lingual. She spoke English, French, and German. Her English was just fair, but she could write it. Her French was fluent. She was my mentor. She was unusual. She was strong. She was bright. She could not come over because we would never have been able to get a visa. She was too old. This country looks at people, looked at people then, as a possible burden to the State. We had just here come out of a Depression, and that was understandable in that sense. But she would never have been got, able to have gotten a visa, so she was never on the application. I think we closed our eyes to the fact, not I, I think my father had to, that he knew that she would have to be left one day. And I have often resented that in my father, until I spoke with my son. He is 42 now. He has two children. He said, "What do you think I would have to do one day? Would I not have to leave you as much as I love you? For the sake of the children. And the children come first." I understand that. But, I can never make my peace with it. So, anyway, we did not go. I'm probably jumping the gun.

NP: That's all right. That's fine.

ET: We did not go to Haiti. We knew then that this was it, and we hoped and hoped and hoped our number would soon be called. We hoped. The points of exit in Germany were lessening, as Hitler rampaged his way, or ravaged his way through Europe. Every country fell, all the Scandanavians, the Netherlands, Poland, and in the end, France. So the ports of exit in Germany and all Europe were closed. We were still not getting any news from the, Stuttgart as to when we would be called. In January of 1941, after having been in the Jew House for two years, we got a letter from the Consulate. "You are to appear April 21st for your visa, for examination for the visa." HIAS got us the train tickets. It was a far trip. It's a, Stuttgart is in the south of Germany. We went, and we were treated by the American Consulate very much like the Germans treated us. I think they had learned German ways already. I don't know what it was. They were mass processing us. They took 49 fingerprints of me at the age of 13.

NP: Hmm.

ET: What criminal I could have been at that time I have no idea. We were given a sheet of paper, how to behave for the day. We would be there the whole day. We were examined by a doctor. I was 13 and some. I was menstruating the second time in my life, and I had to walk naked in front of this doctor. The indignancies [indignities?] of life. So did my mother. And we had to do certain exercises so he could see how well we were — raise our arms and our legs, and walk single file in front of him. And I think the most comforting thing my mother said to me was, "Ellen, pretend he is not there. Just walk. We may get out of this country." And so I did. It's a very tender age, at 13.

NP: Oh indeed it is.

ET: To be young, and also to be in flux at the time. It was very difficult. I didn't like the man. He was very military. He barked at me in German what I should be doing, lifting my arms. But I took my mother's advice. I thought of better things. And then we got dressed and there were...at least 50 people who had been called up that day. And then we were called to the Consul's office. He was a young man, and I think today I would say he was about 40, a handsome dark man, with a little moustache. And he looked at me, and he said, "Are you well?" And I said, "I think so." I wasn't sure how to answer him. And he said to my parents, "Are you aware that your daughter has a heart murmur and she may not be able to get a visa?" My mother at that point was just about to slip under her chair. And my father had a fantastic command of the German language. He was very bright. Instead of saying, "She doesn't," he said, "To the best of my knowledge I am not aware of it." He didn't want to offend the possible new country's emissary. And, the Consul looked at us, and he said, "I will have her x-rayed. And I will see what happens. But if she doesn't pass it, she will stay here, and you may go." My mother was not to be dealt with at that point at all. She was almost comatose again. We did go in for an x-ray. And we were told it was a lung x-ray. We came back and at this point we were I think-

Tape two, side one:

NP: ...an interview with Ellen Tarlow, on 11-19-93. We can begin.

ET: O.K. Back in the Consul's office, he informed us that, although he detected a heart murmur, I seemed to be otherwise in good health and that we could indeed get a visa. The relief was incredible. We finally had this tiny little stamp on our passport, and it said, "This visa is good until September 22nd, 1941." And so there we were. We had what we wanted. We didn't even, I didn't even think of my grandmother at that point. I was just so happy. I could not believe I had this. So, back we went to "The Jew House." And there was always that little envy there. I could sense it. "You have a visa. We have nothing." Both Jew Houses were full of people who had nothing, who had no quota number, who had no way of getting out. Did we suspect more at the time? I think within us we probably did. We had been reduced to nothing, and how much worse it could get? I don't know that we knew, that we saw it, that we envisioned. I think my mother always envisioned something horrible. Anyway, now the task was to get passage. At that time the only harbor still open, one was Lisbon, and one was Yokohama. And Germany was already, no, Germany was going to be at war with Russia in 1940, I believe? If I get my facts straight. I think it was.[2] Anyway, those were the two exit harbors. So then again HIAS, which is the only organization that could ever work for us, tried to obtain passage. And we tried to get money from our relatives to pay for this enormous amount of money to make up for that. It was just highway robbery. All these countries were, [sighs] oh, using us and extorting money to get us, you know, passage. It took forever and ever and ever, because it was very hard to get passage. Now that we finally had the visa, we didn't know if we'd be able to use it. And I do remember going back to our little school in Bielefeld, and a man coming, a Jewish man coming up to me at recess and he said to me, "You'll never get out. You may have a visa. You're gonna be stuck here with the rest of us. You won't get passage." And I remember a terror flooding right through me, because that was all I lived for, that we had the visa. Well, somehow somewhere, we were told that we could get out through Portugal, and that my father's cousin in New York was paying, and HIAS, and everyone combined and so on. It was I think $1,000 a person then. And so October, no, excuse me, August the 5th or 6th we embarked on the greatest journey of our lives. We were told we had to assemble in Berlin, and we would go in a sealed train to Lisbon. I will explain the sealing later. We had to provide food for the train for ourselves for five days. There would be no refrigeration. So my...parents prepared boiled eggs and bread and some pickled meat and odd things in a thermos. And early on an August day, at five or six in the morning, my grandmother walked us to the train. It was the longest walk I ever took and I ever will take. She was 77, I think, or 78. She took us to the train. She always wore black. She had a little hat on with a little veil. She was my father's mother. She stood on the platform, and the

[2]Actually, Germany attacked the USSR in 1941.

train approached. We had a bag each to carry. We could only take out that which we were able to carry, and I was very skinny, and very undernourished. I weighed 78 pounds. I was 13-and-three-quarter, and my father carried my bag with the clothing. It's all we could take, we couldn't, we could take nothing of value. We had nothing nor could we have taken it. And she stood, my grandmother. I called her *Oma*, which is German for Nanny. And, she did not cry. I don't know how the woman did it. I've talked about this, choking with tears. I've talked about as if I were a commentator and Connie Chung[3] herself perhaps, and right now I feel like Connie Chung. I'm looking on. She stood there, and she put her arms around me and she said one final thing. She said, "Do well." I think it was as if she pronounced me for life, that I should do well. Because it echoed in my soul forever. She hugged us. She did not cry. If she did I didn't see it. I looked out the window until she was a little black dot. It was the most horrible thing in my life. She stayed. We went on to Berlin. We [unclear] I'd never seen Berlin. My father took me around. There were constant air raids. And, we did get out at night to the railway station in Berlin. It was a subterranean kind of a through-walk. And the sirens were sounding, because 1941, the British were heavily, heavily bombing Germany. And that was our farewell, a last air raid. And we were put on a two-compartment sealed train, with Gestapo escorts, because we were going through France. France was occupied by Germany. We could have been spies. And, the train was sealed. I don't know how it was sealed, but it was sealed. We had two toilets for 64 people. We sat straight up and they were not the upholstered first or second class compartments; they were wood. And we stayed on that for five days. Well, actually we were let out in Spain, so I shouldn't say that, but all the way through France we sat. In Paris they were, we stopped and HIAS again came with hot tea and hot coffee and the Gestapo came. We had two Gestapo men on each of the train compartments. Not compartments, I mean the whole train section. And he opened the windows with a key and the hot liquids were brought in to us. This is the only liquid we had since Germany. And then the two toilets, systems were made—children first, women, and so on. And I was so skinny that my father laid me in the baggage net on top, where the baggage goes. We didn't have much baggage anyway, and we were all in the same boat. So I kind of twisted and turned in there and I laid there. Everyone else sat. And then we got into Spain. The border of France, a little town spelled H-E-N-, I'll say it again. H-E-N-D-A-Y-E. The Germans called it Hendaye ["hen-dai"]. My father said, "They don't know their French. It's Anday [chuckles]. That was our last examination, by Gestapo and border German police, because France, you know, was theirs and a woman was body stripped and body searched...a Jewish lady. And she was in a hysterical state. My mother quietly explained to me what they did to her. I could not believe what they did to her. They were looking for jewelry, and some people did smuggle things out. And, we were questioned one more time, and then we went into Spain. And Spain in 1941 was at the tail end of a civil war. It was terrible. It was burnt, the fields were burnt to

[3]Connie Chung - a popular American TV commentator.

a crisp. They were stubbles of black. And the children were jumping on our train. The Gestapo escort had left. We were, Spain was neutral, for what it was then Spain. Six-year-olds were jumping in our train window yelling in there. But they wanted to smoke. Someone spoke Spanish, and they asked, "Why do you want to smoke?" And they said, "It kills the hunger." So we saw there another form of terror. And then we were let off at a little town called Irun, I-R-U-N, and it was the loveliest experience...

NP: This is in Spain.

ET: This was in Spain. We stayed a night and a day in a little inn. I had bed bugs in my room.

NP: Oh dear.

ET: They were falling on my head. I didn't know what they were. [laughs] And I called my father and I said, "Daddy, something's falling on my head!" And he came in and said, "Oh my," he said, "they're bedbugs. Put the sheet over your head." The next morning I thought I was in a scene of Carmen. It was Sunday, and the bells were pealing, and church was, Mass was beginning. Little donkeys with women riding on it. It was incredible. We had a wonderful time. My father knew Latin well, and Spanish, and Greek, so he got along really well everywhere. And we mingled. And we had some awful bread we'd gotten out of Germany. But it was bread, and they had no bread. Very little of it. They had lots of fruit, so we got fruit. So we bartered a little bit. And then back on the train and we rode all through Sierra Madre, which was burnt out at that time of year. It was kind of...I don't know whether it was burnt out. It looked yellow; I remember it. Everything was yellow ochre and mulberry trees and there was nothing there. And we just went through and through and through. And all these little kids kept jumping on our train asking for cigarettes. And then we arrived in Portugal. Not in Lisbon, but at the other end of this long, narrow strip of Portugal, I guess. It sort of ensconces that part of the world there. It's at the left end of Spain, it is a long strip and that's Portugal. And we were let out in a little town at night called Pampelhosia.

NP: Yes, would you know how to spell that?

ET: I think so. P-A-M-P-E-L-H-O-S-I-A. I located that.

NP: It's in Portugal.

ET: Portugal. And, we were told that we were going to get a real meal. And out, and under the stars at night, a little old lady came. And she had no teeth. She was dressed in black. And some other ladies came and put a table up outside, outside the railroad tracks. And there was a meal. And someone came and played music, and we were dancing. I couldn't believe it. It was very beautiful. And back on the train and the next morning we arrived in Lisbon. So it was a five- or six-day trip. And, Lisbon was breathtaking. It's a beautiful climate. It's a magnificent city. And my father being so aware of the arts immediately said, "Look at the architecture! Look at the sculptures! Look at the ma-, look at this, and look at that. Look at the fountains! Look at the streets! Look at the sky!" He was always educating me wherever he was. And it was magnificent. We were put up in a

huge old brownstone house. Communal living again. I had so much communal living that [chuckles] I've said to my husband very often that, "I don't mind being poor, but I always want to have my own bathroom [laughs] and my own bedroom." So there we were, communal living, in a big, big three-story house. We ate in one room. We had food provided. And we lived in Lisbon for two weeks, waiting for the boat to be ready. It was a lovely, lovely time. We had four dollars each, twelve dollars total, and we got Portuguese money, and my mother got coffee, which she hadn't had in years, and she inhaled it. And I got milk, which I hadn't had. So we kind of like floundered around and then again HIAS was there. And they said, "Would you like to go on a trip?" And they took us to some of those marvelous islands off the coast of Lisbon. And it was extraordinary. And while we were there we saw, I think half of Europe, its spies and its espionage system running around. Ex-Nazis and ex-thises and that. Just like the Humphrey Bogart movie. That's what life was in a neutral city. And then finally we were told that we could board the ship. It was the 22nd of Sep-, of August. And, I made a mistake before. The visa was good from April to August, not September. The visa ran out the night we boarded the ship. If we were not in international waters, I think it's three miles, I'm not sure, something like that, we could have been taken off that ship. We took off at 9:00 at night, and by 12:00 my father said, "We're finally safe." Our visa ran out.

NP: Do you remember the name of the ship?

ET: Oh, I certainly do. The Germans called it *Musinio*, but it's really *Mouzinho*. It was spelled M-O-U-Z-I-N-H-O. But there is some kind of an accent circumflex somewhere. And, it could be over the H or the N or, I'm not, I don't know Portuguese, but that was the name of the boat. It was an ancient boat. It had been an Italian boat built in the early part of the century, given to some other country as war settlement from World War I. It had been around. It was meant to house 350 people. It took on 750. Because, the company which owned the boat—I still remember that name too—the *Compania Colonia Navagacio*, which means the Colonial Navigation Company—owned that ship, and made *lots* of money on us, lots of it. And we slept tween deck. If you don't know what that is, that's how the Irish potato diggers came over. It's in the hold of the ship, in the bottom. And there are no windows, and there are no [unclear].

NP: How do you spell that? Tween deck?

ET: We called it tween deck.

NP: In between.

ET: In between. But it was the hold of the ship. And, we were taken down and there were 150 bunks. Two high, two across, men, women and children together. Six sinks. And air hoses to get air down there. There was no air. So you had to undress, and you had to do your, your everything. We had a...Russian lady—and we were all Jews, we were all in the same boat—she put up an umbrella and put a sheet over it. She was so comical. She would go under that sheet with the umbrella, ensconced under it, and she'd come out beautiful. She did the whole thing under that. And I remember lying next to a man who

was constantly seasick and throwing up, and sometimes on my side. And with six sinks, O.K., we had a system. Due to the fact that [laughing] we were the intelligentsias of Europe we had a system within sixty minutes. The climate was lovely. The men went atop on deck, and the women washed first. Since there wasn't enough water or time, you could wash down to the waist. And, then we would go upstairs as women and children, and the men would come down. But no shaving allowed, because there wasn't enough water. And then the women complained that they had to do a little more personal hygiene once in a while, so we were given once a week extra time for that. And we voted that the only luxury cabin available, since everyone had not paid personally but HIAS had paid the same amount of money, was awarded to a young French couple who had a year old and a two-year-old. And we gave it to them. They were both in diapers. I don't know how they managed. The food was obnoxious. We had everything done in putrid olive oil, and to this day I can't eat olive oil. I cannot tolerate it. I go to an Italian place and I say, "Leave it out." Unless they disguise it really well. We lived on oranges and bread, because the food was not edible. But the Portuguese who ran the ship were delightful. They were very friendly, very sweet. And every night we had entertainment. We had famous violinists, sopranos. My father loved running fun shows and things. He was a very entertaining, bright man. So he was the emcee. We had fantastic entertainment. We were free! It was a freedom boat. It took two weeks. Two weeks, and we went across the Amazons[4] and then we...had a British convoy, which seemed to follow us for a long time. We were told later that the Germans often knew that they were refugee boats, and thought nothing of shelling them. And we felt very secure with this long British convoy line running along. The weather was magnificent. So the whole trip took a month. And we arrived on Labor Day.

NP: Where did you arrive?

ET: [chuckles] Well, we arrived at Staten Island. At the time I was told that Ellis Island was closed because it was Labor Day. And I believed that, but I have since found out that it may not all have been that, because I think the Coast Guard took it over. So whatever it was, it was Staten Island. But the setup was exactly the way Ellis Island went, disembarking. And there was the examiner at the table. And when I, I took a picture of Ellis Island, which we visited. And I made a little girl's face with the table that they had standing there, pretending I was checking in. And they spoke German. Of course they had to be so multi-lingual. And one of the first things he asked me, he said, "Have you ever had your lungs removed?" [chuckling] And my father said, "Do you think he might not know the word for tonsils?" Then he said, "I think I made a mistake." They were very sweet. So they did the whole thing. It took a whole day, and we couldn't get off the ship, because of Labor Day, so we sat on top with our little suitcases. And it was very, very hot. We didn't know that kind of heat. We didn't know it existed. Because Europe isn't humid, it isn't that hot. It was in the 90's and it was very humid. And we had our fall clothing on because we

[4]Azores? -ed.

were told, "September is September everywhere." And we were sitting, we had long stockings and hats, dying. And the Portuguese decided since it was a legal holiday here they were not responsible to feed us. So, we didn't have food. And so somebody hitched up some hot dogs to us. And finally at night we got off the boat.

NP: Wait a minute. Excuse me, were there Jewish relief agencies there?

ET: Oh yeah! They were everywhere.

NP: They were there in Staten Island.

ET: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yes. And relatives.

NP: And relatives.

ET: And HIAS. HIAS is a wonderful work.

NP: And ORT? Was anyone from ORT? Anywhere?

ET: Never heard of it. I only knew of HIAS. That was all I ever knew. If there was something else, I'm sure there was, but that was brought to my attention.

NP: So there were relatives to meet you.

ET: Oh there were relatives just standing down there and there were lights and, I will have to backtrack soon, and talk about my last three years in Germany. They were spent in air raids. I forgot about that before.

NP: That's all right.

ET: And, so here there were lights. There was no blackout. And it was heavenly. And we were taken to the loveliest section of New York, right off Central Park, another brownstone house. Communal living, and I...don't think I could ever go to camp after [chuckles] all that communal living! It was beautiful. It was a brownstone house, donated by someone, right off Central Park. And all the women stayed in one part, and all the men in another. And then you had to work in the kitchen. And we had food and I became very, very ill. I had a strep throat, which in 1941 wasn't treated with anything but rest. If they had sulphur it was only for the army. I didn't get any. And I also developed an infectious disease of the mouth because of what had happened on the boat—bad food and so on. And they said I'd have to be hospitalized and be isolated. And I said, "Don't do that to me. I can't even talk English." So they said, "O.K., you can take a little room upstairs and stay there for two weeks."

NP: You were quarantined?

ET: I was quarantined. And, I was really sick. I had fever, I don't know how long. But, as I came out of the fever I still had to stay in bed, and my father—who was eternally thinking of my education—said, "I found some books in the library in German! And you're going to read the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*!" So I did. And we had a German Jewish doctor who came to visit me, because who could understand English? Everyone had learned French over there, and some had learned English, but French was the language one learned there. So, the doctor came up and he looked at me and said, "Wow," he said, "You're thin." He said, "When you get up you tell me what you like to eat and we'll do it for you." So the first time I stood up he looked at me and he said, "I knew that you were

skinny. I didn't know you were that tall with it too!" He said, "What do you like?" I said, "Candy bars and whipped cream." He said, "It's yours!" So I lived off that. And we lived in New York for about six weeks. And it was very nice. We were able to see a lot of relatives. My father took me to museums. And, I got well despite not having antibiotics. He did it.

NP: He took care of you.

ET: Yeah. I got well. I was skinny and malnourished, all that stuff. And then we had relatives in Philadelphia—my mother's cousins—and they insisted we come here. And they got a room for us. It was communal living again. It was a boarding room, boarding house with a room. It had a room to sleep in and I had an army cot. My parents had a bed. And then there was another room that was a kitchen, but it didn't have running water. It only had a two burner stove. The running water we got from the bathroom next to our little two rooms, and there were boarders who bathed and also got water from there. And I remember being repulsed and just the whole thing was disgusting, because people were running in and out of bathrooms. This was in Strawberry Mansion on Columbia Avenue. Do you know it?

NP: My grandmother used to live in Strawberry Mansion.

ET: Everybody did.

NP: Yeah, yeah.

ET: But it was nice once.

NP: Oh yeah.

ET: It was lovely. It was beautiful.

NP: Everything convenient.

ET: It was wonderful.

NP: We walked to everything.

ET: Wonderful. Oh yeah, it was great. But this, you know, a little room. So we lived there for a month. My parents went to work in a factory making $16 a week. My mother sewed on a machine, because she had learned to sew in finishing school, you see, so that equipped her really well [laughs]. She learned to work a power machine. My father became, swept floors in the same factory and became a shipper. And I started school. And that was a lovely experience. I knew a couple of words of English, "hello, how are you." But that didn't mean anything. And I was put into eighth grade, and I should have been almost in ninth, but they felt it was easier for me, because I didn't know English. What they didn't know is that I knew more than they did, even without my education. And I did extremely well. I started school in October in eighth grade. I graduated eighth grade in 1942, in June, within what about ten months? And I got into honors classes. I couldn't believe it. I lost my accent. I had a very lovely Jewish teacher helped me. She made me round out my words, *the* and *why* and *are*. [chuckles] And, I did very well. And we got a bigger apartment, and I worked summers. And I worked weekends. We all had to. And we did not know what had happened to anybody there, in Germany. I got one letter from my

grandmother, the last letter before Pearl Harbor. When I came here it was September. Pearl Harbor happened in December. And I might interject here that our boat, other than a boat leaving 4 A.M. that night, was the very last boat out of Europe. So I share this great fortune with all the people on the boat—the last out of Europe. There was no more. The Consulate which gave us our visa in April was closed down in June. Had we had a higher number we wouldn't have gotten the, a visa. One of the last visas. It was the last train out of Berlin, too. And, literally the last boat. The *Navemar* was the second boat out that night at four. So, about nine hours later than when we left was literally the last. I was the last to leave, and I have done nothing but question this since then. Why me? And I don't know why. I don't think there's an answer. But there is a survivor's guilt there. It is always there. Because, the children with whom I played, the children who I left, the people in the Jew House, they all went. And I have a book which was sent to me concerning the people in my hometown, as to their ultimate fate. It was made up by someone who had emigrated to Israel, and he had gone back to my hometown and searched everything. And I have the book and my children have it. It's in German. I've translated the salient parts for them. And it tells what happened to everyone. And we had left that August day, and by December they were already taking people. They took the couple that came from the Baltic Sea, in December, and sent them to Riga, Poland [Latvia -ed.], to a sure death. My grandmother was taken in '42. She went to Theresienstadt, which is the least of the offensive camps. It was for indigent and elderly and children. It's from that place that those famous drawings came of children, *The Butterflies*.

ET: Yes.

NP: She didn't last long. She died of starvation. She was near 78. There she was united with a sister and her brother-in-law, from the same region where we came from. They all died together. And when I think of her, lying on the ground and dying of starvation, I...can't reconcile that with anything ever again in life. Because she was the woman who gave, she gave everything. She gave every indigent person the same treatment. Every poor person, every "*shnorrer*", as we say, who came to our house. He could stay as long as he wanted. He was given food. She always had clothing. She always had something else in an attic room. She always had an open home, an empty...chair, table filled with food. She was the one who washed the dead bodies when other women said they couldn't. And I think of her.

Tape two, side two:

NP: O.K.

ET: Yes, he was lucky. My grandfather had died—I forgot to mention that—the year we left, in January, 1941. He was 84. He died, which was good. At least one less to go that way. I mourn all the others. My father's sister went and her daughter. Her husband, too, had died young, so that was one less to go. My father's sister fought in the battle of Warsaw. She was killed in it. Her daughter, who was, I think 12, was taken away from her to Auschwitz and was gassed—my first cousin who I spent my summers with at my home. I mourn for them. But I mourn really only collectively for my grandmother. And every film I've ever seen about the Holocaust, about the camps, I see only her face. She is the primary face. And when I see children in camps, I think of my playmates. And I also see me. I see myself. I always see myself in the camps, because with the proximity in time that there but for you go I, I would have been shipped out within four or five months from my town. And I don't think I would have survived very long. And I often envision what would have been. My mother was a tall, statuesque woman, and I don't look anything like her. She would have outlasted me, outlived me. And the terror of that lives within me, too, the might-have-been. I live in the might-have-been, because I was the last to go, last out of the town, last out of the land, last out of Portugal. And I have always envisioned myself in a camp. And I've had to do a lot of soul searching why God would have saved me. I never did lose my faith in God. My cousin has. The aunt who died in the Warsaw Uprising also had a son exactly my age. He came on the children's transport, alone. She was able to get him out alone. So she sacrificed that. He was raised very stringently Orthodox. He is a Baptist now. He said that his religion had caused him nothing but misery. His mother died. His sister was killed in Auschwitz, and why should he hold on to it? My father chastised him relentlessly. He said, "All the more reason that you should cling to it, because of what happened." But he did not.

NP: Is he alive today?

ET: Yes. He's exactly my age.

NP: Where is he?

ET: Chicago. A very bright man, in research chemistry. He remained childless—he is married—I...have the feeling on purpose. So, he was saved and what was, he was saved, but what was saved? Was his soul saved? His body was saved. I too, I forgot to mention was going to be in a children's transport. When we lived in the Jew House we were approached again by HIAS whether my parents wanted to get me out. It was easier to get a child out, and we called it children's, *Kindertransport*. You know that word.

NP: I know that. There is this wonderful woman that works with the Archive named Eva Abraham. She lives in Greenhill. And she has organized reunions of *Kinder*, and we have many testimonies and taped interviews of *Kinder.*

ET: Mmm hmm. Well my cousin then was *Kindertransport* what we called it. and I was considered for it in 1939 while we lived in the Jew House. My mother had a brother who lived in Nice, France and he wanted me to live with him. Little did we realize that, heh, France was going to go, too. And everything was instituted to get me there. It took time. I didn't tell my parents that I did not want to go. I was crying inside at the thought of leaving them. I was tortured. And I loved my uncle. I wanted to be there. It sounded wonderful, but I couldn't understand how I could ever leave my parents or be able to accomplish that. So, in 1940 in May Hitler conquered France. So all that went up in a puff of smoke. I was the happiest person alive, that I didn't have to go. When France fell to Germany, I was in Bielefeld, at the end of a school day, and I heard the loudspeakers. And people were screaming in the streets. Paris had fallen. And I went into an alleyway and I quietly cried, because that was the last stronghold of liberty, when Paris fell. And I couldn't cry publicly, because that would have been a dead giveaway. And because I was so "un-Jewish looking", incidentally, every time I took this train to go to the Rabbi's class in Bielefeld, I was accosted, why I was not in uniform, why I was not on an outing, why I wasn't here or there where I should have been, where all German children were. And I made all kinds of excuses. I, my hair then was sort of honey-colored. And I had the typical little German girl hairdo with a little pin on the side, with straight little short hair. And I was always taken for one. The other thing I— in retrospect—I think about is the years we spent in the Jew House. Air raids were constant, because the British were bombing us forever and ever. And we had this ambivalent feeling of, hey, we don't want to get hit, but we want them to hit something wonderful, to destroy this country. And the air raids were nightly. And then during the day for a while too, but it deprived me of sleep. We had by law to go down into an air raid shelter. And one night we had five air raids. Up and down, and up and down and up and down. And we were bombed pretty severely at one point. I remember falling off the seat as I was sleeping in the air raid shelter. A bomb hit very closely and I was rolling on the ground. They did quite a bit of damage. But we were bombed for two years, and the feeling of wanting them to really hit a fantastic target and yet not wanting to be part of that, it's a strange feeling.

NP: So this was constant.

ET: Yeah. And then, you know, as I said, the last years in, from Crystal Night on until 1941, I call them the gray years in my life. They have no color. There was no intimacy. There was nothing in my town at all. We had long, long, long years since been able to go to a movie or to a park or to anything. We were not allowed radios. So, reading was the only source of information, and education. And my father made very sure that I did that. And I did read voraciously and avidly. But they were very gray years. I went, I turned into my inner self a lot. I fantasized a lot. And when I read Anne Frank, which of course that fate doesn't even touch upon mine, but I...sensed her loneliness. Because I manufactured people in that lonely little room in the Jew House. And I dressed up. And I put perfume on and I read strange books. Because I wanted to be somewhere else than

where I was. The only escape I had was by going to the Rabbi's class in Bielefeld. There were some Jewish children there. But I always had to return home in the evening to my town where I, there again, I was alone. And it was like a...cold, iron grip upon me when I would return home, that I would be isolated again.

NP: It was a difficult time of life, being a teenager.

ET: Very difficult. It was a very tough period. The other sadness was that in the other Jew House was an elderly couple who had a daughter, a married daughter, and a little grandson in Berlin, who would intermittently visit. And this little boy was about two-and-a-half or three. He was a darling child. And I would go over and play with him. That was the only thing I could literally do. This little child and his parents died in Auschwitz. And I look at my grandchildren now. And I behold their life as very, very precious. And I think of that little boy. And it's hard to reconcile a world upon a world where this could happen. So needless to say that my four grandchildren to me are the essence of life. And, I think maybe that I was saved that I could go on and talk about it, that I could have two children, and that I could have grandchildren, that life has gone on for me.

NP: It is a reaffirmation emotionally.

ET: Isn't it. It is.

NP: Even when you carry this [unclear].

ET: Yes.

NP: It is a reaffirmation.

ET: It is. Now, I have been back to Germany.

NP: What year did you go back?

ET: '85, per invitation.

NP: Per invitation.

ET: Yes.

NP: Was this by the mayor of the town or...

ET: Yes. Each town, are we recording?

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: Oh, O.K. Each town had this little pang of guilt, *I think we did something wrong*. [chuckles] Putting it very mildly. And, they all came up with money and plans to have people come back. And a letter came inviting my mother and me. My mother was failing. She's in the Geriatric Center in her ninth year there now. And at that time she wasn't that bad, but she didn't grasp it, and I also think, if my mother had gone back into that town...

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: She would have killed. She would not have been able to tolerate this. She would have taken everyone and slashed them. So, I wrote to Germany and I asked, "Could I bring my husband in her stead?" And they said, "That's O.K." So we were both free. And my son and my daughter-in-law had been backpacking in Europe many years before and had been there. And my daughter had not been, and she said, "I'm coming." So she, the

three musketeers—my husband and I and my daughter! [laughs] All of us went. It was a question of, how would I feel about going back? Lots of people go back. But they have some semblance of a place that has some reality to them that they can look at. I had nothing. I mean that house was gone. That house, incidentally, burnt to the very ground, down to nothing. I think it was looted. I think they had to have been fools not to have looted it. We had this strong feeling. To go back in space a little bit, the day after Crystal Night, my mother and I did walk down momentarily and looked at the smoldering ashes and the glows of fire. And there was nothing there, except the stables at the very end of the property and the orchard, and the gazebo and the gardens. But the house was totally gone. And to go back to nothing, I don't know whether it's harder to go back to nothing or to go back where there was something that's not yours anyway. I think either way it's difficult. So my husband said, "I think it's good for you to go. And you'll see it in the light of today." And that, I...had nightmares about going back into that burning house. Two of them; one I wanted my little box of jewelry. I ran up, and I knew the house was burning and that I was, I knew that I was in this country but I was still running back into that house. And the other dream was that I couldn't get out of Germany, that my visa was not good, that I already had been to this country, had knowledge of it, but I was in Germany, and that I could not get out. So, we decided it probably would be fine for me to see what it was like today. So we went. And a German couple had contacted my parents, oh, at least ten years before. We did not know them. They were about my age. And the man wrote to my father and said that he, my father started a legal process, and he sued the town. He did a wonderful number on them. He won a little bit, too. He had three people put in jail for setting the house on fire. He sued the town for not protecting his property with the fire engines. My father loved to write. He was very articulate, and...

NP: These people were still alive?

ET: Oh yes, none of which I ever got to see. No one came out, except my darling old maids and a couple of old neighbors. Not one friend. So, anyway, we...did go back. And this particular couple had been in contact with my father and then with me. They had read about my father's collective writings to the town, and suits. And they wanted to write to him. The man was a very, I can only say "God fearing" man, who felt on his shoulders the guilt of Germany. And he wrote to my father for a long time, came here right before my father's death, which was in '77, and was able to meet my father. And he cried when he hugged him. He felt the German guilt so extremely, so deep within him. And so when we came to the town, he took total charge of us. He wouldn't let us take a train from Düsseldorf to my hometown. He came by car and he picked us up and he brought me a rose to welcome me. They were wonderful. My daughter stayed with them. My daughter did not go free, we had to pay for her transport. But she was given hospitality at this couple's house. And we were put up in a lovely hotel in my hometown. And when I touched German soil for the first time, I had a very strange feeling. And my husband and my daughter looked around, and I really laughed. And he said, "You know we're not in Kansas anymore." [chuckles]

And we were taken by this lovely man in a car. And as we approached the outskirts of my town I had a freezing feeling, a gripping cold feeling around my heart. It's the very essence of Germany where I lived. The oak trees, deep looks of Germany with forest, the isolated farm houses. That's on the outskirts of my town. And I saw that. I could only think of the oak cluster and the oak leaves. I could almost think of the tales of, *The Legends of Siegfried*. It was ominous, and it was beautiful. And I acknowledged it that it was so beautiful, as much as I had learned to hate it. And then we hit the town. And, my daughter and my husband just looked at me. I think they thought that one of two things would happen, that I would either scream, or I would just cry. I did neither. I just took it all in. And we were given spending money every day, other than everything having been paid for, $35 a day just to run around. I looked around the town. My daughter went with me. She found little places all of her own that had been my haunts. I felt through her that I, she was the young woman who was expressing through her being there, who I had once been. She found a little place for a little clasp for her hair that I had found as a child. She found a shortcut through a church yard. And I said, "How did you know?" She said, "I just found it." I said, "That was my own short cut." And, being there gave me a measure of peace. I never dreamt again, about the house. I didn't. I went back to where the house was. That was very hard, I went alone with my husband. I don't know where my daughter was that day. She had been back with us, but that one visit was alone with my husband. And we had this triangle park in front of the house. I call it the little Rittenhouse Square of my hometown. And it's still there, changed a little only as far as architecture and horticulturally. But other than that, it's there. The property on which my house stood, I had always said, "I think it was two blocks long." And everyone said, "Oh, you were a kid. You know, you can't remember." My husband looked at it. He said, "This is two blocks! It's immense! I can't believe it!" The town took it and built upon it a cultural center, which made me very happy in the sense that my family had cultural evenings. We had musical evenings, and poetry. It's a center for the arts—dance, music, and stage. It's very beautiful. The pavement is exactly the way I left it. Little stones, the same pavement. I couldn't believe that. The pavement I had walked on, which I had thought somehow if I would walk on it, the door would be there and the house would be there. But there was the center. And we had lunch there. And, I said, "I swear this lunchroom, this dining room, is on top of my real dining room." It's sort of the same space. It's a feeling as if you had lived another time, another place, put the two together. So the one time I sat there and looked at this place I was with my husband and I really broke up. And that was the only time. And I said, "You know, this is mine. It's not theirs. This house is mine. They have no right to this." And I said, "I want it back. I want it the way it was." And I was angry. And I cried. And my husband looked at me and he said, "You're alive. You're with the living. You are not bones in Treblinka. You are here." And that was it. I was fine. But I had to say it.

NP: You had to set it right.

ET: Yeah. It's not theirs. It still isn't theirs.

NP: Was there any possibility of reparations for your family?

ET: Oh, we've gotten reparations. But it's not enough. My mother still gets money at the Geriatric Center once a month. But that actually is money that she received from my father having had to sign his profession away. Deprivation of the right to work. And they've been getting this, they, she gets widow's rights since 195-, hmm, middle '50s, I guess. They did get a settlement also, for the house, to a point. But...it's nothing really. It's nothing. But you know, one has one's life. And that's the most important thing. People always say to me, "What'd you, what did you bring out?" I said, "Me." And, as often as I've talked to friends who've known me a long time, they'll see a little jewelry item on me, "Did you bring that with you?" I said, "No. Everything was burnt in the house. Everything. There is nothing that I have that is my own, ever." And that's the hurt of it, that the identity which was once yours, it's only a material identity to say, "I owned this bracelet, I owned this something, this was my mother's, this was my father's." There is a loss from not passing that on. Because someone has touched it and it has belonged to someone from a long time ago. Someone sent a teaspoon, no, tongs, silver tongs, to my father here, and said that his grandmother in the last century had given it to a maid who took very good care of her. And because she knew that we had nothing left, we should have this. That's all I have. We have old fashioned silver tongs for sugar cubes. I don't bemoan or bemourn the fact of what we had. I would like to have shared looking at it with my children. I liked the house a lot. I liked how we lived. We had dinner prepared every day for 12 people—dinner is the mid-day meal as you know—just in case someone would come, a relative, a business person or someone, and the maids opened the door and curtsied. There was a genteel style of life. And although Hitler came and the Nazi world took over, I do remember that. And I do like it, and I did like it. But it took a long time for me to be able to say, "I did love it." I was supposed to have hated it. But one can't deny how one was raised.

NP: So much a part of you.

ET: Yes.

NP: It's how you feel.

ET: Yes. I was also interviewed when I was back in Germany by a young student about the age of my children. At that time he was about 30, 31. He was doing a doctoral thesis on the Jews of the area. The reason he was doing it is because he was a history student at the University of Bielefeld, and something came up about Jews. And he said, "What's that?" Of course he hadn't known. And he and his friends said, "We've got to find out." And they researched, and they found out there had been some people from Mars called "Jews" who had once lived in this town. And he got caught up in it. And he

did his doctoral thesis on it. And all the people who came back to all the neighboring towns within, as you would say Montgomery County or Townships and so on, he used all the people who came back on tape, and by mail. And he wrote the book. And I have the book. And it is beautiful. And he interviewed me for three-and-a-half hours. And he said, "Don't give me facts. I have them. That's my research. Give me feelings." And, he specifically asked me about the day when I couldn't go swimming, because that was probably the most traumatic thing in my life. Because it...was the real cut off of any normal life of child there. He interviewed someone else, and it was the most poignant thing I have ever read anyone ever having said about having lived in Germany. This man he interviewed lived in Hamlin, where the Pied Piper came from? And the river was called the Weser, W-E-S-E-R. He talked to him about when he was a child how he swam in that river. And he also skated on it in the winter, and how he loved it. And he said, "You know, I loved it so much. It hurts I loved it that much." He said, "I wish I didn't. I wish I hadn't. But the feeling of love for what it was will never go away, and how I wish it would." So anyone who is not truthful or honest with oneself or themselves, you must have loved it the same as your life would be, Natalie, here...

NP: Mmm hmm.

ET: You loved it, and if you would be expelled from paradise, you would still love that paradise. It took me a long, long time to be able to say that, and to let that out. For the first many decades that I lived here I was thoroughly, totally American in my mind. Whether I, I think I appeared that way because in our first neighborhood in which we lived when we were first married, oh, they knew by my parents' appearance for sure that I came from Germany. And I had told them I was but I never talked about it. And I have talked about it incessantly in the last ten, twelve years. And I think that Elie Wiesel is greatly responsible that we all talk about it. It wasn't fashionable, and also, it was done with. It was over. But I think now I know that it was never over, and had brewed inside of me. And, I would never have said 30, 40 years ago how I loved Germany. I negated everything German. I married an American—because I loved him, not because he was an American! [laughs] But he happened to be. And I stayed with American friends and acquaintances, in an American milieu. Probably the more so to negate it. But I don't know whether you've found out that people in the last ten, fifteen years have opened up more?

NP: Yes.

ET: Why?

NP: Because there have been various gatherings in Jerusalem, Philadelphia, Washington, and survivors began to feel more comfortable giving their testimonies but many times didn't because they didn't want to frighten their children, but not knowing their parent's wartime experiences was frightening to children as well!

ET: Mmm. My children always knew.

NP: And that helped you.

ET: Yeah. My father talked a great deal about it. Sometimes perhaps too much, too young for my children, I don't know that. But I, I didn't-

Tape three, side one:

NP: ...Tarlow. This is tape number three, 11-19-93.

ET: Now where did I leave off?

NP: About the children.

ET: Oh, yes, yes.

NP: Your father's sharing with them.

ET: Yes. My father adored writing, reading, knowledge, and so he imparted a lot of that I think specifically to my son, who very much enjoyed history. And it is important that my children know this. It is utterly important that my grandchildren will know of this, when they are ready to hear this. I want them to know who they are. I want them to know how fortunate for me it is to have had them, to know that from that which I came, they also came. And I do see in all of them certain traits of my family and whether it's true or whether I want to read it into them, I don't know. In turn my daughter has named her eldest for my father, whose Hebrew name is Simchah.

NP: Oh.

ET: And that's a delight. And, my eldest grandchild Joshua was named for Joseph, who was my father's father, Joseph Meinberg. His little sister, Rayna Sophie, her middle name is Sophie for my grandmother, and I dearly love that. And my youngest granddaughter, Alexi Michelle, Michelle is for my father's father, who was Max, or Mordecai. So they all in turn are someone...who has been. And I'm very grateful for that.

NP: Your grandmother would have said you did well.

ET: Yes. I think I wanted to go on with that, and that's again stepping back a little bit. Since we arrived in September, it was three months before Pearl Harbor, in December of 1941, and there were only two communications from my grandmother, because everything stopped after that. And she wrote a letter in English at her age. And that was not her favorite language. She loved French more. And she wrote and she said, "I am writing to you in English because this is now the language you have to know and learn. And I want you to read English all the time. And I hope you're doing well in school, and I hope that you're getting A's." And if ever anybody whipped me into it she certainly did. And I did get A's. [chuckles] It was very important. And, I think she deeply touched me with that, when she said, "Do well." She knew she'd never, ever see me again and what must have gone through her mind to have let go of me. I was one of three grandchildren, but I was living in her home, and I was very special to her. So, yes, I...think that because of her I made a very strong effort to really do well. And I think I imparted that also into my children. I think they're very strong. And, I've talked with them and I know because of my background they have become strong individuals. Notwithstanding my husband, but the difficulties that I had encountered I think made them realize that whatever might or would have gone wrong in their lives couldn't measure up to what I had to battle. So I think it

gave them a lot of strength. And they're very productive people and they've married wonderful people in turn who complement them very well. And...

NP: You did do well.

ET: Yes, I did. I really did. And I think now, as I am getting older, much more about the past. And I read an article about that pertaining to people such as my background warrants. The reason we remember now, because the further we are away from it the closer we get to it. I think the spanning years mean nothing. I think the beginning and the latter, well, the beginning and what is ahead of us now is the important thing. And the focus is different now, that we realize that we lived in an incredibly intense part of history. It was so overwhelmingly awful, and we were caught up in it, and here we are. And no matter how little time passes or how much time passes, again and again and again, you will read about the Holocaust. You will read about Nazi Germany. You will feel it. You will look at it on television. It never goes away. And it's more intensified now than ever. It goes on and on and on. I personally have watched everything on television. I don't know whether I am trying to punish myself by doing that. But my mother could never watch one single thing. I can understand that. She was older. She didn't want to hear about it. She didn't want to read about it. She didn't want to know about it. My father read intensely. He followed everything. She wanted away from it all. It took too much out of her life. But I have watched all the horror and terror documentaries of the camps. And I feel compelled to watch it. And I see faces. I see children with whom I played who I know did not get out, the relatives I had known who I know died in it. But most of all I see myself and I have probably said this before. But I do see myself in a camp. And I marvel at the people who I've met who've come out of them. And I wonder how weak I would have been in one. I can't imagine myself even being that strong. And so I am compelled to look again and again and again at something which I was saved from by, I think a slot and a slit in time, a door through which I slipped. I slipped through that little crack of time which separates me from that fate. And I...cannot really not think about it, especially as we're talking now. And I want to know if other people feel that strongly too. Do they express it?

NP: Some cannot—some do. It's something that you, time helps them cope, and makes things not so raw.

ET: Hmm.

NP: This is not across the board. This is up to the individual, they never forget, time helps people to cope, with your testimony and other testimonies, history is really now just being written. There is an awareness now like never before, and it's very important to get these stories together.

ET: Well I have written a lot to my hometown. I've been in communication with them. This *Lyceum* which I attended had a 100th year anniversary, and they very gingerly approached me, would I write something about myself? Since the very first daughter of the town of "Mosaic persuasion" was my aunt named Else Meinberg, and since I was Ellen Meinberg, I was the last, would I write to them? And, also, that I should understand that

the last director of the *Lyceum* was certainly not politically involved, and was a wonderful person. Well, I wanted to be very honest, and I thought, well, if they won't publish it, and if they won't, you know, disclose it, that's O.K., but I'm going to write exactly the way I saw it. The director was a charming man. He was not a political man. But he was a coward. Because the day I could not go swimming—I talk about it all the time, it was the most, probably the greatest soul insult to my little life, I was only ten—he knew about this. I was the only Jewish child in that school. And he knew. The edict came to him. He then told the gym teacher. So I wrote back in this little testimonial for the 100th anniversary of the school, "You explained to me how apolitical he was, and what a marvelous person he was." And I said, "Yes he was. He also instructed my English class. Other than being a director he was a fine teacher, and he was a fine man. But he didn't have any courage, because if he had, he would have had the courage to ask a little ten-year-old into his office and said, 'It is out of my jurisdiction. It's not in my power to get you to that pool. I just want you to know I'm sad you can't go.' He disregarded it. So, I'm sorry to disagree with you. He was not that wonderful. He was not big enough." They published it.

NP: They did?

ET: They did. They really did. And I was happy. And, it's a big book. I have all these books over in my little library here. And, again my public school, which I attended for four years, was renamed Anne Frank School. And the family, what is this woman's name, a descendant of the family that housed Anne Frank? A Dutch woman, who came to the dedication. And they took an excerpt of one of my writings and they had this little girl named Gabriella, who was my age, read, and, "I am the voice of Ellen Meinberg." And she read of my being alone in the town and being denied access, and the story of the pool, and my whole life there. And the children of that school go once a month and clean up the Jewish cemetery. So, progress is being made. And while I was there during my visit, I tried to enlighten a few people. Because, I felt that I had come from another planet, and plopped myself into their midst. The hotel in which we stayed, the people who ran it were in their 30s, at that time the age of my children. And my daughter came every morning to visit for breakfast. And they didn't quite get the connection.

And one day they said to me, "You always speak German to us. Why is that?"

And I said, "Because I want to practice my German. I'm in Germany."

They said, "Well all the other people who come here don't want to talk German."

I said, "Well, I can understand that."

"And why do you?"

And I said, "Well, it's a language, and I want to be able to keep it, and I'm here, and I'm talking German."

"Well why is it that that young girl doesn't speak German?"

I said, "That's my daughter."

"Oh. Well, she wasn't born here?"

I said, "Do you know who I am?"

"Well, yes, we know the young couple, we know who you are. A lot of you come every week and stay here. And, but were you born here?"

I said, "Yes."

"Really? What happened to you?"

And I said very simply, "I lived near the Triangle Park."

"Oh, well that's a cultural center."

I said, "Yes, it is. But that was once a house in which I lived."

"It was!?"

"Yes, it was."

Oh, so they were listening. And, I said, "I went to the same..." I said, "Where did you go to school?"

She said, "*Lyceum*."

I said, "So did I."

"Really?"

I said, "I lived here. I breathed here. I went to all the stores you went to. I was a real person. And I've come back."

And, they cried.

And I said, "You've learned nothing of what happened here?"

And they said, "No."

But now they are teaching it. I know.

NP: Now they are.

ET: Yeah. And I also went to the bank to cash an American Express check, and the man recognized—I was talking German—and he said, "Oh, someone else came in this morning by the name of Tarlow, a blonde young woman. But she didn't speak German."

And I said, "Oh, that was my daughter."

"Oh." He looked at me strangely.

And I said, "Well, I was born here."

He said, "Really? Where?"

And I said, "I lived at ta ta ta..."

He said, "There was no house there."

I said, "Yes there was."

And he said, "Well, anyway, I'm from another part of the town."

I said, "You know, sir, that's irrelevant." I said, "This house was burnt at the time by the Nazis." He said, "Well, I...didn't live near there."

So those were the answers we got. Well, we talked to some older people who were very interested in the war in Russia, that it did them in. I could care less. But nobody wanted to ever address the issue of me at all, except the Burgermeister had a meeting for us and I gave a speech, which I couldn't believe. I talked about my life a little bit. I did thank them for bringing me back, but I gave them a little dig. And my three maids came forth when I was there. They were true blue. They were never involved politically. They were farm women. And they just wanted to see me, and that's all. If there's anything else I've missed...

NP: No, eh...

ET: I'm sure I missed...

NP: I want to thank you, and to assure you that future generations and serious scholars will benefit from your testimony. And to extend my sympathies for the ordeal that you and your family had to endure. I'm glad you're here, and I thank you again.