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ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA
LEGACY PROJECT**

MEMOIRIST: RENATE BIAL HEDGES

INTERVIEWERS: SARA GHITIS
RUTH EINSTEIN

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<Begin Disk 1>

INTERVIEW BEGINS

Sara: Would you please state your name?

Renate: It's Renate Hedges.

Sara: What was your name at birth?

Renate: Renate Bial.

Sara: Where were you born?

Renate: In Gleiwitz,¹ Upper Silesia, Germany.

Sara: Would you please . . . let's go back for a moment. Would you spell your name?

Renate: My last name or first . . . or both names?

Sara: Both names.

Renate: Renate. R-E-N-A-T-E. Bial. My maiden name: B-I-A-L. My married name . . .

Hedges. H-E-D-G-E-S.

Sara: You said you were born in Gleiwitz. Where was that?

Renate: Gleiwitz is a city called now . . . came to Poland after the Second World War and it's now called 'Gliwice.' Gleiwitz was located right on the border to Poland and it was in Upper Silesia which was a province . . . there was a plebiscite² at one time after World War I, asking the inhabitants whether they wanted to join Poland or Germany and the inhabitants voted for

¹ Before World War II, Gleiwitz was in Germany. After the war it became part of Poland and is today called 'Gliwice.'

² A plebiscite is a direct vote in which the entire electorate is invited to vote for or against an important proposal.

Germany. It became Germany. As a matter of fact, it was in Gleiwitz where [the Germans] took one or more inmates from a concentration camp, put them into Polish uniforms, shot them and this gave Hitler the excuse of invading Poland.³ It was that close to the border that they said that Poland tried to invade Germany.

Sara: You mentioned World War I—did anyone in your family serve in World War I?

Renate: Yes, my father. My father was some sort of officer in World War I.

Sara: What was your father's name?

Renate: Fritz Bial. He died in 1929.

Sara: And your mother?

Renate: Lucie Bial.

Sara: What kind of work did your father do?

Renate: He had . . . owned in Gleiwitz a brick factory which after his death my mother rented out the factory part. There were a couple of bungalows on the property which my mother rented out and this is what we were living on.

Sara: What do you remember about your life in Gleiwitz?

Renate: Generally speaking, we had a very nice interesting life. I started school at the age of five. I was in touch with one of my Catholic friends who stayed in Gleiwitz all through the Russian occupation and after the war we got in touch with each other again. She . . . there was another girl I went to school with . . . she's half Jewish and she was able to hide herself in Gleiwitz. But generally speaking, our life was a very middle class life. We had enough to live on and I had lots of friends. I belonged first of all to a German-Jewish organization. After a while with Hitler being there I figured, "Why would I belong to a German-Jewish organization?" and I joined a Zionist organization.

Sara: How Jewish was your family?

Renate: Let's put it this way—my mother was more Jewish than I am. Friday nights, she did try to light the candles.⁴ Some of the holidays, she used to keep sort of partially although we

³ The Germans fabricated a border crossing incident in Gleiwitz, Germany by the Poles, claiming that the Poles had crossed the border and attacked a German radio station. They even left bodies of Polish prisoners dressed in military uniforms around as 'proof.' This false flag incident was used by the Germans as an excuse to invade Poland on September 1, 1939.

⁴ Lighting the candles on Friday evening before sundown to usher in the Sabbath is traditionally done by women. After lighting the candles the woman waves her hands over them, covers her eyes and recites a blessing: "*Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light Shabbat candles.*"

were not *kosher*.⁵ She just picked from the Jewish religion parts that she felt comfortable with and that was it.

Sara: Were you connected to a synagogue, a congregation?

Renate: Yes, the rabbi was a certain Dr. [Samuel Moses] Ochs. He came from Galicia [southern Poland]. He was married [and] he had two sons, Wilfred and Siegfeld. I think they wanted to marry me off later to one of them which I didn't want to. But anyway he left England with his family and another . . . no, that was the cantor . . . the cantor⁶ left for the United States. He had a wonderful voice and people came especially on *Hanukkah*⁷ to the synagogue to listen to him sing. But he got a job at the . . . a position at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Then we got another cantor whose voice was not that great.

Sara: Do you remember the name of the rabbi?

Renate: Dr. Ochs. The rabbi was Dr. Ochs.

Sara: What about the synagogue, was it a temple . . .

Renate: It was a proper synagogue with the women sitting upstairs . . . it was Orthodox. The children had a children's service on Saturday. I think it was in the afternoon . . . early afternoon. The rabbi was always there and the cantor was there and us kids used to go there of course. It was a matter of pride that we were at the service. I didn't understand Hebrew, I didn't know what was going on but one went anyway. Then afterwards, we could stay together and fool around.

Sara: What language was spoken in the home?

Renate: German.

Sara: Any other language?

Renate: No. I don't speak Yiddish and I don't speak Polish.

Sara: Tell me a bit about your education.

Renate: The first four years I went into . . . the school was called the 'Eichendorf

⁵ *Kosher/Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws. Food that may be consumed according to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is termed 'kosher' in English. Food that is not in accordance with Jewish law is called *treif*. The word 'kosher' has become English vernacular, a colloquialism meaning 'proper,' 'legitimate,' 'genuine,' 'fair,' or 'acceptable.'

⁶ The *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

⁷ Hebrew for 'dedication.' An eight-day festival of lights usually falling around Christmas on the Christian calendar. *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rulers of Palestine, who had desecrated the Temple. The Maccabees wanted to re-dedicate the Temple altar to Jewish worship by rekindling the *menorah* but could only find one small jar of ritually pure olive oil. This oil continued to burn miraculously for eight days, enabling them to prepare new oil. The *menorah* with its eight branches commemorates this miracle.

Oberlyzeum,⁷ it was a high class school. After that, my mother couldn't afford that anymore so she put me into a middle school which was much cheaper . . . Carin Goering Middle School, in honor of Carin, Goering's first wife.⁸ We were only about three or four Jewish children in that school. That school was pretty miserable especially as the years went by because the teachers made very nasty remarks. On one occasion I walked out of the school. It's a long, involved story actually.

Sara: Please tell us.

Renate: First of all, one of the teachers used to always call us the "Jewish children"—never by name. In one of the lectures, she explained about one of trees—the weeping willow—the reason why it's hanging its branches and it's called the "weeping willow" was because it was so sad because a Jew was hung on it. Being Jewish, you sit there and you're flabbergasted. Then another example was the . . . I come into the schoolroom and the desk had written on it and the blackboard had written on it, "The Jews stink. The Jews are our misfortune" and slogans which one of the German newspapers used to bring, *Der Stürmer*.⁹ Actually my friend Suse Rosenthal, who died on the *Patria* going to Israel,¹⁰ and I went down to the principal who was *Fraulein* Dr. von Brixon with a big *swastika* stuck on her lapel. But she was a very decent lady. We knocked at the door and walked in and I complained about this and she said to me, "You better go back to your classroom. I'll be up in about five or ten minutes." She did come up and as usual when she came into the room, we all had to stand up, lift our arms and say, "Heil Hitler!" We had to do it too. Then she let them have it. She said, "I understand that this has been written on the desks of our Jewish children and I can see it on the blackboard. Whoever did that will come forward right

⁸ Hermann Goering (German: Göring) was one of Hitler's inner circle during the Nazi years. His first wife was Carin Fock. She was already married to Baron Niels Gustav von Kantzow when they met. She divorced Kantzow and married Goering in 1923. She died in 1931. Goering made a shrine to her in their home, Carinhall.

⁹ (German: *Der Stürmer*.) Literally "*The Attacker*" in German. It was a weekly tabloid Nazi newspaper published by Julius Streicher from 1923 to 1945. It was a significant part of the Nazi's anti-Jewish propaganda and was violently antisemitic. It depicted Jews as ugly characters with misshaped bodies and exaggerated facial features and regularly featured articles on blood-sucking Jewish capitalists, how the Jews killed children and drank their blood, etc. Its motto, printed at the bottom of every page, is "*Die Juden sind unser Unglück!*" ("The Jews are our misfortune!")

¹⁰ On November 25, 1940 the *Patria*, an old French ocean liner, with about 1,800 Jews aboard from German-occupied Europe was sunk by the *Haganah* (Jewish paramilitary forces) in the port of Haifa, Palestine, killing 267 people and injuring 172. The 1,800 Jewish refugees had arrived in Palestine on other ships without entry permits and the British refused them entry. They were transferred to the *Patria* to be sent to Mauritius, an island off the east coast of Africa. The deportation was opposed by the *Haganah* (a Jewish paramilitary organization) which put a bomb aboard, intending only to disable the ship to keep it from leaving and to buy time for negotiations. However, they miscalculated badly and the bomb blew a big hole in the side. The ship rolled over and sank in only 16 minutes. The surviving refugees were allowed to stay in Palestine. The issue remains controversial.

now with a sponge, take the sponge and clean it up. I will tell you one thing, as long as our government says that the Jewish children are permitted to be present in our school, you will treat them decently. The reason why they are still permitted in our school is because their fathers fought for Germany in World War I.”

Sara: What year are we talking about?

Renate: We are talking around 1936 or 1937.

Sara: How old were you?

Renate: I would have been 12 . . . around 12.

Sara: Until when were you allowed to go to a public school?

Renate: Actually, at that instance . . . when that happened . . . I had forgotten about this . . . when that happened, I walked out of the school and went home. My friend, Suse Rosenthal, came with me. It was my mother that brought us back to the school and to see the principal *Fraulein* Dr. von Brixon [sp]. This is how it materialized, one thing after the other. But later in 1938, my mother moved to another city, Breslau, which is located on the river Oder, which today is called Breslau,¹¹ also came to Poland. In that city, my grandmother, my mother’s mother,¹² lived there and we joined her. We lived with her. I was then 14 years old . . . that was in 1938 . . . there were no more schools available to us. It was just before Crystal Night [*Kristallnacht*].¹³ There was one school in Breslau called the Paula Ollendorff School¹⁴ where you learned household cooking, mending . . . things like that. My mother enrolled me into that school. That was closed down on Crystal Night as well.

¹¹ Breslau [German] is the historical capital of Silesia and Lower Silesia, located on the Oder River in Central Europe. At various times, it has been part of the Kingdom of Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, the Austrian Empire, Prussia, and Germany. Following World War I, Breslau became part of the Weimer Republic and eventually became one of the strongest support bases of the Nazi Party. After World War II, the city became part of Poland. Today, the city is known as Wroclaw (Polish: Wrocław) and is the largest city in western Poland.

¹² Berta Ostrowski Schenkalowski (1873-1942).

¹³ A Jewish youth named Herschel Grynszpan, distraught over the deportation of his family from Germany to Poland in August 1938, went to the German consulate in Paris and randomly shot a German consulate official, Ernst vom Rath. Vom Rath lived for several days and then died. Vom Rath’s death was used as a pretext to instigate a state-sponsored pogrom on November 8 and 9, 1938. Across Germany (and in Austria) Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses were looted and burned, Jews were attacked on the streets and 91 were killed. Thousands of Jewish men were sent to concentration camps for several weeks and released only when they agreed to leave the country as soon as possible. The Jews were made to pay for the damages to their premises. The pogrom was called ‘*Kristallnacht*,’ which means ‘Night of Broken Glass,’ because of all the damage done to Jewish shop windows.

¹⁴ Paula Ollendorff lived in Breslau and devoted her life to promoting education and training for Jewish girls. She was prominent in the social and civil life of Breslau, becoming the first woman in Germany to become a member of the town council of Breslau. She founded a home for illegitimate children and a school of home economics (named after her). She died in Jerusalem in 1938 at age 78.

Sara: How many children were there in the family? Do you have any siblings?

Renate: I've got . . . I had a brother [Wolfgang Bial]. He was three years older. He left Germany for college in England in 1936, he left . . . he was in college in England, Harrowgate, Yorkshire.

Sara: I had asked you when you had to stop going to school. What do you remember about that?

Renate: I hated school. I didn't learn anything much in school. I absolutely detested school. To tell you the honest truth . . . I don't know when we came to Breslau . . . that would have been around August of 1938 . . . I don't know whether there were any Jewish schools still in existence short of this Paula Ollendorff School. I was fighting. I would have fought, hand and nails, not to go to any school any more because I hated it so much. But the Paula Ollendorff School was different because it was a household school. I didn't have to learn anything about Jewish people being hung on trees and things like that.

Sara: Had there not been a war, what kind of an education would you have had?

Renate: War, that's something else. Really, my education would have stopped at the age of 14.

Sara: You're talking about 1938, November of that year. What do you remember?

Renate: I remember the radio bringing the information about this German official, [Ernst] vom Rath having been shot in Paris. I didn't pay too much attention except, yes, it was a Jewish boy that did it, by the name of Greenspan or something? Then the next thing, let me see . . . [the] tenth of November, I was going to school in the morning . . . to this Paula Ollendorff School . . . I walked to the streetcar which would have taken me there. I was walking over all kinds of glass. I looked up and the windows from shops had been broken and some of the materials that were shown in the shops were lying on the ground. [I] walked over it. I also saw the police there, on the other side of the street, with their . . . I don't know, they usually had a band on their helmet which was down there on the chin, which meant they were on special duty. But I didn't pay any attention—I kept on going to my streetcar. When it came, I got up into the streetcar. I never sat down any more. I used to stand on the platform where the driver was because a couple of times when I did sit, somebody came [and said], "Jewish child, get up, you don't sit here." I never bothered to sit down any more. We carried on going and we came to a place called Tauentzien Platz. Now that one, it was a . . . the street went straight through that place but the buildings

were all around it. They were mostly dwellings and shops. But behind those buildings, you used to see the synagogue—the top of the synagogue—the copper top with the *Magen David* [Star of David] on it. When we got there with the streetcar, the place was filled with people all staring in one direction. The car had to inch its way through the people very slowly. I was wondering, “What are they all staring at?” I bent down to look and there was the synagogue on fire. I could see the flames and the Star of David was melting. It was tipping over. The irony of the thing was that below there was the *Gestapo*¹⁵ building and they were afraid that the *Magen David* would fall onto the *Gestapo* building so they had to evacuate this *Gestapo* building. Anyway, when I saw that, I got off the streetcar and I walked back home. I told my mother, “I don’t know what’s going on.” That afternoon . . . no, I went to the school, that’s right . . . I went out again to go to the school. I found it closed when I got there. That afternoon, they put explosives into the synagogue. They had to blow it up two or three times before it collapsed. In 1993 when I went to Breslau with my daughter on a sentimental tour, we went to see that place where the synagogue was. It was a wet day and my daughter, Crystal, was saying, “Mum, I can still smell the wood, the burned wood.” They had not cleaned it up. I’ve got pictures of that here. It was like a barbecue smell still. Nobody . . . the Poles hadn’t cleaned it, the Germans hadn’t cleaned it.

Sara: What was the name of that synagogue?¹⁶

Renate: I don’t remember. I couldn’t tell you. That afternoon, I was at my grandmother’s place. I was in the kitchen, sitting there and the bell rang. You worried every time the bell rang. What’s happening? My grandmother went to open the door. I could see into the hallway from the kitchen. An SS man jumps in with a black uniform and closes the door quickly behind him. He whispers to my grandmother and jumps out again. My grandmother comes back and said to my mother, “He is somebody that used to come to our bar.” My grandmother was running a bar downstairs in the building . . . in the house. He said that they had orders in the SS to raid all the Jewish apartments and he didn’t want to my grandmother to be hurt so he came to warn my grandmother, “Please get out and get your family out of the apartment tonight.” My

¹⁵ An abbreviation of *Geheime Staatspolizei*, which means “Secret State Police.” It was established in 1934 and placed under Heinrich Himmler. With virtually unlimited powers, it was highly feared. The *Gestapo* acted to oppress and persecute Jews and other opponents of the Nazis, including rounding up Jews throughout Europe for deportation to extermination camps.

¹⁶ The New Synagogue was built in 1865-1872. It was one of the largest synagogues in Germany and the center of liberal Judaism in Breslau.

grandmother was taken in by an ex-employee of the bar. But he said he couldn't take my mother and me because people were watching. That was just too many. Anyway, we walked the street and eventually we found a half-Jewish hotel. We took a room there and spent the night.

Sara: Where was your brother?

Renate: My brother was already in England, because he had left in 1936. That was 1938.

Sara: You said that on the street car you were not allowed to sit. How did they identify you . . .

Renate: . . . as Jewish?

Sara: Did you have a star? Were you already wearing a star?

Renate: No, no, that came much later.¹⁷ I'd already left Germany by that time. There is something about us Jews. A lot of us can be recognized in the street or wherever we go. I go around here to a restaurant. I'm looking up and somebody is sitting at the next table. I'm thinking to myself, "You're Jewish." Now I don't know what it is. I may be wrong but . . .

Sara: While the violence . . . the attacks against the Jewish stores and the rock-throwing and the synagogue being burned . . . were you aware that that was going on because you say that on November 10 you saw the remnants . . . but were you aware of what was going on while it was going on?

Renate: No. That happened in the night. They broke into these shops in the night. I didn't know that was going on. The next day I went to that school as usual. It was just that I stepped over the glass and realized things were funny . . . were not as usual.

Sara: What were your feelings in the family, your mother, your grandmother, you . . . what did you think?

Renate: The thing was—get out of Germany. I remember saying to my mother . . . that was in 1936 or 1937, when I was still a young child, one learns as one grows up . . . I said to my mother, "The main thing is that my brother gets out because they'll be after the men. We women and children will be quite safe. If we do want to go out, why don't we go to Vienna?" I had three uncles there . . . my father had three brothers there. "Why don't we go to Vienna where the uncles are? They speak German there, we don't have to learn another language, and we've got the relations there." My mother said, "No, no, no, no, that wouldn't do." She just dismissed it.

¹⁷ In September 1941, Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propaganda Minister, issued a law requiring Jews over the age of six to wear a yellow Jewish star, or *Magen David*, on their outer garments. The star had the word "Jude" (German: Jew) written on it. The following year, Jews in lands under German control were also forced to wear the Star.

Thank goodness she did. We knew what was going on but never thought that it would get into the extremes it did. We figured that we were Germans. We were born in Germany, my father fought in World War I. It didn't enter our minds that we . . . they would all be murdered, all the leftovers. My grandmother wanted to get out too. Matter of fact, I've got some of the correspondence she wrote to the *Hadassah*¹⁸ in New York because her sister left a lot of money to a hospital in . . . somewhere out west and she was trying to get out with the help of *Hadassah*. But *Hadassah* couldn't help because America had . . . what was it called? . . . the system by number depending on which country you were born in?

Sara: The quota system?¹⁹

Renate: The quota system, right. They said that my grandmother . . . before her name would be called four or five years would go by. That was it. There was no way and she was . . .

Sara: What happened . . .

Renate: . . . actually I found out about two or three weeks ago . . . she was transported away . . . she became blind and [was] sent to Treblinka.²⁰ I only heard that two or three weeks ago.

Sara: What happened after *Kristallnacht*?

Renate: I wanted to get out of Germany. I worked in the . . . since the school was closed . . . I had friends in what was then called the Palestine office in Breslau [the *Palestina Amt*].²¹ I used to go there every day and help a little bit, typing and things like that. I wanted to go on

¹⁸ *Hadassah*, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer organization founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, with more than 300,000 members and supporters worldwide. It supports health care and medical research, education and youth programs in Israel, and advocacy, education, and leadership development in the United States.

¹⁹ The Immigration Act of 1924 limited maximum annual immigration to 153,774 people. Inside that total number, each country was assigned a total number of immigrants. Great Britain and Ireland dominated most of the available slots. Germany was assigned about 26,000 immigrants per year while countries like Poland were allowed 6,000 immigrants per year. The German quota number per year was not related to Jews but to all Germans. Those Jews who determined very early in the Nazi regime to leave Germany essentially had to get in line as their numbers would not be available for several years. Those Jews who took no steps to try to leave until *Kristallnacht* (or in the mid to late-1930's) stood no chance of getting out of Germany as after war broke out in 1939 all emigration from Germany was halted. They, of course, did not know that in the late 1930's they didn't have the time to wait three or four years for their number to come up so many who applied late but were trapped.

²⁰ Treblinka was part of the Operation Reinhard program, which also included the death camps of Sobibor and Belzec. All three camps were pure extermination facilities, that is, the Germans intended that any Jews who went into the camp were never to come out again. They were murdered with engine exhaust fumes and buried in mass graves inside the camp.

²¹ *Palestina Amt* (Palestine Department/Bureau) was the Jewish Agency's office in towns across Germany which was responsible for handling applications for entry to Palestine. Presumably, while the Germans were promoting emigration, the office was a tolerated Jewish agency under their supervision and control. It appears that after *Kristallnacht* it was closed down.

hachsharah,²² which I actually I did just for a couple of weeks. Then a permit came through to go to England on a children's transport. But that is another story again. While I was in the Palestine office, one night everybody had already left [and] I was cleaning up. That was after Crystal Night. A man walked in with a hat on and as he walks in . . . it's about 8:00 or 8:30 in the evening . . . he takes off his hat. He was all clean-shaven so I knew he had just been released from Dachau concentration camp. He said to me he was released with the understanding that he's got to be out of Germany within 48 hours otherwise he'd be picked up again. Could we help him? I was 14 years old and the only thing I knew was the next day in the Jewish hospital in Breslau, they had a bunch of kids going there . . . and grown-ups . . . for physical exams for immigration to what was then Palestine or *hachsharah* in Holland or wherever. I did something that later on I was told off [for]. I took one of the forms there, filled out his name and all the information, put my name underneath, Renate Bial, and very carefully put the Palestine stamp on top of my name so nobody could read it if possible. I told him to go to the hospital the next day for physical. He did. He got out within 48 hours. But about two months later maybe, one of the fellows from the Palestine office said to me, "Renate, what is this? You signed this form?" The office in Berlin had said, "Who on earth" . . . they found the signature . . . "Who is this Renate Bial?" They said if that would be caught by the Nazis, they could have closed the Palestine office altogether. I apologized profoundly but said at least he's out of Germany. That was sort of pushed aside then.

Sara: Did you ever find that man?

Renate: Did I ever? No, no. I would assume he got out on *hachsharah* either to Holland, Belgium or one of those countries. Whether the Nazis ever caught him later, I don't know. He might have even gotten out into Palestine on one of the ships. I don't know. One of my girlfriends, Suse Rosenthal, was on one of the ships. I don't know what year that was, the *Patria* . . . the Jewish people inside . . . the British blockade was on, they wouldn't let the ship land. I think they were taking the people to Cyprus at that time. They blew up . . . the Jews themselves in the ship . . . blew up the ship to force the landings. My friend Suse . . . lost her life in that.

²² (Hebrew: pioneers) A Zionist youth movement for children and adolescents focusing on educational, social and ideological development, including a belief in Jewish nationalism as represented in a State of Israel. *Hachsharah* prepared youngsters to go to Palestine (at that time).

Another friend of mine from Gleiwitz jumped overboard and swam. The *Haganah*²³ was waiting there and trying to pick up as many people as they could and they made them disappear. The British tried to find them but they couldn't find them anymore. There are so many involved stories going on that once you start talking, one thing leads to the other. [It] intertwinds my interview with the *Gestapo* for instance. Things you forget and then you talk about something . . . yes, so and so happened.

Sara: So you're 14 years old. You just mentioned that the thought of leaving Germany was much on your mind.

Renate: Yes.

Sara: What happened next?

Renate: The next thing was . . . there again, there's another story involved with that. When Hitler marched into Austria,²⁴ one uncle had already died and his two children had gone to the United States, which I only found out much later. The other two uncles had married non-Jewish women. Richard had married a German woman by the name of 'Gertrude.' The youngest of the brothers, Kurt, had married a woman by the name of 'Berta'—she was Catholic. Kurt's name was on top of the list of the *Gestapo* for pickup. He was not liked because some of the business . . . his business that he ran was what they called in England a 'never never system.'²⁵ You keep on paying but you pay interest, which is now a common thing [today] but in those days it wasn't. They wanted to pick him up. He heard about it and he fled Austria. He went to Switzerland and they wouldn't let him stay. They wouldn't give him asylum in Switzerland. He went to France. They wouldn't let him stay in France. He went to Belgium. Finally, in Holland, he took a boat . . . some sort of little boat which brought him to England. He legalized his stay with the Home Office in England. Then he arranged for me to come over on a children's transport. He arranged for my mother to come over to England on a domestic servant permit. He was employing . . . he had money abroad so he was able to do all that. He put out a guarantee for me . . . a certain

²³ (Hebrew: Defense). This was a Jewish paramilitary organization that operated in the British Mandate of Palestine from 1920 to 1948. Later, most of its members became the core of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). After the 1920 and 1921 Arab riots, the Jewish leadership in Palestine believed that the British had no desire to confront the Arabs who were attacking Jews. *Haganah* was originally created to protect Jewish farms and *kibbutzim* and to actively confront the Arabs.

²⁴ Austria was forcibly annexed into the German Third Reich on 12 March 1938 by a succession of threats and the pressure of military feints by Hitler. The Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg was deposed and the Nazi puppet Arthur Seyss-Inquart was put in charge. German troops marched into Austria, Hitler did a triumphant entry parade into Vienna and Austria ceased to be its own country. After World War II, it became its own country again.

²⁵ Basically, paying on the installment plan, which was uncommon in those days.

amount of money . . . a domestic was going to be employed by him. In July—the day before the first of July which would have been a Saturday—I get a note in the mail in Breslau from the *Gestapo* saying that they want to see me at 8:00 the next morning at the *Gestapo* building . . . as a witness . . . it said as a witness. My mother said, “What on earth did you do? What did you witness?” I remember I was 14 years then—my birthday is in August—so she took me. Now in the meantime, I already had . . . I broke off my *hachsherah* because the permit came through for me to go to England with the next children’s transport.

Sara: Can you explain *hachsherah*? What is meant by ‘*hachsherah*’?

Renate: It’s a preparation for living in a *kibbutz*²⁶ in Israel . . . Palestine then. It’s a preparation sort of thing. It’s pretty rough. I was there for two weeks cleaning toilets . . . that sort of thing. Others had to do the laundry and so on.

Sara: Was it like a camp?

Renate: A camp, yes.

Sara: Who ran it?

Renate: It was run by the *Palestina Amt* but they were all closed down after Crystal Night. As a matter of fact, this particular one . . . you see Crystal Night or later, I think maybe it was closed down later . . . they were . . . those kids were all youngsters. They were beaten up. The *Gestapo* was waiting for them and beating them all up. This is what I was talking about to other people. My mother said, “You and your big mouth. I bet they heard about it.” Anyway, she took me to the Jewish organization which was arranging the children’s transport to get a letter to say that I was leaving Germany on the Monday, July 3. They said they couldn’t do that in case the government stops the transport. They couldn’t tie themselves down like that. But the transport was supposed to leave on Monday, July 3. She said, “I’ll take you to the *Gestapo* right away now. I want to know what this is all about.” We got to the *Gestapo*, the first floor . . . they’re behind iron gates. You ring a bell and somebody comes to the gate . . . closed gate, locked gate . . . with a gun in their hand pointing at you. “What do you want?” My mother showed the letter that I got. “My daughter is a minor and I want to know why she was called to the *Gestapo* tomorrow morning.” He said, “Just a minute, I’ll find out.” He goes to some office, comes back and says, “Don’t worry, you will see your daughter again but we want her here

²⁶ ‘*Kibbutz*’ means ‘gathering’ or ‘clustering’ in Hebrew. It is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture. They began as utopian communities that combined socialism and Zionism.

tomorrow morning at 8:00 without you.” The next morning I went there. I got into . . . they opened the gate for me, they closed it behind me, [and] led me into an office. It was a huge room with one desk at the end with a fellow sitting there. The door was open to next door where I could hear the typewriter going there. There was no chair . . . the chair was on the other end of the room. I brought the chair over to the desk and I sat down, which was actually was already pretty cheeky in those days. The fellow was still writing at the desk and then he looked up and said, “You brought a chair.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “I want to know why you came to Breslau.” I said, “Because my grandmother lives here, my mother was coming here—my mother was born in Breslau—so we moved to Breslau.” Don’t forget that in Germany you had to report every move to the police. You had to go to the police to tell them you’re leaving this certain address and you’re going to be found now at another address. They had that information. They asked on these questionnaires what religion you are and you had to answer. He said, “You know we don’t permit any more Jews into Breslau.” I said, “That’s fine, but where am I supposed to go? I’m with my mother and my mother was born here in Breslau.” “That doesn’t matter—she came from Gleiwitz. I want to see her—she’s got to get out too.” Now remember one thing, my mother already had the permit for England also in her pocket as a domestic. But she still had some business to do in Gleiwitz so she didn’t want to leave. I knew that. One had to be very careful not giving any dates to the *Gestapo* because they held you to these dates. I said, “I don’t know . . . my mother is here now. What do you want us to do?” “You have to go back to Gleiwitz.” I said, “I don’t know about that because my mother and I have no more home in Gleiwitz. We’re now living with my grandmother.” “I want your mother here on Monday and I’ll talk to her.” I said, “She can’t come on Monday.” “Why not?” “Because she’s got some business in Gleiwitz” . . . (I knew that) . . . “on Monday.” I was leaving on Monday. “Okay Tuesday.” “She’ll be in Gleiwitz on Tuesday, she can’t make it Tuesday.” He got mad at me. He started putting the fist on the table. “I want your mother here on Monday and I want you to come with her on Monday.” I said, “No, I can’t come on Monday because I’m leaving on Monday.” “Where are you going on Monday?” “To England, on the children’s transport.”²⁷

²⁷ In German: ‘*Kindertransport*’ is the name given to a series of rescue missions that assisted Jewish children in leaving Nazi-occupied Europe. The United Kingdom took in nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi Germany and the occupied territories of Austria, and ex-Czechoslovakia. The children were placed in British foster homes, hostels, and on farms. Some transports were organized by *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE) in France where German-Jewish children were put up in a series of OSE children’s homes. When the Germans occupied France, the 144 children, in two separate transports, were smuggled out of France into Portugal where they

“Why didn’t you tell me that before?” I said, “You didn’t ask me.” I had real Jewish *chutzpah* [Yiddish: audacity, nerve] on me. He said, “You go home and tell your mother I want her here on Monday.” Anyway, my mother had to postpone her trip to Gleiwitz. Apparently what happened with her was he tried to get her to give a date and she wouldn’t give him a date for leaving. In the end she got up and she put her fist on the desk. She said to him, “I tell you one thing. I don’t stay in this bloody country one minute longer than I have to” and turned around and walked out. We were lucky; they didn’t take us. Anyway . . . on Monday, I left in the morning. I went to Berlin. In Berlin we were picked up at the station and met other children from all over Germany. We . . . were housed overnight in a *beit halutz*.²⁸ I was given a bed with a mattress that was all crooked. I fell out of bed twice that night. The next morning we went to the station and there was a . . . for the transport, they had—I forgot now—one or two carriages on the train reserved for all the children.

Sara: What was it like at the station?

Renate: Terrible. This is something . . . I can talk about just about anything but for some reason if I really talk about that, my neck closes up and I can’t breathe anymore. Here I go again. It was a terrible sight to see the children, their parents crying and we were all hanging out of the windows. I don’t want to go into details because I couldn’t talk if that’s the case. There was even a German soldier going along the streetcar shaking the hands of all the children, “I wish you luck, I wish you luck.” Not all Germans were that nasty, but enough of them.

Sara: Your mother was with you at that point or not anymore?

Renate: No, my mother stayed behind because she had to go to Gleiwitz the next day.

Sara: You say you spent the night in . . . in what kind of place?

Renate: In Berlin, in a *beit halutz*.

Sara: *Beit halutz*?

Renate: Yes.

Sara: Was that like a hostel?

Renate: It was like a hostel, yes. But that was more for the grown-ups. The people that were in the usual *beit halutz* they were also on *hachsherah* but they were over 16.

caught a ship to the United States. The first transport left on June 21, 1941 and the second on September 1, 1941. Altogether the OSE sheltered and assisted in getting nearly 1,600 Jewish children out Nazi-occupied areas.

²⁸ ‘*Beit halutz*’ is the singular of ‘*beit halutzim*,’ meaning ‘House of Pioneers.’ It appears to be a housing related to the movement that sought to train young Jews for immigration to Palestine.

Sara: Where did the train take you first?

Renate: We went . . . the train took us to Holland . . . Arnhem and the first . . . it was a very, very hot day. By the way, we were only allowed to take what we could carry with us . . . a suitcase . . . I had a rucksack on the back. What we were allowed to take was 10 German *Marks* which turned out to be in England later on 17 English shillings. We got into Holland . . . first of all before we left Germany, the border people came in to look, to get our passports and all that, and open suitcases. He opened my suitcase. I had a tin of powder on the top. He opened it and closed it again and it all puffed out on his uniform. I think he was slightly mad . . . too bad. Then when we got into Holland, there was one of the Jewish Women's Committees was waiting for our train. They came with bottles of drinks . . . I think they had some cookies or something for us. But we wanted the drinks; we were terribly thirsty. I remember there was a boy going down the platform calling, "Apples, oranges, bananas." I called him over and said, "How much is an orange?" He said, "Are you paying in German money or Dutch money?" I said, "German money." He said, "In German money, it will be 75 cents, 75 *pfennig*." I said, "That's too expensive." I only had 10 *Marks* on me. I had to do without it. Then we got to Hoek van Holland [Hook of Holland], Holland and the ship was waiting for us. The ship's doctor was supposed to look at us . . . if we were healthy. All we did was one after the other pass by him and open our mouths. We had to go "Ahh" and he passed us. Then we got a bag with sandwiches, with a banana in there and an apple, and a container with milk and we were shown to our berths. We were worn out.

Sara: What was the atmosphere like among the kids on the train and later on the ship?

Renate: It was pretty sad, it was pretty sad. I looked after some younger ones, four or five years old. Partially they were crying for their mummies and so on . . . it was pretty sad. It's something I wouldn't want to go through again but it saved our lives.

Sara: You sailed from Holland?

Renate: Yes, from Hoek van Holland, Holland. When we woke up the next morning, we were already in Harwich [England]. I didn't know we had already sailed, it was so smooth. From Harwich, we got into a train to London, to Liverpool Street, and there was a hall there. We were marched into that hall. The various . . . there must have been . . . judging from the hall . . . the size and every chair was taken . . . there must have been 150 to 200 children there, I would think. We were sitting there and the foster parents came to pick up the children. Their names were

called and we got up and joined the new family, or relations . . . there might have been relations. My uncle didn't come. I was sitting there, the last one. Then suddenly a lady comes up and I'm looking up. I knew her from Gleiwitz. She was a Miss Cook—she was teaching English in Gleiwitz. That was years ago but I knew her. “Miss Cook.” She said, “Renate, I've got orders from your uncle. I'm going to take you to King's Cross Station, you're supposed to join your brother in Bradford, where he's in college.” Thank goodness, I saw a friendly face. We went to a taxi and we went from Liverpool Street to King's Cross, which is right across London. What amazed me on that trip was, I couldn't see any soldiers . . . Germany was full with soldiers where you were going . . . they were everywhere in uniform, SS, the brown one—SA and the *Wehrmacht*—[regular German] army, they were all over the place. In England, there was nothing. On a corner, when we passed by . . . a soldier was standing there but he was in a kilt, a Scotsman. If my mother hadn't told me that in World War I when the Germans heard the bagpipes going, they knew the Scottish regiment would be coming along, who were ferocious fighters . . . the Germans would say “The balletrettes²⁹ [sp] are here.” They [the Germans] were shaking in their boots. If possible, they would have liked to have run off. I had sort of respect for that soldier. But to see a man in a skirt was . . . just hit me as funny. Anyway, we got to King's Cross Station. Miss Cook put me on the train. She bought me some more drinks [and] another sandwich, and she put me into the care of the conductor. [She] told him . . . I couldn't speak any English in those days, I just knew ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and a couple of words and that was it . . . she told him to let me off in Bradford. The train went . . . the seats were not wooden like in Germany—they were upholstered. Two fellows [were] sitting in the same compartment [with me]. One of them spoke to me. I don't know what he said. I just said “Yes” to him. Eventually, two or three hours later, we arrived in Bradford. The conductor came and got me and took me out. My brother was waiting for me. [He] took me to his landlady who wanted me to stay there and help her in the house because she was renting out three rooms to students. She wanted me to help with the housework and a bit of cooking and so on . . . and learn English in the meantime, free of charge because we didn't have any money anyway to pay. This is what happened. But my English was pretty miserable. I didn't learn very much English with her.

²⁹ Renate confirmed this word. It's not pejorative, but a fond term, and means something like “little dancers,” probably because of the link between Scottish dancing and bagpipe music. But while the English may have referred to them fondly in the diminutive, Scottish troops in World War I and II had a fearsome reputation. The Germans called them “Girls from Hell” or the “Ladies from Hell.”

Sara: How long did you do that?

Renate: Until my uncle, my mother . . . the first thing that my brother did . . . he took me to the city hall. I was issued with a gas mask and a ration book. My brother said to me, “The whole thing is nonsense because there is no war . . . because it’s ridiculous the propaganda we’re getting from Germany. It’s all ridiculous. It can’t be as bad as they say.” I said, “It’s even worse.” I was telling him . . . as a matter of fact, the *Gestapo*, the fellow at that interview said to me, “If your brother comes back to Germany, he will be taken to concentration camp.” I told him that. My brother couldn’t believe it.

Sara: What was your brother’s name?

Renate: Wolfgang Bial. What was the question . . . what was the atmosphere, did you ask me?

Sara: I asked you how long you stayed in that home, working?

Renate: Probably around I think four or six months. My uncle took an apartment in London. My mother moved in with him as a domestic. That was when my uncle said, “You better come and join your mother here in London.” That was in Kensington. I remember when I got there I had my own room next to my mother’s room. It was a very nice apartment. They had the [barrage] balloons³⁰ up over London. I don’t know, but they were supposed to stop German attacks of the dive bombers because those balloons were on wires. They were filled with gas and they were crisscrossed all over London so that the dive bombers couldn’t come down. I was thinking to myself looking at that, “This is stupid because they can just machine gun those things and they’ll fall down.” But that was England . . . like England . . . they didn’t know whether they were coming or going I think at the time. But the atmosphere was already at times a little bit more, “We’ve got to do something here. Germany is not to be trusted.” I think this is really what it boiled down to.

Sara: You went to live at the home of the family . . .

Renate: Yes, of my uncle, Kurt Bial . . .

Sara: When your mother was working as a domestic . . .

Renate: A domestic, right.

³⁰ Barrage balloons were large balloons (they looked like a blimp), that were tethered with metal cables and floated over British cities or sites to defend them from low-level aircraft attack. The attacking airplanes had to fly above them or risk crashing when they tangled with the thick cables. Some had explosive charges on them that would be pulled up against the aircraft, making sure it was destroyed. They couldn’t be deployed very high though as the cable would get too heavy. London was dotted with barrage balloons to make the Germans’ bombers job more difficult at least.

Sara: Was she living in the home where she was working?

Renate: Yes, she had a room. My uncle had a bed sitting room . . . the nicest one, the room was his. Then my mother had a bedroom, a small bedroom. I had a small bedroom. Then there was a dining room and sitting room, kitchen and bath in the apartment.

Sara: How was your mother treated as a domestic? What was it like for her?

Renate: My uncle did treat her as a domestic, I'm afraid. There was . . . my mother was in a way upset at times. My uncle used to be a millionaire back in Austria. He was used to being served hand and foot. He brought that attitude with him, although he had already come down a step or two. But he still was the one that had the money and we were depending on him. On one occasion, I might have told you that before . . . when you were here before . . . for instance, when we had the Rosé [String] Quartet come and play chamber music. They came for dinner . . . my mother had cooked a very nice dinner. Afterwards they were playing and my mother had to clean up. My uncle didn't even put a chair out for her to join everybody. She had to bring a chair from another room to sit down. My mother was upset but she depended on him. There was nothing she could do about it.

Sara: What about you . . . how was your life?

Renate: My life was . . . at that point, I was staying with my uncle. It was around . . . before Dunkirk, when this chamber music came. Professor [Arnold] Rosé came with the cellist and two other people. When my uncle introduced me to him, I was 15 or 16 years old and I did a curtsy. My uncle said, "Not every 16-year-old has the honor to shake the hands of such a great man." I didn't know him from Adam. I didn't know who he was. I started blushing . . . I could feel my face blushing. Then he [Kurt] said, "Where's Alma?"³¹ Professor Rosé said, "Alma . . . she's gone to Holland. She needed an operation from her sweetheart, the doctor that is practicing in Holland." She was caught and later on the book was written about her. What was it called . . . I've got it here—*From Vienna to Auschwitz*—because she was a leader in one of the orchestras

³¹ Alma Rosé was an Austrian violinist of Jewish descent. Her uncle was Gustav Mahler. Her father was the violinist, Arnold Rosé (1863-1946) who was the leader of the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and leader of the legendary Rosé String Quarter. Arnold and Alma fled to London. At the time Renate met her father, Arnold, Alma had, unfortunately, decided to return to Holland. When the Germans occupied Holland in May 1940 she was trapped. She fled to France and then tried to get into neutral Switzerland, but failed and was arrested by the *Gestapo*. After several months in the French internment camp of Drancy she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943, where she directed an orchestra of terrified prisoners who played for the captors to stay alive. Alma died in Auschwitz, probably of food poisoning. Her experience was the subject of the controversial play *Playing For Time* by Arthur Miller. You can also read about Alma Rosé in the book, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz* by Richard Newman with Karen Kirtley (Amadeus Press, 2000).

in Auschwitz. But Rosé later on had the quartet playing. I used to go to the performances because I was very . . . I liked listening to classical music. My uncle . . . then Dunkirk³² came along. My brother who was still in Bradford in the college was interned. Just before Dunkirk . . . no, I was . . . to try to get the timing right is a little bit hard sometimes, it's been so long ago. When Dunkirk happened, I was still in London because I remember bursting out crying. I was with friends of my uncle. I burst out crying when I heard about that. They said, "Why are you crying?" I said, "Because Britain cannot fight Germany! There's just no way." They said, "Yes, but we're fighting on." I said, "You don't know what goes on in Germany." Then Dunkirk happened . . . that was when Dunkirk happened. My uncle was interned, and both my brother and my uncle met in the Isle of Man.³³ They were shipped on a ship called the [HMT] *Dunera*³⁴ to Australia, which again is another story on its own because it was a swimming [floating] concentration camp.

Sara: You say that your brother was interned also? The internment was in the Isle of Man?

Renate: He was interned in Bradford and taken to the Isle of Man. My uncle was interned in London and taken to the Isle of Man. It was a camp in the Isle of Man which was emptied.

Sara: Why were they interned?

Renate: Because they were aliens.

Sara: For being aliens?

³² Dunkirk was a pivotal point in World War II history. In May 1940, the British and French forces were driven back to Dunkirk on the coast of France and just across the English Channel from Great Britain. Surrounded by Germans, several hundred thousand soldiers were about to be wiped out or taken prisoner by the Germans. Winston Churchill ordered any ship or available boat, large or small, to pick up the stranded soldiers. Some 861 ships, including any boat that could even remotely float responded to his call. In nine days from May 27 to June 4, 1940, 338,226 men (including French, English, Polish, Belgian and Dutch troops) were spirited off the beach under murderous German artillery and aircraft fire at great risk. Some 40,000 soldiers were not rescued and were captured by the Germans. All of their equipment and ammunition had to be left behind. It was a bittersweet victory as Dunkirk was in actuality a terrible defeat. Winston Churchill called it a "*miracle of deliverance*," while at the same time warning that "*wars are not won by evacuation*." After Dunkirk, Germany controlled large parts of continental Europe, which came to be known as "Fortress Europe."

³³ The Isle of Man is located in the Irish Sea between the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. It is a self-governing Crown dependency.

³⁴ Her Majesty's Transport [HMT] *Dunera* was a British passenger ship and cruise liner. During World War II she was converted into a troop transport ship. After the fall of France, men of German and Austrian origin (including, but not directly focused on Jews) were rounded up. Suspected of being enemy agents, they were interned on the Isle of Man, while the government tried to figure out what to do with them. They decided to send them all to Australia. On July 10, 1940, 2,542 detainees, all classified as "enemy aliens," sailed for Australia. Some had already left on the *Arandora Star*, which had been torpedoed with great loss of life. The *Dunera* herself narrowly escaped a failed torpedo attack by a German submarine. The guards looted the internees' possessions and the physical conditions were deplorable. They arrived in Sydney, Australia on September 6, 1940 and were interned there. [Note: The Museum has Renate's brother's diary from his journey on the *Dunera*.]

Renate: Yes. Don't forget they didn't know in those days who was a friendly alien, who was a spy. The German spies came over as refugees. They didn't know who was who, so the whole lot . . . not the whole lot . . . but most of them were interned. After the tribunal . . . there was a tribunal at the beginning of the war and there were 'A', 'B' and 'C.' I've forgotten now how that went. I think 'C' was "friendly alien," 'A' was "enemy alien" . . . I'm not too sure. I think my brother and my uncle were both 'B.' All the 'A's and 'B's were interned.³⁵ The 'C's were left alone; that was my mother and me.

Sara: Your mother came to England and your grandmother stayed behind in . . .

Renate: . . . in Breslau, yes . . .

Sara: . . . Breslau. What happened to your grandmother?

Renate: She was . . . again another story . . . my mother and my uncle at one point . . . you see this is because the timing is all mixed up in my mind. Before my uncle took that apartment in Kensington in London, my uncle and my mother came to Bradford and stayed in the rooming house the summer . . . the students were from Portugal, one was from Egypt, the other was from Portugal. They had left for the summer holidays so the landlady had two empty rooms. My uncle got one and my mother got one. They stayed in Bradford. As I said, at one point somewhere before Dunkirk, my mother and my uncle were staying at the landlady's in Bradford with my brother and me. I stayed in the same room as my mother. This one night my mother was yelling, "Mother!" Woke her right out of her sleep. She woke me up and I said, "What's the matter?" She said, "Something must have happened to my mother." She wrote a Red Cross letter to her mother which took months or so . . . six weeks, if not longer . . . I don't remember . . . before a reply came that was from a cousin who later on was also deported. "Your mother, that particular night . . . your mother fell down some stairs and broke her arm. They took her to the hospital for injection for pain and when she woke up she was blind." That is when my mother heard her mother scream in the sleep in the middle of the night. It's hard to believe but I was right there when it happened, when my mother screamed. Anyway, my grandmother . . . I don't know after that what happened. [At] the end of the war, my mother tried to get hold of the Russians to find out . . . could they tell her [what had happened to her mother]? They wouldn't

³⁵ After the fall of France in June, 1940 foreigners living in Great Britain were rounded up and interned. They were classified into 'A's who were immediately arrested. 'B's were left free initially but then taken into custody after May 1940. 'C's were "friendly aliens" and allowed to remain at liberty. Renate and her mother—presumably women would not be spies—were classified as 'C's while her uncle must have been 'A' or 'B'.

cooperate at all. Then eventually, I called . . . I spoke to *Hadassah* in New York because I knew my grandmother had applied to come to the [United] States. They brought out all the correspondence that they had trying to get her over. In the end they said they couldn't help her because of the quota system. Then there was an article in the paper that I read that said the Russians had opened some archives which they had kept closed for 50, 60, 70 years, I don't know . . . with German . . . where the Germans had registered all the deportees. It was a very exact information about everybody they deported and killed. Then suddenly the Russians opened that for international use. I sent an email to the people that were advertising or written about. It was about three weeks ago . . . three or four weeks ago . . . I had an answer on the email. They sent me the original copy of what they found in the archives that my grandmother, Berta Schenkalowski,³⁶ was picked up from an address in Breslau . . . Grabnerstrasse No. 51 . . . the date . . . they're giving the date on it as well . . . it was 1942, I think. She was put into a transport, headed for Treblinka with a stopover in Theresienstadt.³⁷ When the transport left Breslau, it had approximately 18,000 people on it. By the time it left Theresienstadt, it had over 2,000.³⁸ That's all they could tell me. Treblinka I know was an extermination camp. That's about all I know about my grandmother. I'm just hoping that maybe somebody at least took pity on her . . . I was secretly I was always hoping that maybe she still died in her bed . . . that something happened . . .

Sara: When she was deported, she was blind?

Renate: She was blind, yes. I don't know how she was treated and how things went. I don't know.

³⁶ Berta Ostrowski Schenkalowski (1870-1942), Renate's maternal grandmother, lived in Breslau, Germany until she was deported on Transport IX/2, Train Da 508 to the Theresienstadt ghetto near Prague, Czechoslovakia on August 31, 1942. From Theresienstadt she was sent to Treblinka death camp on September 29, 1942. This information came from the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names on the Yad Vashem website.

³⁷ The Theresienstadt (Terezín) "camp-ghetto" near Prague in the present day Czech Republic was opened in late 1941 and existed until May 1945. In the course of its existence, approximately 140,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, and about one third of the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia were sent to Theresienstadt. It served as a ghetto, an assembly camp, and a concentration camp. It was originally designed to hold prominent Jews, persons of special merit and old people and to camouflage the extermination of European Jews of world opinion by presenting it as a "model Jewish settlement."

³⁸ Sometime after November 1941 a series of transports left Breslau for the Kovno ghetto, the Lublin district in Poland, Auschwitz and the Theresienstadt ghetto/transit camp. One of the last transports in June 1943 carried the last patients of the old age home and the Jewish hospital. The final destination of Treblinka was not a foregone conclusion for the Jews in Theresienstadt since the Germans mostly sent the Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau. But on October 5, 1942 they did send five transports to Treblinka, where all were murdered. Renate's number of '18,000' is wrong. The transport to Theresienstadt carried 222 Jews from Breslau and the transport to Treblinka carried 1,190 Jews.

Sara: How long did you stay in England?

Renate: In England? Fourteen years . . . all through the war.

Sara: Do you remember the Blitz?³⁹

Renate: Oh, yes!

Sara: What do you remember?

Renate: It was . . . the date I don't remember, but I do remember it was a Saturday afternoon [September 7, 1940] . . . beautiful summer day when the sirens went. Now remember in England, the sirens [are] not like here . . . the hurricane sirens here are just one tone and that's it. When the bombers came over, there was the up and down of the siren sound. When the bombers went, it was the 'all clear' one . . . just one level sound. Church bells were not allowed to be rung all through the war because that was reserved in case of invasion . . . the church bells were allowed to ring. Anyway, that Saturday afternoon the sirens went. We could hear airplanes and we could hear explosions, but very far away. Now we were living by that time in Hampstead—we had moved from Kensington to Hampstead.⁴⁰ Behind our building was Rose (something) Hill, something Hill, Rose,⁴¹ I've forgotten the name. Right by that hill, Regent's Park started. Anyway, on that hill, what the British had mounted were naval guns. During that afternoon, we could also hear these naval guns going. The house was shaking. I remember one of the tenants saying, "That's good that the house is shaking because then it gives a little bit." That evening after the 'all clear' went, in the evening my mother and I went out to this . . . what is the name, Rose . . . I've forgotten . . . anyway, to that hill which was right behind our building. Around this hill there were buildings and all the windows had been blasted out from the naval guns. We were standing there and we could see on the horizon . . . the sun was going down somewhere else . . . was all red . . . the burning . . . they had [dropped] incendiaries⁴² all along the Thames

³⁹ The 'Blitz', or the 'London Blitz', was the sustained bombing of London by Germany between September 7, 1940 and May 10, 1941. Many other cities were bombed as well, including Coventry, which was destroyed. London was bombed by the *Luftwaffe* (German air force) for 76 consecutive days and nights. More than 1,000,000 homes were destroyed or damaged, one in six Londoners were made homeless, and more than 40,000 civilians were killed, half of them in London.

⁴⁰ Hampstead is an area of London northwest of Charing Cross.

⁴¹ This is Primrose Hill. It is the site of a park that lies between Hampstead Heath and Regent's Park. During the war, it was cleared of trees at the top for the guns and fenced it off. There was also a radar installation there and a barrage balloon protected the site. An air-raid shelter was established in the southeast corner.

⁴² An incendiary bomb was specifically designed to start fires. Incendiaries did not contain explosives but worked by a chemical reaction, when they struck the ground. The actual incendiaries were small 'sticks' bundled together in a casing that was designed to open at altitude in order to scatter the fire-starting incendiaries around as large an area as possible.

[River]. They had thrown . . . bombed with incendiaries because they were going to come back that night and bomb and that was going to show them the way how to get in. That night was the start of the Blitz. From there on during the day, we had an average of about six to eight alarms and all clears and during the night it was just one solid alarm. We had in our apartment building . . . in the apartment downstairs . . . they put a room aside with supports in the ceiling and sandbags outside that was air-raid shelter. All the people living in the apartment building which was only about . . . two, four, six . . . no, five different families, it was a small building . . . we all stayed the night in the apartment building. We had two trunks down there with emergency clothing and we put some cushions on the trunks. That was the bed for my mother and myself during the Blitz. This is how we got to know our neighbors. We had tea together and we got to know each other. It was actually quite jolly excepting when one heard the airplanes. You were waiting for the bomb whistling down. Then on one occasion . . . that was when the RAF [Royal Air Force] shot down about 180 odd German fighters or bombers or whatever it was. That was the height of the Blitz. My mother was just getting dressed, the alarm went and we could hear the planes all over and bombings all over. We had already been to some friends to Kensington because we thought maybe it's more quiet there but it wasn't. We came back to Hampstead and my mother tried to get into her underpants to get dressed quickly and both her legs went into [one] hole . . . one leg there and I had to actually dress her. She started drinking. She had under her pillow case a bottle of brandy. Every time the alarm went she started to take a nip. I said, "That's it. We've got to leave here just for you." We went to Sheffield and once in Sheffield, the Germans followed us. We had a couple of big raids in Sheffield. Then some friends that we knew from my uncle were in Leicester, in a little village near Leicester. Her name was Mrs. Rucka [sp]. She wrote to my mother, "Why don't you come and join us here in Leicester?" So we went to that little village called Oadby.⁴³ Then later we moved into Leicester. We stayed in Leicester . . . they had a very bad raid as well. But that was when Coventry was bombed . . . Coventry that night was pretty bad. They bombed Birmingham which was close to Leicester and Coventry. Later on it turned out that [Prime Minister Winston] Churchill⁴⁴ knew about it because they had decoded that German secret machine which was top secret for interaction between the armies and all that. They had a copy of that machine . . . all involved stories from

⁴³ A little town southeast of Leicester.

⁴⁴ Winston Churchill (1874-1965) was the Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955.

Poland. They had in England in Surrey,⁴⁵ a village where they had the top mathematicians working on decoding that German machine called ‘Enigma.’⁴⁶ When they did decode it, they found out, amongst other things, that Coventry [England] was to be bombed to smithereens. Churchill at that time had a choice of either evacuating Coventry and letting the Germans know that the code was broken or not evacuating Coventry and keep on being able to get the secrets off the German military. He decided to let Coventry be bombed.⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, I’ve got some of the [printouts] right here which I pulled only yesterday from the Internet on this machine. Coventry was bombed into smithereens.⁴⁸ What they did in the end was they just put lime over all the city . . .

Sara: What about the population?

Renate: They were underneath . . . they were all bombed in the shelters and the buildings had fallen on them. They couldn’t get to them. Something like 9/11 [September 11, 2001]⁴⁹ where they just couldn’t get to the people. In the end, they just put lime so the diseases wouldn’t spread. That was Coventry. That was the Enigma machine which . . . it helped them later on to get various German military secrets which helped to win the war.

Sara: Do you remember the end of the war?

Renate: Yes, we were all dancing in Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus! Yes, when . . . V-

⁴⁵ Bletchley Park was an estate in the town of Bletchley. During World War II, it became the main code breaking facility in the United Kingdom. Now it is a museum.

⁴⁶ Enigma was an encryption machine used by the Germans. It produced a random code that was virtually unbreakable. It wasn’t until the Poles managed to get one of the machines and passed it on to British intelligence that the Allies were finally able to decrypt German codes. It was literally ‘Ultra’ secret—at the time only Winston Churchill was allowed to see the raw intercepts.

⁴⁷ The Coventry bombing remains controversial. The town was virtually destroyed in a firestorm on November 14, 1940 and some 500 British people were killed. Some say that Churchill knew from the ‘Ultra’ decodes that Coventry was the target that night and let it happen to prevent the Germans from realizing their Ultra code had been broken. However, recent scholarship has determined that the location of the operation was not known specifically and that Coventry was only one of many possible targets. Nevertheless, the controversy remains.

⁴⁸ Coventry had already been bombed several times but the attack that destroyed it was on the evening of November 14, 1940. In Operation Moonlight Sonata, 515 German bombers with accompanying fighters first dropped high explosive bombs to knock out the utilities and blow buildings apart so they could be penetrated by the incendiary bombs in the second wave. A firestorm developed in which the city center of destroyed, including the now iconic Coventry Cathedral. About 500 people were killed and 1,000 injured. Over 60,000 buildings were destroyed. Coventry was bombed again in April 1941 and in August 1942.

⁴⁹ The attacks of September 11, 2001, also known as the ‘9/11’ attacks, were the deadliest terrorist attacks on American soil in United States history. Nineteen militants associated with an Islamic extremist group hijacked several commercial airplanes and attacked targets in New York City and Washington, DC by crashing the planes into buildings. One failed attack resulted in a crash in rural Pennsylvania as well. The attacks caused extensive death and destruction and triggered an intensive United States effort to combat terrorism in the Middle East and around the world.

E day,⁵⁰ when Germany gave up . . . by the way, when Germany attacked Russia . . . I have in my little diary there that I kept at the time written . . . I've still got it, "Now that the Germans have attacked Russia, they have lost the war." I was how old? Sixteen, maybe 17? I knew already at that time that . . . I was jumping into the air when I heard that and, as a matter of fact, I twisted my ankle when I came down. I was in bad shape for a while. That was because they had attacked Russia. I knew that was the end of Germany because to me Germany couldn't fight in Africa and the West[ern] Front and East[ern] Front. That was just out of the question. I was right.

Sara: So the war ends.

Renate: Yes, the war ends. We signed the treaty. We had in our apartment . . . my brother had come back from Australia, but he was still at the Isle of Man for the release procedures. We had living with us Free French Air Force fellows by the name of Charles 'Rico' Hazan [sp]. He was . . . my friend, Lilly, and I and Rico went downtown into London on V-E Day. I wore his hat and Lilly wore his jacket from the uniform. We were dancing . . . he was Jewish too . . . we were dancing . . . some people were dancing the *hora*.⁵¹ There were fireworks and there was . . . we had to walk home after because the underground was already closed down. They close down at 12:00 or 1:00 [a.m.]. We walked and that walk took us about two hours to get home. That was the days when I could still walk, couldn't do that anymore today. Yes, that was the end of the European war but the Japanese were still coming.

Sara: Did you hold a job?

Renate: Yes. In Leicester . . . first of all, we were not allowed to work in England short of domestic servants. But in Leicester, they were advertising for assistant to kindergarten teachers for the Leicester Education Department. By the way . . . that time I spoke English. Do you want to know how I learned it while I've got it in my head? My mother put an advertisement into the *Daily Telegraph*: "Refugee girl, *au pair* [child care or maid] or small remuneration, to learn English in an all English household." We had about 120 letters and my mother in the end picked one of them in Surrey. They wanted me. The man was working in the Bank of England. They had a one-year-old little boy and they wanted someone to come and take the little boy for a walk and feed the little boy and look after the little boy. My mother took me there. She spoke English

⁵⁰ Victory in Europe Day is May 8, 1945 marked the formal acceptance of the German surrender to the Allies. It marked the end of the war in Europe.

⁵¹ A circle dance that originated in the Balkans, but is today generally associated with Israel.

already with a heavy accent, but she spoke English. She explained the situation to them and they said, “Yes, they would teach me English.” They didn’t know any German. I got my suitcase. I moved in there. I had a room there and this lady . . . her name was Ryder [sp] . . . Mrs. Ryder, was teaching me English. There was a book, a children’s book . . . I was looking up every word in the dictionary and put the writing of this . . . the translation over it so that I could read the whole sentence afterwards. But she wouldn’t let me even have a drink of water unless I asked in English. She told me what to say and I had to repeat it and then she would let me have the water. Everything that I wanted and needed to do, she had me repeat in English and what do you know, in three months, I spoke English. It was unbelievable. Anyway, that’s how I learned English. Now then, to go back to . . .

Sara: Work . . .

Renate: . . . work, right. Yes. The Leicester Education Committee said, “Yes, they would employ in a school, assistant to a teacher,” but I’d have to have the police permission because I was an alien. I went to the police department and we had an alien registration book and they put a stamp on it: “Permitted to work for Leicester Education Department.” I was working there all day and I had a bicycle at the same time . . . they gave me permission to use a bicycle . . . we weren’t allowed to have a radio, we weren’t allowed to have any cars or bicycles unless we had special permission. They gave me that special permission to get to work. They paid me per month 19 shillings which bought just about nothing. But it was a job and I stayed there for just about a year, year-and-a-half until we moved to . . . no, then I got a job. I was offered a job through someone else we knew who was working as a domestic for a dentist in Leicester. He needed . . . his assistant had quit and he needed an assistant. I was already I think 17 or 18 by that time. He said “Yes, he would train me.” I started working for this dentist. That was what they called a “reserved occupation” . . . a medical occupation. The other one was educational . . . so that all reserved. They paid . . . he paid me two pounds a week which was wonderful because there again I used my bicycle going and coming back. I saved the two pounds . . . which my mother later on used every cent that I saved to move back to London because she didn’t have the money. Anyway, I worked at the dentist, Mr. Francis [sp]. In England, if you have a plain doctor degree, you’re a “Dr.”—if you’re a higher degree than a doctor, you’re a “Mr.”—now he was higher; he was a dental surgeon, so he was a “Mr.” Francis. I worked there for about . . . until we moved to London, I think probably a year-and-a-half to two years. [In] 1942 we moved back to

London because things were quiet by that time. But as soon as we moved to London, we started the ‘doodlebugs.’⁵² When I got to London, there again I went and worked for a dentist who I didn’t like. He was a butcher and I quit there. Then they told me I’d have to do war work. They sent me to a training camp in Hounslow where I had to be at eight in the morning—it took me a whole hour to get there. I learned precision work for about two months . . . three months, something like that. There were civilians there . . . Canadian REMEs⁵³ engineer corps . . . learning and British naval people learning. But the strange thing was, although I left school at 14 . . . and for the precision work you need a bit of mathematics . . . you need to know fractions . . . you need to know how to add and subtract. We had to go to a kind of school there where everybody was tested. They gave us additions with carrying from one line to another and subtractions. I was one of the few that passed the test. The rest . . . they didn’t know how to add, how to subtract, never mind doing fractions. It was unbelievable how uneducated the Canadians were and the British naval people. They must have . . . I don’t know what their schooling was. It was unbelievable. Anyway I worked there and then I got a job in an aircraft factory. We made the undercarriages for the Lancaster bombers.⁵⁴ Then I got . . . there were some problems with . . . the doodlebugs started . . . the bombings . . . the pilotless airplanes. With it there were some people in the factory that started telling me about aliens, “You bloody Germans!” and so on. That came to the management. The management heard about it. The manager came to me and said, “You are different material to all the people that are working in the factory. Would you like to run one of the offices here?” He took me to the . . . showed me the office and what I had to do was . . . every job that was done had a number. Everybody was clocked onto the number at a certain time and the job was given a certain limit of time. If they didn’t keep to it they were taken to court for sabotage. I was the timekeeper for these jobs. They came to the office, sat down and with a piece of paper, “I finished this job and I’m clocking onto that job.” I had to

⁵² ‘Doodlebug’ was a common term for the V-1 flying bomb. The V-1 was a pilotless airplane/bomb (today what we call a ‘drone’) which the Germans launched at Britain and parts of Belgium near the end of the war. It carried one ton of high explosives. It was pre-programmed so that the engine would stop at a certain point after which they would randomly fall. It was purely a terror weapon. There was no time for air raid sirens or to take shelter and they appeared at all times of the day or night (some 70 to 100 V-1s fell each day). London and southern England was the premier target with nearly 8,000 V-1s falling there from June to October 1944. If they could not be shot down before they arrived there was little anyone on the ground could do about them, other than hope that when the noise of the engine stopped, it wasn’t right above you. You may hear this sound at: http://www.flyingbombsandrockets.com/V1_into.html. The Germans launched 9,521 V-1s in total at England killing nearly 23,000 people.

⁵³ The acronym for Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME).

⁵⁴ The Avro Lancaster was a British-built four-engine heavy bomber designed and built during World War II.

have that all on paper. That was done for quite a while. Then later they changed me to do the wages and that was no small thing because I don't know if you're aware of the British money system in those days—pound, shilling, and pence—I had to do fractions in pounds, shillings and pence—that was a headache! They all had to clock on and they were given three past eight, four minutes past eight, they were reduced by payment by 15 minutes. If that happened more than three times, they had to be reported again for sabotage, they came to court and maybe even to prison. It was very serious. Anyway, I stayed there until the end of the war pretty well.

Sara: How did it happen that you came to the United States?

Renate: I was in Canada. Actually Canada is my country . . . Britain . . . I became a British subject. I was naturalized. Then after the war . . . I was a group leader for holiday groups going to Switzerland and Austria. I had . . . we were flying over . . . I worked for the London County Council . . . I got my holidays free of charge and they paid me for taking these groups which was wonderful. When I got to Austria, I met an Austrian fellow. I fell in love with him and I went back to England and we decided to get married. I wouldn't go to Austria and live in Austria [and] he wouldn't come to England, live in England. I said, "How about if we go to Canada?" "Yes, wonderful." I made my application, I was a British subject and there was no problem, I could go any time to Canada. Then when I got to Canada, I applied for him and there was a date set for our wedding and all that. He came over and then as he came over, after a week or so, I found that things were not the way I remembered during our holidays, during my holidays. He was . . . in the winter he went to the Laurentian Mountains and became a ski instructor and while he was there . . . how did that go? Yes, there was something that I didn't like about it . . . that's right, he got a job . . . after the ski instructor he got a job as a crane operator up north in northern Quebec. I gave him \$10 . . . that's all I could . . . and I said to him, "When you get your first wages, you pay me back, bring me \$10." His first wages came along and by that time I was working in a factory, the Northern Electric in Montreal. The first wages came and I wrote to him, "Please send me back my \$10." He didn't; he wrote back, "My hands are bleeding and I need the money for other things." I wrote back, "Thanks very much but in that case all the belongings you left with me I'm putting into storage. Here's your paper for the storage. I'm leaving Montreal. You won't know where I am. You can go back to Austria." He didn't believe me. This materialized later. I left Montreal and I went to Toronto and he didn't know where I was. When he came back to Montreal, he didn't believe that I had left. People told me because

he was looking for me all over.

Sara: You left Montreal and you went to Toronto?

Renate: To Toronto, yes. He decided to go back to Austria. Later on . . . two years later, I decided . . . I was curious to see what happened to him. I wrote his sister and he wrote a letter back. He said, “When I couldn’t find you, I went to Halifax [Nova Scotia] and I went onto a ship which I thought was going to Genoa. But after ten days at sea, I started making inquiries and I found the ship was going to Calcutta [India].” He said, “In Egypt, all my money gave out and I was being punished for what I was doing to you. They’ve helped me back . . . to come back to Austria and luckily I got my job back. Now I have to repay the Austrian government.” That was the end of him. Anyway, in Canada, I was working and then I joined the Army there . . . intelligence. This is where I met my husband.

Sara: What was your husband’s name?

Renate: Robert . . . Robert Hedges.

Sara: At what point did you come to the United States?

Renate: My husband died in 1977. I lived 43 years in Canada and became a Canadian citizen and he was Canadian anyway. He had been a prisoner-of-war in Germany for two-and-a-half years during the war. I was living with my daughter . . . my daughter got married and then we had a home built and I had my own apartment there, attached to their home. Crystal got married; she was working for DuPont,⁵⁵ that’s where she met her husband. He worked for DuPont. Steve, my son-in-law, got an offer from his company. He started [with] his company in Canada and then after a few years, they asked him to come here to Atlanta. It was a corporate transfer. My daughter gave up a very nice job that she had in Canada to come here and the question came, “Mom, what are you going to do? Are you coming with us or are you staying in Canada?” I had friends in Canada but no relations. I said, “I suppose I’ll come with you but only if I can have separate quarters.” We live together, we eat together and so on. But separate in the evenings so we don’t sit on top of each other all the time. This is how I got here in 1996.

Sara: You have done some volunteer work. You have been involved in different causes. Could you say a word about that?

Renate: Yes, I’ve done here in Cobb County—I’ve been with the Cobb County Sheriff’s

⁵⁵ E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, commonly referred to as ‘DuPont,’ is an American conglomerate founded in 1802 as a gunpowder mill by Éleuthère Irénée du Pont. In the twentieth century DuPont developed polymers and moved into chemicals. Today it is the fourth largest chemical company in the world.

Office and I worked in the jail here for 11 years and a bit, I think. I quit there last year in October when I suddenly found—there were two reasons—I found that I couldn't see the computer very well anymore and I found later on that I had a stroke in my right eye and I only have one good eye. My right eye . . . they gave me a needle in it with a steroid and it's much better now but I'm still suffering with that. Also, the jail was expanding and the parking lot was being torn up and the parking was to take place in the street or across the street at the prison. I wasn't going to walk that far because I had a walker and that was too far for me to walk. I had two good reasons.

Sara: What kind of work did you do in the jail? What exactly?

Renate: I was processing visitors that came to see inmates. It was quite a complicated business and I understand that it's going to get even more complicated. Every now and then, some people . . . either an inmate or a visitor . . . would get mad. [The visit] was by telephone with glass and the prisoners were sitting on the other side, the inmates. Sometimes they'd take the phones and smash them against the glass or the inmates would smash them against the glass which broke them. The whole project was closed down. We even had a lawyer once trying to push a forbidden substance underneath the glass to the prisoner. Things happened that . . . they decided to make it more foolproof. From what I understand, I haven't seen it, I think they're still working on it now, it's going to be over television now. They're going to visit only on television now, if they can. I don't know how far up the television will be because if they smash the television, it's going to be pretty expensive. I don't know yet how that will work.

Sara: Have you been connected to any survivor groups . . . organizations?

Renate: No, no, not really. I've done the . . . as you know . . . the *Shoah*⁵⁶ thing but, no . . . can't think of any. I have not been in too much in Jewish circles. I've been to a couple of meetings on the other side of Atlanta. They send me every month one of these things, their meetings are on Monday . . . I think you were there.

Sara: Café Europa?

Renate: Yes. I've been there two or three times and then it's . . . I don't know . . .

Sara: Is there something you would like to add to your story?

⁵⁶ Director Steven Spielberg (of *Schindler's List* fame) established the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in 1994 to gather video testimonies from survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust. In addition to interviewing primarily Jewish survivors, homosexual survivors, Jehovah's Witness survivors, liberators and liberation witnesses, political prisoners, rescuers and aid providers, Roma and Sinti (Gypsy) survivors, survivors of Eugenics policies, and war crimes trials participants were also interviewed.

Renate: Gosh . . . there's been so much really.

Ruth: Maybe just a . . . I'm curious . . . as one of the few surviving German children your age or people who were in Germany as children, what your view is not only of Germany but perhaps of your own experience 65 years later?

Renate: The Jewish children that survived that were on my transport I'm not in touch with. I don't know who they are. This friend of mine, Gerta, she was . . . she came over as a domestic servant. I have tried to trace my friends . . . there was one girl, Lily, she came on a . . . I heard later on a transport earlier than I did and she died of breast cancer in Scotland. Then there was my friend, Nesta, that's the one who I went to school with the first four years, the Catholic girl who stayed behind. When the Russians came, they took her to Auschwitz and they had to break up the I.G. Farben factories, the gas [chemical] factories there. But she's always been a very nice girl and we were friends. She came to visit here afterwards, right here. She is dead now. The other one, Hanna Prager [sp] . . . that was rather funny. She and I were in a class at the Carin Goering Middle School. My other friend, Maya, who . . . when you come to friends, she lives in Florida and she went to . . . became a nurse in Havana. Then she got married and she went to Florida. She called me one evening, "Are you Renate Bial?" I said, "Yes". She said, "Do you remember Maya?" I said, "I only know one Maya . . . Maya Löbinger [sp] from Gleiwitz." She said, "That's me." I didn't even know she was living there. We've been in touch ever since. Maya said to me, "I'm having Hannah Slawinska (or whatever her name is) come and stay with me. She's visiting her daughter in New York and she's coming and staying with me. Would you like to talk to her and to find out about Gleiwitz because she still lives there?" I said, "Yes, let her call me . . ." That evening Maya called me and said, "I've got Hannah here but Hannah only speaks German, she doesn't know . . . and Polish." I said, "I can speak German to her." She comes to the telephone and she starts talking about Gleiwitz and so on. Then she said, "I went to the middle school." I said, "Middle school?" She said, "Yes. The principal was *Fraulein* Dr. von Brixon." I said, "The Carin Goering Middle School?" She said, "Yes." I said, "What's your maiden name?" She said, "Hannah Prager." I said, "My God, we were in the same class!" But she survived by pretending to be Catholic, I think.

Now, there were other kids that I tried to find out what happened to them: Rosel

Klisman, Rita Joschkowitz,⁵⁷ all friends of mine. I've gotten the final notifications that they were all deported. Now I was reading a book here, *The Rise and Fall of the Nazis*,⁵⁸ which is one of the interesting . . . it's politically interesting . . . but there's one chapter on the Holocaust and I'm telling you, reading that, it makes one wonder . . . a human can sink that low as they describe in that book what has been happening in those camps. That book is true because . . . for instance they bought an article about Gleiwitz where they, the Polish soldiers that they shot, and then Hitler used that as an excuse for the invasion of Poland. They also bought the Canadians . . . the D-Day;⁵⁹ that the Canadians were . . . that's something that you don't hear about because you think it was mostly Americans that were liberating Europe. There's an article on the Canadians there, how they were actually the only ones that achieved their goal on D-Day and even went further. On top of that, I read somewhere . . . that is not in that book, but I read somewhere else . . . that the British had equipment which they put in front of the tanks which was turning the earth [unintelligible] in front of the tanks and would explode the mines. The British offered that to the United States for their tanks, for the landings. The United States said, "No thank you." The British had that and the Canadians, and they hardly lost a tank in the landings. It just makes you wonder what went on behind the scenes. We don't know everything. Then in Canada, they had Camp X.⁶⁰ Have you heard about that? In Whitby? Again, I've got the write-up on that. If you pull it up on your computers at home, Camp X . . . you'll see . . . that was done in Whitby where I lived, very close to Toronto. That was a camp where . . . on Lake Ontario . . . where everything that went on was brought in through Lake Ontario. In Whitby, nobody knew this camp existed. It was . . . Walt Disney⁶¹ was there. Through photographs that

⁵⁷ Rosa was born in Gleiwitz in 1925. She was deported from Gleiwitz to Auschwitz-Birkenau on May 20, 1942. This information is from a deportation list in the Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names.

⁵⁸ This book is probably *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer.

⁵⁹ Also called 'Operation Overlord.' The landings began on June 6, 1944 after being delayed one day for bad weather. First airborne troops went sent in and then the Allied infantry began to wade ashore starting at about 6:30 a.m. The Supreme commander was General Dwight David Eisenhower. It was the largest amphibious landing to that time in history combining land, sea and air elements. Nearly 160,000 troops were landing the first day. Over 5,000 ships were involved and thousands of airplanes. The landings took place along a 50-mile stretch of Normandy coast divided into five sectors: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. The United States Army landed on Omaha and Utah Beaches and the British on Sword, Juno and Gold.

⁶⁰ 'Camp X' was the unofficial name of a World War II paramilitary and commando training installation on the northern shore of Lake Ontario between Whitby and Oshawa in Ontario, Canada. It was established in December 1941 and was used to train Allied agents from the Special Operations Executive, Federal Bureau of Investigation and American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) who were intended to be dropped behind enemy lines as saboteurs and spies. They were schooled in sabotage, partisan support and recruitment methods, demolition, map reading, weapons and Morse code. One of its trainees was Ian Fleming, who was the creator of James Bond, 007.

⁶¹ The presence of Walt Disney in Camp X was unable to be confirmed.

had people sent in that were confiscated, they reproduced, for instance, the area in Prague [Czech Republic] where one of the Germans . . . I've forgotten his name now . . . I could look it up if you're interested. The *Gauleiter*⁶² there was going to the office every day and by the time they dropped the agents from Camp X into Prague, they exactly every street there and every corner. They attacked this *Gauleiter*, who died I think the next day or whatever and then reprisals, you might have heard about that, when the Germans completely destroyed the village of Lidice. They put everybody into a church and burned the church down.⁶³

Sara: . . . in Czechoslovakia . . .

Renate: Yes, in Czechoslovakia. Now also in that camp, Ian Fleming, who wrote all the books, 007 [James Bond], his experience on 007 came from that Camp X. He was there and this is very interesting. As I say, I can show it to you. I've got the write-up right there. I want to put it into my books, into my collection. But this was all going on during the war; nobody knew and today they have just . . . I've been there, I went to this Camp X, what was left there, and they've only got a little memorial there now, with a flag.

Ruth: Do you have any explanation . . . you seem to have had a lot of both Jewish and non-Jewish friends growing up . . . do you have any explanations about Germany and why this could have happened there, knowing the German culture?

Renate: Yes, I don't understand it. I don't understand how a cultured nation like the Germans are supposed to be can sink that low. Yet I have to say that there were a lot of Germans that put their life on the line helping Jews and other people. There were . . . the Jews were not the only ones that were killed. There were cripples, mentally [ill] people, homosexuals, gypsies, they killed them all. There was no difference. But there some decent [Germans] around. I know of a cousin twice removed was hidden by a German family. They shared all their rations with them.

⁶² A Nazi party district leader in Germany, similar to a provincial governor. His responsibility was to make sure that Nazi party directives were implemented in his area and to ensure Nazi party political dominance. They were appointed by Hitler. A large city like Berlin had its own *gauleiter* (Joseph Goebbels), or a *gauleiter* could preside over a region or area with several smaller towns.

⁶³ This entire account relates to the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942), who was the *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia (the part of southern ex-Czechoslovakia that had been annexed to the Reich). He was brutal and ruthless in his suppression of dissent and was deeply hated. He was attacked in Prague on May 27, 1942 by a team of British-trained soldiers, who jumped him as his car turned a corner on the way to his office. He died from his injuries about one week later. Intelligence falsely linked the town of Lidice (then in the Protectorate, now the Czech Republic) to the assassination. On orders directly from Heinrich Himmler, the village was completely destroyed on June 10, 1942. All 192 men over 16 years of age from the village were murdered on the spot and the rest of the population were sent to German concentration camps where many women and nearly all the children were killed.

They put their life on the line. But why they would do that . . . antisemitism has always been in existence. A lot of it was also, I'm sorry to say, preached by the Catholic Church. I remember one of my classmates, walking home with her . . . she wasn't Jewish . . . we were talking. I would have been around maybe eight or nine years old. She said to me, "Yes, but you Jews crucified Jesus." I said, "I don't know." I didn't know at that time that Jesus was: (1) Jewish himself and (2) that he was crucified by the Romans. But they were told by their church and by the politics that were going on [that] the Jews crucified Jesus. Then she said, "You killed . . . you put the Christian children . . . our priest told us that you put the Christian children into barrels with nails and they you used the blood to make the *matzah*." I remember my reply, "But the *matzah*⁶⁴ isn't pink—it's white!" These were things that were handed down by priests, by the church, yet priests were killed themselves by the Nazis.

Even in Montreal . . . when I was in Montreal . . . a friend of mine, a Catholic, came storming to see us one day. My husband was alive then. She said, "I am so disgusted about what has been happening" . . . that was between Protestants and Catholics. The priest had just been saying . . . there was a school there, a Catholic school. Quebec is funny . . . in Canada, there's a Catholic school, a Protestant school. The Protestant school took everyone that was not Catholic. But in the Catholic school you had to be Catholic. During the interval . . . during the recess time, the kids played together. That day the preacher in the church said, "We have to build a fence because our children will be contaminated by the Protestant children." This is how hate starts. Not only that, but these are all things that came to me much later as I grew older and got a little bit more knowledge. The German ideal was blonde hair and blue eyes and be in perfect physical condition. [Joseph] Goebbels's⁶⁵ had a club foot, that's number one. He would have been killed by his own people had they known. Who of the leaders was blonde and blue-eyed? Not one of them. The German people fell for all that. Were they that stupid? Even the cows are not that stupid. I don't know.

Ruth: How do you feel about the Germans today? Have they learned anything? Have we learned anything?

Renate: I don't know. I've got German friends in Canada. To this day, I'm wondering. One of

⁶⁴ Unleavened bread eaten in memory of the unleavened bread prepared by the Israelite during their hasty flight from Egypt, when they had not time to wait for the dough to rise.

⁶⁵ Josef Goebbels was the Propaganda Minister in the Third Reich. He committed suicide with his entire family in the Hitler bunker on May 19, 1945.

them is from the *Sudetenland*, the German part of Czechoslovakia.⁶⁶ She was complaining to me that when the Russians came in there that the Czechs got so mad at the Germans and [this woman's family] were Germans . . . they were ousting them from the *Sudetenland*. "We had to walk over the mountains. When we got into Germany, we were starving and thirsty. When we knocked at the doors, they wouldn't even give us any water." I said to her, "Doris, that is nothing to what the Jews had to put up with done by you Germans." We've had our . . . but you don't know . . . were they part of the system, were they not, you don't know. I've met as I said some very decent Germans that put their life on the line. I've met some . . . Austria—I'll tell you something . . . while I was in Austria . . . I was there for six weeks. That was while I was engaged to this Austrian fellow and I was living in a guest house. They had this restaurant there and I had a room upstairs. I was sitting there knitting. During that time [in] Austria, coffee was very hard to get, if not impossible. They came from Germany and smuggled coffee over and so on. I bought a tin of instant Nescafe with me. The owner of this guest house said to me (who was also I was warned a National Socialist) but he was very, very nice. He gave me a huge ham when I left and was crying that I was leaving and all that. He was probably one of the decent ones. Anyway, I was sitting there knitting and having a cup of coffee when a young fellow comes up to the table and asks me, "May I sit with you?" which is the habit over there. I said, "Yes, of course, sit down." We got talking. After a while, I noticed he seemed to be a Nazi. I said to him, "Tell me something. You believe in *Der Stürmer*?" . . . which was a German . . . Goebbel's propaganda newspaper . . . nasty, nasty paper. I said, "You believe in *Der Stürmer*?" He said, "Yes! That was a good paper." I said, "You believed in what they quoted in *Der Stürmer*, that the Jews stink and the Jews are our misfortune and the Jews . . . when you eat from the Jew you will die of it?" "Yes, definitely!" I said, "Would you like a cup of coffee? I've got some coffee here from England." "Yes, I'd love to have some coffee. It's so expensive here." I went into the kitchen where they gave me the okay . . . brought him back a cup of coffee. I said, "Please have your coffee." He drank. I said, "You know I'm Jewish." He said, "No, you're not Jewish." I said, "Yes, I am." I had my Jewish-German identity card on me which I've still got in my bedroom today. I showed it to him. I said, "There it is, the proof that I'm Jewish." He

⁶⁶ The *Sudetenland* was an area along the border of Bohemia and Moravia near the Sudeten Mountains. The *Sudetenland* had a predominately German population that was incorporated into the boundaries of Czechoslovakia after World War I. The area became a major source of contention between Germany and Czechoslovakia until the Munich Conference yielded it to Germany in 1938 as an attempt at appeasing the Germans.

said, “I don’t believe it.” I said, “I hope you’ll die from the coffee because you believe it.” I said, “Now you may leave my table.” He went over to another table where other people were sitting. “May I sit here?” They said, “No.” He went to another table. They said, “No.” In the end, he had to leave because nobody wanted him. You see, you still to this day, well to this day . . . that was in 1950’s, late 1940’s probably . . . you got the bad ones, you got the good ones. I was just reading here in this book some of these experiments they did. Never mind Dr. [Josef] Mengele,⁶⁷ there were some other doctors that also did the experiments and they showed picture of the woman doctor. There was apparently a doctor trial in Nuremburg. I didn’t know about that. I only found that out in that book.

Ruth: How do you feel having escaped all that? What are your thoughts about what could have been your fate?

Renate: I’m thinking . . . my uncle’s picture is hanging up there . . . I was thinking that if he hadn’t fled Austria and hadn’t let us come over, either I would have been dead by now or I would have made it to Israel which is a possibility, I don’t know. It leaves you with goose pimples. That sort of thing makes you wonder . . . life is not fair.

Sara: How appealing was the idea of going to Israel, then Palestine, to you?

Renate: At the time it was okay because I had a lot of friends from my hometown that I knew were already there. I wouldn’t have minded going. My mother was against it. She didn’t like the idea.

Sara: What did she say?

Renate: I think she was all alone short of her mother . . . my brother was already in England. I’ve got a feeling that she just didn’t want to be left alone. But we didn’t have any idea in those days that we’d all be killed. That didn’t enter our minds.

Sara: Was your family a Zionist family?

Renate: No. They were German. One of my friends . . . when my father died, a lawyer by the

⁶⁷ Josef Mengele was born in 1911. He became a doctor and joined the SS. He was notorious for being one of the physicians who sorted newly-arrived prisoners on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, picking out those he wanted for his medical experiments—especially twins—thus earning him the nickname the “Angel of Death.” Many survivors recall being selected by Mengele, but caution should be used because Mengele only arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau on May 24, 1943. He fled the camp before the Russians arrived in January, 1945. He turned up in Gross-Rosen for a while and a few others camps until he assumed the guise of a *Wehrmacht* soldier and tried to flee west undetected. However, he was captured by the Americans, who did not know who he was or what he had done. He was released in June 1945 under the name “Fritz Hollman.” From July 1945 until May 1949 he worked on a farm in Bavaria and then fled to Argentina. He moved through several countries in South America, always being pursued to be brought to justice. He died in Brazil on February 7, 1979.

name of Dr. Ernst Kohn,⁶⁸ who had been badly injured in the World War I and he was still limping, and he got the Iron Cross First Class. He was very German, very pro-German. I remember meeting him. He was my so-called godfather . . . I think I mentioned that after my father died. He had three daughters. Lili [sp] was the one that died of breast cancer. Annemarie was the middle one—she still lives today in New York. She married a doctor . . . Hadda [sp], her name is now . . . Annemarie Hadda [sp]. The oldest one, Hilda Kohn [sp], married a [Max] Kochmann [sp] and lived in London. Who reminds me of something else again . . . remind me of Rinzetti afterwards, the Italian. Doctor Kohn was very, very pro-German and then later on his daughter sent me these write-ups. When they brought [them] into so-called ‘Jew houses’ . . . collected into ‘Jew houses’ . . . her father was there as well. They weren’t allowed to wear any more the World War I decorations and the ribbons and so on. He was also deported. It makes you wonder. There he was pro-German right to the last and he was still killed. Now his oldest daughter, Hilda, married [Max] Kochmann, who was a cousin of . . . there was in Gleiwitz a *Justizrat* [Judge] [Arthur] Kochmann, who had a daughter by the name of Suse. My mother told me she was the most beautiful girl you can imagine and she had beautiful, beautiful long hair. In Gleiwitz, they had during this plebiscite . . . after World War I, there was the Polish occupation, Italian occupation and French occupation. The ponds, for instance, in my father’s brick factory were holding a lot of frogs. After the French left, the frogs had gone. They were no more squawks. Anyway, Suse met this Italian officer during the occupation, who my mother said looked as if he stepped out of a storybook with the epaulets and the things hanging down and gold things down his pants. He fell in love with Suse and Suse fell in love with him. His name was Rinzetti [sp]. [Arthur] Kochmann, the father . . . forbade Suse to marry this Rinzetti; he wasn’t Jewish. Rinzetti said, “I will be coming back for Suse when Suse can make up her own mind without your permission.” He came back when Suse was 21 to marry her and Suse went with him to Italy. Rinzetti became the aide to the Italian ambassador to Germany. Suse came with him. Hitler kissed Suse’s hand and said to her, “Only Italy can produce beauties like you.” In the Kochmann household in Gleiwitz, whenever there were receptions in the Italian embassy, Suse asked her father in Gleiwitz, “Please arrange for . . . there was a special Jewish dish,

⁶⁸ Dr. Ernst Kohn was born on September 20, 1888 in Berlin. He studied law and moved to Gleiwitz where he married Berta (Bertel), the daughter of legal counselor Siegmund Schüller, in 1917. He served in the German army during World War I, during which time he was wounded twice and received the Iron Cross. After the death of his father-in-law, Ernst took over his legal practice. He was arrested for a short time after *Kristallnacht*. On February 27, 1943 he was deported, along with Berta, to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

*kugeltopf*⁶⁹ . . . Jewish cake, yeast cake, comes in little pieces, very, very nice . . . to send to the embassy because we're having a big reception. Hitler and Goering and Goebbels, they're all be there." My mother used to say, "Why the hell don't they put poison into that stuff when they send it." But anyway they did send it and Suse later on, when [Benito] Mussolini⁷⁰ went downhill, when he was hung upside down,⁷¹ Rinzetti fled with Suse to Sweden. Now all during that time, her father, [Artur] Kochmann, was protected by Rinzetti. He was not deported from Gleiwitz until Mussolini fell and Rinzetti went to Sweden. All during that time, her father, [Artur] Kochmann, was protected by Rinzetti.⁷² He was . . . this is when they picked up Kochmann and he was taken to Auschwitz. Hilda Kochmann [sp] married a cousin of this Suse Kochmann and she was telling on the telephone that Suse had moved to Pisa [Italy] where the Leaning Tower is and as far as she knew, she had died there. I don't know where he went, whether he died in Sweden or went with her but that was quite a nice story too.

Sara: Thank you very much. Great storyteller. [It] was wonderful listening to you.

Renate: You're very welcome. I remember so many little things. Then when I come to one thing I remember another thing and another thing. It's like a chain.

Sara: That's the way it goes.

<End Disk 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS

⁶⁹ '*Kugeltopf*' is a rich yeast cake baked in a tall, fluted pan with a central hole.

⁷⁰ Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) was an Italian politician, journalist, and leader of the National Fascist Party. He ruled Italy as Prime Minister from 1922 until he was ousted in 1943. He ruled constitutionally until 1925, when he dropped all pretense of democracy and set up a legal dictatorship. He was known as '*Il Duce*.' Mussolini was captured and executed near Lake Como by Italian partisans on April 27, 1945.

⁷¹ Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci, were stopped by Communist partisans near Lake Como, as they headed for Switzerland to board a plane to escape to Spain. The next day, Mussolini and Petacci were both summarily executed, along with most of the members of their 15-man train. On April 29, 1945, the bodies of Mussolini, Petacci, and the others taken to Milan, Italy. After being shot, kicked, and spat upon, the bodies were hung upside down on meat hooks from the roof of an Esso gas station.

⁷² Artur Kochmann was born in 1864 in Gleiwitz and worked there as a lawyer until 1938. He was a prominent member of the Gleiwitz community in general as well as president of the Gliwice synagogue among other Jewish activities and organizations. He was protected by his son-in-law, a member of the Italian diplomatic corps, through the first deportations in 1942. But when Italy fell and his son-in-law, Rinzetti and his wife, Artur's daughter, Suse fled Germany for Italy, Artur and his wife Johanna were finally deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on December 28, 1942, the last Jews to be deported from Gleiwitz.