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Interviewer: What are your first memories of your homeland?

Freudenthal: My memories of Mannheim, Germany was a good time with my brothers, my family, my cousins, and we grew up as most children do in a middle-class comfortable home. I was, oh I think about eight years old when I first encountered any kind of anti-Semitism and that was when some children threw rocks at me on the street and called me a dirty Jew. That hurt me but I never put that kind of importance on it because of incidences we've heard about from other people as well. So this was just one of many things that I've heard about and this one was the first time I had really experienced it. I went to a public school, and we had to leave that and go to a strictly Jewish school, which again didn't bother me because I was surrounded by people I knew and my education continued as it always did. And this was between 1937 and 1938. In 1936, I had two older brothers. In 1936, my older brother left for America. My parents at that time recognized that things weren't going where they should be to have a future in Germany. So that the older of my two brothers left in 1936 for America to establish himself and the younger of the two who was at that time 16, he left the following year in 1937, and then in 1938 my parents and I left. By that time things had become worst in Germany and still and all, it was the early part of 1938, where life was pretty well-organized and pleasant still. It wasn't until November, as we know, November, '38 when things got very bad. So we were very fortunate to be able to leave in peace. We were able to bring most of our furniture out and I imagine you've heard about the lifts, they were big crates that everybody packed their furnishings in. And you had to make a decision, and my decision was which of the many dolls to take along and we took the toys I was allowed to take along. My mother's major decision was which kitchen items that she cherished she could pack up and the furniture, but my brothers kept writing, "Don't bring a lot of things, our apartments are going to be small, and so don't bring many things." So I very often picture now how would I feel if I had to pack up my whole household into one great big crate and take it along. And knowing that once you arrived in a new country your money will no longer be there and that you have to make do with what you have and your whole standard of living will have changed. So that was my young years before I left for America.

Interviewer: We went through that fairly fast, might just clarify some things. What part of Germany were you living in?

Freudenthal: We lived in the southern part of Germany. Mannheim, Germany, which is

right outside of Heidelberg, and Heidelberg is well-known for the university there and the mountains, and so that's usually how people recognized Mannheim, just say it's near Heidelberg.

Interviewer: You mentioned this early incident and the rock throwing and so forth and being taunted. Were you one of the few Jews in the community?

Freudenthal: Oh no. I don't really know how many Jews Mannheim had but there were three different synagogues and there was a good size community there. My father had a business of his own together with my uncle, and there were a lot of Jews there who had businesses and who were bankers and who had a very good careers going for them.

Interviewer: What about your education at that point...?

Freudenthal: I was in the second grade at that period, about third grade, I was nine years old. I guess I was in the third grade. But you learned the basic elemental things. We went to Hebrew school one day a week. And you learned the things that every child learns all over the world.

Interviewer: Now how did your parents explained to you what was happening, because at nine years old what you were able to comprehend and of course what they understood themselves at that point was probably very...

Freudenthal: Well that's true, but I think that was a conversation of most Jewish families at that time, that something was happening. I think the major impetus that made people leave was that they could no longer hold jobs. There was no employment for Jews. So that was a significant thing at the time, that the general livelihood was cut off. My father couldn't conduct his business any longer because non-Jews would not do business with him. So that's a pretty strong message that you get. How they told me, I do not really remember. What it was that they told me or whether I just got it by osmosis that we were leaving.

Interviewer: Were you feeling at that time that this was just part of life, or did you ever question, "Why is this happening to us?"

Freudenthal: As far as I can recall now, no. No, I had no such deep thoughts. I went along with the flow and I think most children our age, unless they're particularly bright and introspective gave it much thought. I knew that friends of ours had already left. Also knew that my cousin remained behind and that was pretty sad and I think saying goodbye to a number of these people was a difficult, difficult thing. I remember one time we had my last birthday party which is at the end of February, and at that time my mother bought little friendship rings for every child, and I still have that little friendship ring. I doubt whether anybody else in our group has it but

I still do.

Interviewer: So leaving friends and so forth, that was probably at that point in time the most traumatic aspect for you?

Freudenthal: I think it was, that's right. We went to Berlin, my grandfather lived in Berlin, and the last time we went over there and said goodbye to him, I think that too was traumatic. I don't know whether a nine-year-old child realizes that you will never see him again. We'd say goodbye and it was a big thing. He never did get out, my aunts and uncles never left Berlin.

Interviewer: It's a natural thing for parents to want to protect their children from personal fears and so forth. As a child do you remember any perceptions of things that maybe you couldn't quite put your finger on, emotions or interaction that you sensed between your parents that just maybe made you fearful?

Freudenthal: No. No, I don't remember anything like that at all.

Interviewer: So you just kind of went along with the flow.

Freudenthal: I went along with the flow, perhaps I just didn't have the brains to realize this, but I look at nine-year-old children now. I don't believe at nine that you are capable of realizing the immensity or even sensing those things. And if you do, I don't really know whether you would remember that.

Interviewer: And now when you were told that you are going to be leaving your country, how did your parents, did they try to put a good face on it and make it seem like a positive experience for you?

Freudenthal: Yes, that's right. That we no longer were able to live here and the way we want to live and we're going to a bigger and better thing, and at that time my brothers had already left, you see. So I knew I would see them again and that made it all right.

Interviewer: So because your brothers had left there was never any question that you would be following to America...

Freudenthal: Absolutely.

Interviewer: or some other destination.

Freudenthal: That's right. That's right.

Interviewer: And how did they happen to pick America?

Freudenthal: I think that was the thing that most German Jews wanted to do, is immigrate to America. I think the culture was very similar. Everything that you read and heard about America was a very positive thing. Jews in the past had immigrated to America and we were fortunate enough we had people to sponsor us. There was a family in America, I'm sure you know that you had to have a sponsor to enable you to leave the country. So that was a determining factor. We had a quota number. Again, I'm sure you know about quota numbers. We got that and we were able to leave. So everything was right. You know I had an uncle who had to immigrate to South Africa. Uncle who lived in Berlin, he was fortunate enough to get a quota number to leave for South Africa, and that wasn't the most pleasant experience, but he managed. He had a small daughter and his wife and they lived down there in Northern Rhodesia, and they just went from Berlin, Germany to Northern Rhodesia, must have been terribly hard. I've seen my cousin once since then, and she married and moved further south to Queenstown.

Interviewer: You mentioned having to have a sponsor and so forth. Was there a great deal of difficulty getting the papers?

Freudenthal: I don't believe so. No, I think that once my brothers had come over and the family connection had been made, there were many Americans whose families originated in Germany, who were very nice and sponsored a lot of people. Not that they had any responsibility once the Germans came over here but nevertheless they had to be willing to take care of these families in case they did not have the means to take care of themselves.

Interviewer: Sure.

Freudenthal: So that was the major hurdle you see.

Interviewer: What about the contact between you and your brothers after they had been over here and before you had left.

Freudenthal: Pardon me.

Interviewer: Were you able to correspond or is there any sort of...

Freudenthal: Oh yes. Yes, it wasn't until the war that the correspondence was broken off. You see we were at peace at that time when we left, so yeah, we were able to correspond with them.

Interviewer: Now you were brought over by the May family, members of the May family?

Freudenthal: No. No, the family that brought us over is my husband's family, who were

brought over by the May family. We were brought over by a family in Wimpfheimer. My father's family was connected with the Wimpfheimers who lived in New York and they sponsored a lot of German Jews.

Interviewer: Now did the invitation come from them to you or did your family seek them out as sponsors or...?

Freudenthal: I don't really know that. I would imagine that initially we contacted them. I would think so. They were very financially very well-off, and there was no problem that they would...they knew the family, they knew that we wouldn't be a liability on them and so they sponsored my brothers and then they sponsored us.

Interviewer: So you were on the boat coming over to America, and was there anything that might be noteworthy that you remember about that experience, just of the traveling at that point?

Freudenthal: No, I just had a wonderful time. It was very exciting. It was very nice. It was a big ship and the whole thing. We left from Hamburg, Germany with a lot of other refugees and came over and came to America. I remember seeing the statue of Liberty and a big to-do was made over that. But we did not land in Ellis Island as the generations before had done. We just land on a dock and we were reunited with my brothers, which was wonderful.

Interviewer: With the refugees that you came over with, were they people that you knew or did you meet other people coming from other destinations or how did that...?

Freudenthal: Yes, there were other people on that ship because not that many from one community come at one time. I don't recall who was on that ship. My mother and father of course knew some people, but I don't recall. That all I remember I was seasick at one point, that I do remember, which I still have a tendency to do.

Interviewer: Would it be that something like that would be sort of magnified in your consciousness as far as your memories at the time as opposed to some things that might be...?

Freudenthal: Absolutely, that's right.

Interviewer: So you arrived here, where did you settle once arriving in this country?

Freudenthal: At first, another uncle and aunt who had also come from Mannheim a year before. We stayed with them for a couple of days until we found an apartment, and we lived in Washington Heights which is at 163<sup>rd</sup> street in

Riverside Drive. It was a very nice area and we moved into a two-bedroom apartment with a kitchen and a living room and an entrance hall. And my two brothers and myself and my parents moved into that apartment. Most German refugees did that. You just had small quarters. And one of the items that everyone was told to purchase before leaving Germany were couches, sleeping couches, and they were made I believe specifically for this purpose, that you would be able to put your bedding underneath the cushions. It would lift up and underneath those cushions was the bedding. So that there were two couches like that in the living room, and every night my brothers would have to make up their beds, and every morning they would have to fold it in and put it in that part of the couch again. And this I imagine you can multiply by the hundreds of how many refugee people had to do that.

Interviewer: So you had a nice standard of living, nice comfort level at that time.

Freudenthal: We did, very comfortable standard of living, I must say that. And that's why I never felt the hard times that so many people did because I think it was because I was young. Now my parents cut their standard of living considerably. My brothers both went to work even though my younger brother was 16 and helped support the family. My father at that time never did work.

Interviewer: Because...

Freudenthal: He was already in his middle fifties and my brothers insisted he should not seek work. Work was hard to find with the influx of so many refugees, and so that my brothers said "Don't worry, we will take care of the family," and that's what they did.

Interviewer: How were they employed?

Freudenthal: The older of the two, Ehrher (sp), he was employed in I think in a paper manufacturing plant or something at the time and my younger brother, I don't recall, he had a number of job but I think he was working for a florist one time. Jobs were difficult to find, and you worked wherever you could find one.

Interviewer: And you were in school.

Freudenthal: I went to school and as I said, I was nine years old but they put me into the second grade which was demoralizing for me, I was taller and bigger than all the other kids, but since I did not know the language, they felt it was better for me to start in lower level. And one thing stands out in my mind—and how silly some of these things do stand out—I couldn't speak a word of English and there was a child sitting in front of me. He kept

stealing my pencils and I couldn't say anything. I knew the child was doing that but I didn't have the ability to communicate what was happening, so I let it by and that's silly. That's one thing I do remember, all the important things I forget.

Interviewer: Being in public school, I mean the quality of the education was...

Freudenthal: It was all right. It was good. New York had pretty good schools.

Interviewer: How about your Jewish education or activities?

Freudenthal: That went to a blinding halt in my family. Whatever Jewishness I learned, I learned from our background and what happened in our home. At the time we observed the holidays as they went. But my father lost all feeling for religion after we left. He said this can't happen and still have God. He just—he wouldn't. And because of that, he never sent me to synagogue, he never sent me to a religious school, which was all right with me because I was happy not to have to go to those places. But in retrospect it wasn't right.

Interviewer: Well then your circle of friends were fellow refugees or...?

Freudenthal: Right. That's right, the circle of friends because the neighborhood where we lived, all the German refugees who moved to. And because of that, the non-Jewish refugees, the people who came a generation earlier, they moved out, and that's the way it happens in New York. So we were surrounded by people of very similar backgrounds, which was wonderful. That made the adjustment much easier.

Interviewer: Now your father's attitudes were somewhat atypical of most of the community.

Freudenthal: I think so. I think so because friends of mine did go to the synagogue and did attend Sunday school. But he just felt very strongly about that, and I wouldn't say that my father became an atheist because he had learned all these things and he knew what to do, but it wasn't important anymore.

Interviewer: Possibly an agnostic or...

Freudenthal: Agnostic, that's right.

Interviewer: But now you had a choice at that point of about who your role models would be. Did your feelings—you probably didn't realize what your father was reacting to, so it was...

Freudenthal: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: ...probably a little difficult for you to identify, but by the same token, not having that role model as such, did you find that your interest drifted toward the—as far as Judaism—did you absorb the culture around you, or how did you...?

Freudenthal: No, we had a Jewish home, and I had Jewish friends, so whatever I did I still remained a Jew, and I knew what to do on the holidays. We still had our Passover and we still had the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, those things, but I did not have an actual education. I never learned Hebrew. I never went to school—that's the one thing that I really missed, that I never had that experience. But we were Jews and I knew I was a Jew. I mean, other people let you know you're a Jew, no matter if you want to be one or not, but I'm very proud to be one.

Interviewer: Any time some little kid is left out or something they feel a little bit, I mean it...

Freudenthal: Well, I didn't feel that I was left out. Don't get that impression. I imagine there were other children in the same situation. One of the things too, I think had my father felt strongly about joining a synagogue, he would have struggled to get me in there. But he really, really didn't believe and we never—but I did go with friends to synagogue once in a while, I knew the Rabbi. One of our peers became the Rabbi of the synagogue. He still is the Rabbi of that synagogue, who also came over at the same time.

Interviewer: What was your first awareness after having arrived here as to what was happening, what you had left behind and what was still going on once you had come over here? Were you in your early teens at that point or...?

Freudenthal: Well, I think you knew what was going on, slowly, you felt it. I think when you're 10, 11 years old or so and everybody is coming over here you realize—that's what you're asking me, what that period had meant. Of course nobody really knew the extent of the Holocaust and what was going on until during the war and after war.

Interviewer: But there were questions being asked even within this country to Roosevelt and he supposedly said that winning the war was the first priority and everything else would have to...

Freudenthal: Right. That's right. Well I wasn't aware.

Interviewer: I realize you...

Freudenthal: No. I didn't get that involved at that age. I did know that I had uncles and aunts left over there who never came out. One aunt survived in Berlin.



She had been married to a nice man who was not Jewish, and he hid her the whole time in Berlin, so that after the war a cousin's husband found her. But there were other aunts and uncles and my mother's other sister and her husband and her brother who went to work one day and never came back. So they left and never heard from them at all. So knowing that people were left over there and not hearing from them, I was aware of that. But it wasn't until after the war that you realized that some had survived and some have not.

Interviewer: Now your teenage years were pretty normal, I would guess. The next stage, of course I guess was getting married, and tell me about meeting your husband, that's kind of an interesting story.

Freudenthal: Yes, it is an interesting story. We had been invited, my whole family had been invited, to a wedding in New York at the Hotel New Yorker, and as typical young people you really don't want to...

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Freudenthal: Well, we were both born in the same city. We were both born in Mannheim, Germany. The families really knew each other, because Ernest is the same age as my brother Hans. So they were peers and did a number of the same things, and Ernest remembers me when I was a child, when I was a little girl, very little girl. At any event we were invited to the wedding at the Hotel New Yorker by a wedding of a young man who originally had come from Mannheim too. And Ernest was not invited to this wedding, but he had happened to be visiting New York at the time. And I really didn't want to go to the wedding because I just felt I had nothing, no fun, but my mother insisted. The one time we were all invited to one thing, she said I should come along. So I was quite upset and pouting and Ernest happened to be there at the wedding because his cousin said "If this young man knew you were in New York, he surely would want you to come to the wedding. So let's crash the wedding." So they crash, and I was there pouting, and my mother saw Ernest and recognized him, and she called him over and reintroduced us. By that time I was a little bit older and not the young child I was when he last saw me. And that's how we met. And since then, we've been going pretty strong, 41 years later.

Interviewer: Well, was it kind of an instantaneous attraction?

Freudenthal: No, it wasn't. Uh-uh. No, he took me over to the bar and he said let's have a drink, because he knew I was upset. And so the next day he called me, he felt that maybe we had imbibed too much, which was not the case, but he needed a blind date for somebody else and he called me. As it turned out, we sort of got together at that time the second date, and a year

later we got married. That's how we met.

Interviewer: What did you learn about his experiences growing up Jewish, because they certainly were different than yours?

Freudenthal: They were and I think the eight years difference that we have made a big difference. He of course went to religious school. I must say that in the direct [unintelligible 0:24:41.4], when I was sent to the Jewish school that last year, we had intensive study of Judaic learnings, history and some Hebrew. But Ernest had gone to school and to Hebrew school and bar mitzvah class and so that his background is much more varied and in depth than mine ever has been. But he'll tell you more about that. I don't feel comfortable in saying too much about his experiences.

Interviewer: But was there anything that he brought to the relationship with his experiences, or you're bringing your experiences that in terms of the experience now...I mean, obviously growing up in another country and coming over here, and the culture shock and different things...

Freudenthal: Yes, but you have to remember this was at least 10, 11 years later, by that time we have adjusted so well. What made so many of us refugees marry other refugees was the background. You'll find that a lot of German Jews married other German Jews, and that is really because you had such understanding for each other's background, which makes for a good marriage, I think. And a lot of terms you use, idioms you use, will pop out once in a while and the partner understands them, so in that respect I think it's good. Also, the fact that the families knew each other made it a wonderful experience, and just having things in common. But as far as the Holocaust or Hitler period, I don't believe that made any difference.

Interviewer: How about in terms of the raising of your children, their religious education and also the observances that you practice. You mentioned that you never...the holidays were always important but—

Freudenthal: Uh-huh. We certainly have a Jewish home where we educated our children in the traditional ways. We belonged to the temple, they were sent to Sunday school and confirmation and the Bat Mitzvah and Pam and Joan, both of our children have had a good background in Judaism because we feel that it is important. I think it gives meaning to life, stability, and a sense of belonging, and I think that's what people get from religion. And I think it's very important that they do. I don't want to give the impression that my father's feelings denied my Judaism or that I didn't feel that I was a Jew. It's just that I didn't have the educational background because of it.

Interviewer: Now how did your father—he seems very fascinating person, that's why I

keep focusing on him—but his attitudes affect your mother? Your mother didn't feel the same doubts...

Freudenthal: No, she didn't. My mother came out of a more traditional background, and certain things she did because of her parents. She would not sew on the Sabbath. Those are sort of things that she maintained initially. I think she sort of weaned from that later on, but I think that's because of her background. She felt that it wasn't the proper thing to do any kind of sewing, labor on the Sabbath. But she didn't say to my father, "She must go to religious school," and I think one of the—and thinking back now, it was the expense maybe of belonging to the temple. That it cost money to belong, and I know that they make, here in Nashville, if somebody can't afford it they will make exceptions, but I believe that pride would have...but we weren't the only ones who felt that way. There were others like that

Interviewer: Now your children—you mentioned it because being so young your own memories are not all that vivid for you. Is it frustrating for them to know that you grew up in this period, and of course maybe they want to know about it, and there's not a lot, in terms of specifics, that you can tell them.

Freudenthal: Well, I can tell them specifics that I have experienced, but my experiences were not that radical of experiences. They were very bland. Now, I have come to temple a number of years and spoken to the fourth grade, I believe it is, about my experiences, and I showed them pictures of when I was little. My experiences in school, the difference in first grade and what we did and how I came to America—that kind of experience was easy for these children to listen to. Much easier than if I had been a concentration camp member and had some harsher experiences. But these children asked good questions. But again, I can only tell you that mine were benign, and I didn't—the most difficult part of it was leaving friends behind, and that, to me, was the hardest. I was very fortunate.

Interviewer: How about your identification in terms of country and ethnicity and we've addressed the ethnicity issue, but in terms of—do you feel as though you were born and bred American or do you still have the ties...?

Freudenthal: I have no ties to Germany, none whatsoever. We've been back a number of times and my husband always felt drawn to going back to Mannheim. I could have cared less about going back, but I can see where he wanted to visit the cemetery. He wanted to visit the cemetery in Frankfurt where his father buried. And I have understanding for that and I certainly went along with him, but going back there, I saw every person there as a Nazi and I just could not feel comfortable there. And I spoke with citizens of Mannheim and they all immediately told me what a terrible time that was and how awful they feel about it. Of course over a certain age period, or

under a certain age, people are innocent because they're too young. They themselves were children. But when you see an older person, your mind automatically asks, "What were you doing at the time?" And I don't know if things were reversed, if I had not been a Jew living in Mannheim, would I have been benign, laid back, and let things happen, or would I have spoken up? I just don't know.

Interviewer: So you're filled more with questions than anything else about those people...

Freudenthal: Those people. That's right. To think they deprived my father of his livelihood, they broke families where they're in all parts of the world, that's a tragedy. But maybe something was gained from it, who knows.

Interviewer: Well, today we're further removed or 50 years removed in some cases from that period in time, and a lot of people are talking about now, it's a whole new world, that the reunification of Germany is a potential reality. You have the hate groups that are filled now with the notion that people are making these things up, because this is the last generation of survivors. What do you make of all these different things?

Freudenthal: Well, they're pretty terrible. As far as unification of Germany, I really feel that the Germans belong with each other. I don't know—you worry that somehow they would get too strong, but I personally feel anti-Semitism will crop up no matter what, and I doubt very much it would crop up in the same place. So whether you unify Germany now or not will not make any difference. Times get hard, there will always be a scapegoat and it's always the people on the bottom. And so I don't doubt that one day there'll be anti-Semitism on the rise again. We hope our children will never see that. That's why I think we have to give them a strong feeling of identity, that they know who they are and that they're aware.

Interviewer: And how about—we made reference to these hate groups and this notion of the Holocaust not having happened there's...

Freudenthal: That's another form of anti-Semitism, and it's frightening. It's very frightening.

Interviewer: Do you dismiss these as crazies and isolated-type situations or do you feel that...

Freudenthal: I think at this point they're crazies. I feel that way. I really do. I think that people who are in politics and who are in the leadership at this time are not that way.

Interviewer: So the danger would be just the ever-present one of anti-Semitism? There

is no additional danger resulting from people forgetting or this viewpoint being legitimized that it never happened?

Freudenthal: Well, that I would imagine, there certainly could be a danger to that, that people would forget. That's why it's our responsibility to do this. To speak up and to have archives and I think the Jewish community at large is doing a pretty job of keeping it alive, and I'm very grateful for that, because I'm not that active in the movement. But I really do think that is something to be very thankful for.

Interviewer: As someone who was somewhat of an eyewitness and yet sort of has that detachment because of your young years, is there some feeling or memory or something that you could communicate from your perspective, that of a child, that if people were not to realize or comprehend anything else you've said about this whole experience, would stick with them?

Freudenthal: I don't believe that I'm that profound a person that I can come up with one bit of last advice for anybody. I don't know. I wish I had something that I could leave...

Interviewer: What about something that would be representative of how this all impacted on a child? Because I think from that standpoint, obviously there are a lot of children involved but not that many...

Freudenthal: Well, I think it makes a difference in your emotional health and growth to have this trauma happen when you are young. The stability of your home disrupted, and having to make an adjustment in a new country, with new friends, new school experiences, I think it must somehow make an impact. I'm not saying that it's necessarily a negative impact, but I'm sure that's what has molded me. And sometimes adversity can strengthen a person as well. Not being as financially secure as we were in Germany and as well-off, my life certainly had changed. My father and mother walked 15 minutes to save a nickel and we did without. I remember that when we first came to America, I wanted dresses like the other children, because mine were all hand-embroidered, hand-smocked, beautiful dresses, but once I got into public school they weren't at all like what the children wore. So I begged and begged and finally I remember my mother took me downtown to Klein's on 14<sup>th</sup> street which was way downtown, but the dresses were cheaper there, and that's where I got an American dress, my first American dress. So I think the struggle to be the same as everybody around you is very important and that's what I felt. Another time, I remember we went to a park with other children, and I asked my father couldn't he sometimes treat my friend because my friend's family always treated us, and so my mother talked him into it, to buy something for my friend and I. So these are the little things that makes a difference in how you mature and your self-image, and that may have made an impact, but

that's what we all are. We are the result of our experiences. So who knows, what I would have been had I remained in Germany.

Interviewer: Is there anything that we haven't touched on that you might think is...?

Freudenthal: I think we're pretty well with everything. Thank you so much.

Interviewer: Thank you.