

## Transcript:

Inge Lowenstein

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Interviewer: The date of this interview is June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1990. Mrs. Lowenstein, could you talk about what life was like in your town before the war?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, I was a little girl then, but it was very pleasant. It was a very Catholic town and of course Catholics were persecuted too by Nazis eventually, and we never felt very much persecuted until the Crystal Night. Also, the fact that it was so close to the border, we were only about four, five miles from the Belgian border and from the Dutch border, and there were a lot of foreigners always coming through it, I think that made life quite a bit easier for us too. Any holiday, Germans had big demonstration I think, we were never there. We would always go to Holland or Belgium.

Interviewer: What kind of a home...what was your home like?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, we lived in a very nice apartment. All the apartments belonged to my grandmother, the house belonged to my grandmother. It was an apartment house across from a church and across the street from a nunnery, and we were very friendly with the nuns, and we had a very large beautiful synagogue...

Interviewer: And what about your school.

Inge Lowenstein: I went to Jewish school. There were two school rooms for eight grades but it's surprising how much we learned.

Interviewer: So, about how many students was—

Inge Lowenstein: Well, in each class, there were about 40 students in each class and we were just separated in groups, and when our teacher was busy with another group, then we had to study, you see? And we went like from 8:00 to 1:00 and we had a

recess in the middle of it and played. And on our way home, I used to always come home late because we would stop and play on the street and when I came home, I got a good thrashing for it and the next day, I would do the same thing again. I was sort of a...not very goodie-goodie.

Interviewer: And this was a Jewish school?

Inge Lowenstein: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Why didn't you go to a public school?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, most everybody went to this school, like I said, for four years. In fact, my father went to the same school in 1906 when he started school at six years, he went for four years to this school and the first couple of years, I had the same teachers he had. He went there for the first four years and then he went to high school and at 18—17, he was inducted in the war, that was 1918. He was very severely wounded in the war. He was only there for two months at the front and was very...then he spent two years in the hospital and when they got married, my father was still walking on crutches.

Interviewer: Gosh.

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah. And then he went to a school and was well known for its cloth manufacturing and they had a very famous school there. He became a textile engineer but after that, he decided it was easier to work in sales and he represented several factories and traveled because that's one thing he could do, he could drive.

Interviewer: Now, how did the Nazi's rule in Germany first affect you?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, of course after four years, I stayed in the school until we left Germany and rather than go into high school because we knew some of the other kids that went to high school, they had to sit on separate benches on the back of the room being Jewish, and my parents decided that they didn't want to do that.

Interviewer: Now, how old were you about?

Inge Lowenstein: At that time, I was about 10, 11 years old, 10 years.

Interviewer: So high school started that young?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah, uh-huh. It just went for more years actually. So, then at 13, I was almost 14, we left for Peru in 1939. June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1939.

Interviewer: What are some of the things that occurred that--

Inge Lowenstein: Well, of course the Crystal Night and at that time—my father always thought it can't last forever, it has to get better. But after the Crystal Night, he said, "Now it's time to go," and of course then, we had a hard time getting out. His sister had immigrated to Peru two years earlier and through her, we found out there was a consul in France who had given tourist visas to everybody who wanted one for a lot of money.

Interviewer: Where was this consul?

Inge Lowenstein: In France, in Paris.

Interviewer: In Paris.

Inge Lowenstein: So, we got a visa from him, just a tourist visa and we went to Hamburg to board the ship, and the consul in Hamburg who has to approve the visa when you go and board the ship, he would not approve it because he said, so many people had bought this and they had found out about it that it was not a legitimate visa.

Interviewer: So, you could get the visa but you couldn't get out?

Inge Lowenstein: You couldn't get on the ship. So the shipping company told us, if you get on the train here and go to France, this ship is going to also take on passengers in Cherbourg which is a port on the French coast. The French consul has given this visa, he cannot deny it, he has to approve it because he gave it.

Interviewer: So, is that what you did?

Inge Lowenstein: That's what we did.

Interviewer: So you went from Paris to--

Inge Lowenstein: No, we went from Hamburg to Paris. We spent three days in Paris waiting for the ship to get to Cherbourg and that's where we boarded the ship.

Interviewer: But I meant, from the time you got the visa. Then you got the visa in Paris, then Hamburg, then back to France, back to Paris?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah. No, the visa was just done by mail. You didn't have to go.

Interviewer: Oh.

Inge Lowenstein: Anyway, my brother lived already...he had gone...after his bar mitzvah, he was sent to Liege which is an hour's drive from Aachen in Belgium.

Interviewer: So he's older than you?

Inge Lowenstein: He's a year older. And he caught the ship in Antwerp, so he got on the ship a day before we did actually.

Interviewer: This is the same ship?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah, all the same ship, they went from Hamburg to Antwerp to Cherbourg and to England and then across the ocean. And of course, in Peru, we did not know whether we would get off the boat.

Interviewer: How long did it take to get to Peru?

Inge Lowenstein: 18 days.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about—

Inge Lowenstein: Oh, it was a beautiful ship, very luxurious, it was only its second voyage and the food and everything was just marvelous. We had the best time.

Interviewer: And you had a cabin?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah, for four, uh-huh, very, very lovely and it was so fabulous, you know, we stopped, went through the canal and down the west coast, it's just lovely. And my aunt and uncle who had lived there already, they somehow got a permission from the government somehow, by paying a lot of money for it, for us to get off the boat. My mother tells this all much better than I do because I was too little to remember a lot of the details. And anyway, we went, we found an apartment and we started living in Lima. I remember we went shopping, grocery shopping with a dictionary the first few days, and little by little we learned Spanish and then I needed to go back to school and I went to the Lima high school which was an American missionary school. And instead of learning Spanish which I did on the street, I learned English.

Interviewer: Now, why did you got to this American school?

Inge Lowenstein: It was really one of the best schools there was in Lima, and you could take...you got a complete high school education plus you could take either academic or commercial courses, and I took commercial courses and after I graduated, I started working in an office as a secretary.

Interviewer: Did you have any problems adjusting or learning the language or finding housing?

Inge Lowenstein: No, none whatsoever and we had a very lovely apartment which...my parents lived there until after my father died, my mother moved to the United States. Until then, they lived there.

Interviewer: When was—

Inge Lowenstein: My father died in 1953 and she moved here in 1956 I think. She moved to New York.

Interviewer: And what did you father do?

Inge Lowenstein: He did the same.

Interviewer: Was he in textiles?

Inge Lowenstein: Also selling textiles. It was hard during the war because you couldn't get any merchandise. See, but then after a while, business picked up of course not...he didn't live long enough to enjoy it which was—

Interviewer: That's too bad.

Inge Lowenstein: It's too bad.

Interviewer: But do you have any memories from Germany before you left?

Inge Lowenstein: Not too many.

Interviewer: About?

Inge Lowenstein: I remember, we used to—on Sundays, we used to take walks through the woods.

Interviewer: But I mean—

Inge Lowenstein: You mean, if anything happened?

Interviewer: I'm sorry, go ahead, keep going.

Inge Lowenstein: You know, that affected me because of the Nazis?

Interviewer: Yes.

Inge Lowenstein: No, hardly any, hardly any. I remember the Crystal Night...

Interviewer: What do you remember about it?

Inge Lowenstein: I remember when the...I remember, they came and got my dad and my mother carried on like crazy and she went along and she went with him.

Interviewer: And you were...and there was you and your brother?

Inge Lowenstein: No, my brother was already in Belgium then.

Interviewer: So you were alone?

Inge Lowenstein: I was there, yeah. And I don't know, for some reason, I remember, the house was five stories high and for some reason, I don't know why, I just went way up there and just stayed there. I didn't want to come down.

Interviewer: And you were by yourself?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah. And after a few hours, my mother and father came back. And, my mother tells this so much better, but what happened was that she carried on about him fighting in the war for the Germans and all that kind of stuff and almost losing his leg and now they want to take him to a concentration camp... And so, this one guy finally told her, calm down, calm down, if whatever you say is true, he can go back with you. So, he was...she went with him but she had to wait outside. And when he came out, what happened in there, he had to undress and show the guys all his wounds from the war, and he was very lucky. Now, this happened several times, you know. When they invaded the Sudetenland which is part of Czechoslovakia, my uncle who was the oldest in the family, he said to my father, listen, I'm going to cross...see, my uncle...two of my mother's siblings had already gone to Holland and they had a butcher shops in Holland, but right across the border, so it was half an hour drive by car or less like from here to go to Franklin. And so he said to my father, "Let's go, let's have a card game," over there with his brothers and so on, so forth, you know, they played cards. "Let's go over there this evening and play cards," and they went. But on the night of the Crystal Night, when we found out what happened in France—which was just a pretext really because this was all prepared ahead of time—he said, "I'm going over, I'm going to visit Walter," which was his brother, and "You want to come along?" And my father said, "No, I think nothing is going to happen, I'll stay home." Of course my uncle went over, never came back, and my youngest uncle, the one that's has gone with us now in this trip, he had gone already two years earlier to Holland, and that's also very interesting. He had a girlfriend who was not Jewish, it was against the law. And one evening, one of his friends had a birthday and some of this guy's friends from Aachen came to celebrate the birthday and they said to him, "You know, tomorrow morning at 6:00, we're going to come go to the Keller's house and get Ernie Keller." And this friend, who was a very decent person, came over to his house and told him, "Ernie, you better leave." That was like midnight. "They're coming at 6:00 for you." So Ernie got into his car and went over to Holland, never came back.

Interviewer: Oh.

Inge Lowenstein: See?

Interviewer: Terrible.

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah. So, that's the fact that we live so close to the border, you know.

Interviewer: So were there other families who went with you when you crossed?

Inge Lowenstein: When we went to Peru?

Interviewer: When you went to Peru?

Inge Lowenstein: No, but there was one friend of my father's who went also to Peru, but my aunt and uncle were there already, and they were there when we got there and helped us get established and helped us find the apartment, a very nice apartment. It was a two-story house which looked like a duplex and then I started to go to school, it was very pleasant.

Interviewer: So you went to Peru because of this aunt and uncle?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah. Well, this was one place that we could find a visa to go to. At that point, we would have gone anywhere but we preferred to go there. When we were on the train from Hamburg to Paris, there was a guy in our compartment and he's a Jewish guy, and my parents started to talk to him or vice versa and he said, "Listen, why do you want to go all the way to Peru? I know Daladier," who was the premier of France at that time, "I know him personally. I can get you a visa to stay in France." And my father said, "No way. If I go, I go as far as I can get."

Interviewer: So how long...so you went to high school in Peru?

Inge Lowenstein: Hmm-hmm. And I came back...I came to the States in 1946.

Interviewer: Now, why did you come to the United States?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, first of all, my uncle and aunt invited me, and I wanted to get away, I wanted to try my wings on my own a little bit.

Interviewer: So, you were about 20 then?

Inge Lowenstein: Yeah. It was very funny, the first time I went out, somebody asked me for a date. So I went to my aunt and uncle, I said, "May I go?" And they looked at me, "Sure you can go if you want to. If you don't want to, you don't." And then I asked what time I had to be home. They said, "Well, if you have a good time, you can stay out. If not, you can come home soon."

Interviewer: So this was different than when you lived with your parents?

Inge Lowenstein: I had never gone out by myself on a date. And not only that, it was almost impossible during the war years to get a telephone and if somebody asked me for a date, and my parents didn't know too many of the young people and they were very, very protective, he would have to come to the house, ask my father, and then he would say, "Well, I'll think about it." And he would, when he'd go out, went into town, he would find out who the guy was and what background and this and that and the other. And then when he came back, he would say either yay or nay.

Interviewer: Oh, it's very different now isn't it?

Inge Lowenstein: Oh, even there, it's different now, oh yeah.

Interviewer: Now, when you were in Peru though and going to school, did you feel like an outsider? Did you feel different?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, there was only one other Jewish girl in my class and I had one experience, of course, the Methodists tried very much to convert you but they also tried that of course with the Catholic girls. And one Catholic girl asked me, I wonder what are you, Methodist or whatever? And I said I'm Jewish. She said what's that? But they were all very friendly and I had a lot of friends, uh-huh, but we stayed sort of with the Jewish community. We stuck to the Jewish community as far as making friends is concerned.

Interviewer: And how was the response of the Jewish community there to people from Europe?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, of course everybody else had come from some place, and it just depends on where you found your friends. You could go...they had three communities there. There's the German community, the Sephardic, and the Ashkenazi, the eastern European. And I was sort of in between because we did not...most of the German Jews lived in Miraflores, which is outside of...it's like living in Brentwood or in Belle Meade, okay? And we lived sort of in between, so it was closer for me to go to the community center there...of the...in fact, it was only about four blocks from the Sephardic Community Center and synagogue, and so it was much easier for me to go there as well. I did not have many friends among the German Jewish community for some reason or other, even though they were basically much closer in background.

Interviewer: But people were friendly and people—

Inge Lowenstein: But most of my friends were the others, hmm-hmm.

Interviewer: And people...you didn't feel like an outsider then?

Inge Lowenstein: No.

Interviewer: So, you came to New York when you were 20?

Inge Lowenstein: Hmm-hmm.

Interviewer: And how long—

Inge Lowenstein: I lived there until '53 when I...actually, in between, I lived in San Francisco for a year. My girlfriend and I, we decided we're going to travel and we accumulated our vacation to have four weeks' vacation and flew to Los Angeles and we didn't like it there, so we hopped on the train and went to San Francisco and we were there one day and we decide, gee, this is nice here. So we called up our jobs, told them we're not coming back, within three days, we both had jobs and an

apartment. And then, Ann's father got sick and so we decided that she needs to be there because she doesn't...she wasn't...practically an only child. She has a sister who lives in Australia who could not help so she decided...and I didn't want to be there by myself either without any relatives, any...you know. I was not there long enough to really have close friends.

Interviewer: So you went back to New York?

Inge Lowenstein: Went back to New York and then I met my husband and we got married and I came to Nashville.

Interviewer: Now, the rest of your family--

Interviewer: Your uncles or other members of your family?

Inge Lowenstein: Okay, my mother was one of six, OK, and my father had two sisters. My mother's brother is one that brought me over to New York. He also, like I said before, he left from one day to the next. And the youngest brother stayed in Holland underground, hiding and hiding also his parents. Now, there were one more brother and one more sister in Holland and they said, "Well, we're not going to need to go into hiding, we'll stay around," and they of course were deported and killed. And one aunt went to Israel in 1935 and she's still alive. She's 86 years old. And the oldest brother died in '62 in New York, the one I lived with and then the other one is still living in New York. He came to New York after the war, after he was liberated. Of my father's two sisters, one of course went to Peru two years before we did and the other one, the youngest sister who's 10 years younger, she is just 80 now, she was deported, she was in concentration camp. Her child was killed, nine years old, she was raped in front of the child, and eventually, one time she came home, one day she came home from where she had to work and the child was gone. And her husband was deported, sent someplace else. She found out later that he survived the liberation but he was so sick, he died about two weeks afterwards before she ever found him. But she somehow escaped during an air raid and made her way to the Russians. And a Russian Jewish soldier helped her to get to the American side. He told her, she will be better off this way. And then of course, after the war, we found out she was alive, my father brought her to Peru and she was about 38 at that time, 39. There, she met somebody who...he was also from Germany. He had studied law but never practiced in Germany, and he was never very successful though in business. Anyway, he wanted to marry her and she did because she was, you know, at that age, she decided at least she's not

by herself. They had a child still and this man, since he was not able to make a good living in Lima, he was offered a job by the German government to work for the reparation department, you know, where they give back money.

Interviewer: Did he take it?

Inge Lowenstein: And he took it and they went back to Germany. And at that time, the child was 15 years old. And working for the government, they had a free apartment, the education of the child was assured, was free, and he is now...he is only about four years older than my own child. And he has a very good job, he lives in Germany and so does she. They never went back anywhere else because the husband died eventually and he has a good job and he says, "Even though I don't want to live in Germany, I don't want to transplant her again. She's 80 years old." He married an Israeli girl and they have a five-year-old child and that's my first cousin who is as old as my children. And my mother's youngest brother who came after the war to the United States, he also married fairly late because during the war, they couldn't get married. And he has a daughter, in fact, a very beautiful daughter who lives in New York who has triplets. She has four children altogether, one set of triplets, and she also lives in New York. So, those are all the siblings, the cousins and the...now, in my other aunt, the one that still lives in Peru, she had two boys and one of them died in '77 and the other one lives in Israel now. He had come to the United States to study on a scholarship...what was the guy's name? He was from Tennessee, Cordell Hull scholarship, and went back to Peru, he became a geologist, went back to Peru and worked for a year for the government and then he worked for an American company. And when the Peruvian government took over the petroleum company, U.S. Petroleum Company, they appropriated it. They wanted him to work for them and he didn't want to. He had already been working for this American company for many years, so they made it a little bit uncomfortable for him and he decided he's going to leave with his family, his four daughters, and they had a choice to continue working for the same company either in America, in North America, or in Israel so he chose Israel and he went to Israel with his four daughters. They're all married there now and they have eight grandchildren and they're going to be at our reunion too. So, that's the rest of the family.

Interviewer: So your family is very scattered.

Inge Lowenstein: Very scattered, extremely scattered with some of the...my mother's first cousins went to Argentina and she visited them, yes, but I don't know whether anyone are coming.

Interviewer: Do you feel at home in United States?

Inge Lowenstein: Oh yeah, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else but Nashville.

Interviewer: And how--

Inge Lowenstein: I have very, very good close friends and that's what counts.

Interviewer: Now, when did you get to Nashville?

Inge Lowenstein: '53 when I married. And after...both of my children live in Chicago. And after Henry died, everybody asked me, "When are you going to move to Chicago?" I said, "No way."

Interviewer: Have you ever gone back to your—

Inge Lowenstein: Germany? Yeah, I went back twice. Four years ago, I went back with my kids and I showed them where I was born, where we grew up, where my grandparents lived in a little village outside of Aachen and which was interesting. And then last winter, we went back to celebrate my aunt's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and we also went to Aachen and my grandfather from...my father's father was buried there, and for the first time in our entire life, all surviving cousins of this man, which are only four, were at his graveside altogether.

Interviewer: Oh.

Inge Lowenstein: It was very emotional.

Interviewer: How did you feel about...did you meet anyone you knew?

Inge Lowenstein: No, I wasn't interested either.

Interviewer: Did you have any feelings about—

Inge Lowenstein: Now, that first time I went back, it was almost like a strange place, I survived, never lived there. It was very peculiar. I had absolutely no special feeling for it. Now, in 1975, we went back to Peru for a visit. My husband never wanted to go and when I had my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, he said what do you want for your birthday? I said, I want a trip to Peru. So we went and my cousin was still alive then and a bunch of other family there and when I went back to Peru, that was to me like coming home. I had a lot of sentimental feeling over there but not for Germany. I guess I was not big enough, not old enough. The teen years is really the formative years. That's when you develop those kind of feelings.

Interviewer: Do you feel that this whole experience has, you know, involved in leaving Germany and living in Peru before you came here, do you feel what's...how do you feel it has affected your life?

Inge Lowenstein: Oh, it definitely has, I'm sure that...you can't tell how it would have turned out if these things hadn't happened. Probably would have—

Interviewer: But I mean in terms—

Inge Lowenstein: In terms of?

Interviewer: How you look at things or how you look at people and—

Inge Lowenstein: One thing that I've learned from my mother, I don't really cling to anything...I'm not a saver. I've seen it destroyed and things don't have value. Your life has value, not things. That's one thing that I've learned. And family is very important. I think it really gives meaning to your life to have family and connections and you miss those that are gone. And I mean, it's a terrible thing to think about what happened to them. But life goes on and there's nothing you can do about it. My nephew asked the same question in this tape, at the end, and he says, "Well"—and my uncle answers very well. He says, "You have to make your decisions from one day to the next. You shouldn't plan ahead and

you should take things as they come and then decide what you're going to do about it."

Interviewer: Has your experience affected the way you brought up your children?

Inge Lowenstein: No. I think the way I was brought up, personally, has affected the way I brought up my children. I think I have given them a lot more freedom. Now, I don't know whether that's because it's just customary here or because of the fact that I was brought up very strictly. I think the fact that I belong to a temple and I brought up my children in temple, you know, it's very different because my family is so Orthodox and I mean, I rebelled from day one in many things, many ways.

Interviewer: How do you feel about being Jewish?

Inge Lowenstein: I think it's very important to me, but, I mean, it's not important to me whether I drive the car or whether I turn on my light on Shabbat.

Interviewer: But, I mean, the Holocaust and your experiences have affected—

Inge Lowenstein: Well, I was very lucky. The fact that I was very protected during those years always, but I think, otherwise, it probably would have affected me personally a lot more, and much worse.

Interviewer: Well now that you have told me your story, is there any special message you would like to say?

Inge Lowenstein: Oh my God.

Interviewer: Or is there anything else that you wanted to bring up?

Inge Lowenstein: Such as?

Interviewer: I mean, just, is there anything else you wanted to say about the experience or something you want others to know?

Inge Lowenstein: I think everybody ought to know about what happened, not necessarily to me but what happened in general. We should not forget it and our children should know it. But, hopefully, the next generation will learn from it. For us, it's too late.

Interviewer: Well thank you very much Mrs. Lowenstein.

Male: May I interject here? I was just thinking of something that you might want to touch on would be the unification of Germany right now.

Interviewer: Oh.

Male: It's a hot topic.

Interviewer: Thank you, that's a good—

Inge Lowenstein: I'm not for it.

Interviewer: Do you have any feelings about—

Inge Lowenstein: No.

Interviewer: —the German unification?

Inge Lowenstein: Yes, I am not for it. I feel like the Frenchman who said that he feels much more comfortable with two Germanys than with one.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate any more on your feelings about it?

Inge Lowenstein: Well, I have a feeling that somehow, this, the oppression attitude is sort of inborn. I might be prejudiced but I don't like the idea of the Germans becoming that strong again, because I have a feeling that if they do, they can again cause wars and destruction, whatever because...I mean, if you look through history, they have always wanted to conquer and to expand. I mean, the fact that they killed 6 million Jews has really nothing to do with that. They just...because...and they have started so many other wars too before that.

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm. Well, I want to—

Inge Lowenstein: What?

Interviewer: I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts with us today.

Inge Lowenstein: Well, like I said, nothing has again add to it.