

**TRANSCRIPT:**

Elsa Frank

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Interviewer: We're talking with Elsa Frank. It might be helpful if you'd begin by telling us a little bit about life before the war, your earliest years as you remember them.

Elsa Frank: I grew up in a little town with four or five thousand inhabitants, in Germany.

Interviewer: The name of the town?

Elsa Frank: The name of the town is Hochst im Odenwald. So if you can repeat that, you already know some German. And as you all know by now, I'm 80 years old and I came to America when I was 26.

Interviewer: Okay, let's back up a little bit because we want to kind of take it chronologically.

Elsa Frank: Okay, yes.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about your early education.

Elsa Frank: All right. My...wait a minute, I'm going to read you that but I have to translate it into English, this is in German.

Interviewer: It might be easier if you just kind of paraphrased it. If you read it...because we are limited on time and we want to get everything.

Elsa Frank: Oh well.

Male: What is the book that you're reading from?

Elsa Frank: This book was brought out from the Germans in my little hometown. It should tell you all about the Jews who used to live there from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on and has a lot of pictures in it. But as I told you, I grew up in a little town and I have to tell you that in that little town, there were very few Jewish people. My best friends were non-Jewish people and actually, my very best friend, we were as teenagers, day and night together. Her name was Kada and I will never forget the time when she came in 1935 to tell me that her brother has joined the Nazi movement and has forbidden her to be my friend. And all these things which happened now, unbelievable and I never could understand it until it was too late.

Interviewer: How old were you at the time that your friend brought this message to you?

Elsa Frank: Oh, she was maybe 20, young. She actually was a year older than I was but then there were quite a few things I did...I want to tell you something...I went to school three years in primary school in Hochst and then I went to a bigger town where I had a better education and...

Interviewer: And you say you had a better education when you went to another town, was this because of the restrictions on Jewish children?

Elsa Frank: What?

Interviewer: Was this because of the restrictions on Jewish children at that time?

Elsa Frank: Oh no, no, no. You have to remember, this was a time in 1930, we didn't know anything about the difference. This is what I can tell you.

Interviewer: You moved to the other town to obtain a better education?

Elsa Frank: That's right, my parents...I had to go by train from the time I was nine years old in order to learn more than what I could learn in eight years of primary school in Hochst.

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm.

Elsa Frank: Well, I wanted to tell you, I...we were Germans in the true sense of the word but we were also Jews. Everybody in Hochst knew that we were Jews. We had a synagogue and we went there and other people went to church. Lots of times, I went to church with them in the morning, they went with me to synagogue. I give you an idea which is completely different from what you know, I realize that. But I have to be objective. I have to tell you how it actually was. I was an only child and had a very happy childhood. I swam in the Mümling – Mümling was our little river –and belonged to a girl's club which I later became a leader. My father belonged to a club, to a, well, kind of bridge club, and my mother belonged to a little Kaffeekränzchen – it's so hard for you to understand it – which means she belonged to a...in the afternoon, they had coffee and gossiped. And besides that, my father played violin and mouth organ, my mother sang and I played the piano. In Hochst, there were, besides my family, about 20 other Jewish families and we lived in complete harmony with the other Christian people. Anti-Semitism was not known. My friends, my girlfriends and boyfriends, they were either Protestants or Catholics and in our neighbor's house, I was like I was at home. When they were sitting down to eat, I didn't even knock on the door, I just...they had five children, I was an only child, just for sitting down, ate with them. Okay, you want me to tell you a little about school at that time.

Interviewer: Please, Hmm-hmm.

Elsa Frank: I don't like to repeat myself but I guess I have to. After three years in a primary school, I took a train every day those nine years and took it out to a bigger town, I told you that. It was actually a town, a school for girls, girls' school, and that was not only where you learn German and history and algebra, but also we learned French and English and of course my parents had to pay for that. In our class were two Jewish girls, one other and I, and under 15 girls, and we all went to our respective religious education. After I finished the school, I used to take a train every day to another town to go to a business college which I finished in two years and then I became a...I had an occupation in a tire factory in the office. And the main office of that, where I was, was in Frankfurt, a big town, actually, where the owners of the factory lived. It's like here, you have Kroger, the factory, the main seed is in Cincinnati. So, and they were also Jewish. After

1933, some of the workers in the factory I was working, came to my office and wanted to make unauthorized changes in the pay. They wanted to have the people who were Nazis getting more pay and I was the head of the payroll office. So of course, I couldn't do that, you know. So, but then, it was, that already became very serious and my bosses who lived in Frankfurt, they had me to go to Frankfurt where from there, I had to figure the cards, the payroll cards and send them back with the checks. For six months, I stayed there. If you don't understand it, I'd be glad for you to—

Interviewer: You might want to go into a little more detail on it.

Elsa Frank: Okay. And it was...a funny thing which happened when I was there for the first time in Höchst again, I went to that factory where I used to work and the man who did the payroll office was sitting there and I asked him how long he has been there. Of course, he didn't know who I was, and he said, "Oh, I'm here since 1937, and you know what we had to do? We had to send all the payroll cards to Frankfurt and there was a girl sitting there and had to figure them out and had to send them back to our town," to...I said, "Yeah, I know, that was me." It was I actually. Well, now, I'd like to tell you how it came that I came to America. In Höchst where I came from, it was an old Jewish men who happened to be the brother of Jacob May and Jacob May came every few years, came to Höchst to visit his brother. So of course, when he came...he had become a millionaire, he started with nothing. He had already left Germany in 1890 because there were about 12 children and they had...they're poor Jewish family. So, when he came again in 1936, we children always were so happy to see American millionaire, we always went to see him and he asked me if I would like to come to America. And this is very hard for everybody to believe even in 1936 where things already were very, very bad. I hesitated to have to leave my country where my great, great, grandparents were born and always the little hope it cannot go on like this. Then, after a few incidents which happened, I wrote to him about my...to get my papers and he send them right away and I left in 1937.

Interviewer: Did you leave alone or with your—

Elsa Frank: I was an only child. I left alone. My mother had died in 1936, half a year before I came to America. And there was another incident which made me think, when my girlfriend passed me on the street and did not dare to tell me how sorry she is that my mother died, because she was afraid to talk to me. If somebody would have seen it, they would have sent her to the concentration camp. This is what I really want to bring out here. You have to try to understand, what would

you have done if it would have happened like that? Would you have dared to go and say when you know they would have sent you to concentration camp? Could you have taken that step? This is what I feel. As I say, my story is a little different. I can...but I left my father. I did not tell him that I leave. I couldn't and the last time when I saw him, I told him, I said goodbye to him, but I left the next day. And my father was sent in 1942 to Theresienstadt where he died, where he was killed. I had no idea until about two years ago that where he was killed but I had a document which these people who brought all the...they found out where all the names of the people who went to Theresienstadt were and what happened to them. I have the document that he was...of course, I said he died on...exactly on the day in 1942 and the name, his real name, the name of his wife, my mother, there's a maiden name even on, exactly...this is one of the Germans. They had all these dates. So anyway, I wanted to tell you what made me actually change and wanted to get to America as fast as possible. There were several incidents which happened. One was on New Year's night, we went down this narrow street. Hochst is a little town, had narrow streets.

Interviewer: This is New Year's night of what year?

Elsa Frank: New Year's night, yes.

Interviewer: Which year now are we talking about?

Elsa Frank: That was 1936 and we passed on the street other young people and everybody said Happy New Year. Of course they said in German so Prosit Neujahr, and one of them who passed me said, "Happy New Year, you foreigner." Well, even then, it's hard to believe, it did not register. I thought, he is probably drunk, he has no idea of what he's saying. That was my idea. And then of course, I'll think of another incident when it was Passover, we all know what Passover is, and the Jewish people came out of the synagogue and Christian people came out of the church. And my father came out, and there were some hoodlums standing there, some...and one of them started to make anti-Semitic remarks to my father. And another man who had just come out of the church told those anti-Semites, he said, "Now, Max and I," Max was my father's name, "Max and I have right now prayed to the same God. Maybe he will forgive you but I cannot." So I thought, well, as long as people like these still speak out, that was always my hope, it cannot happen, what did happen. But anyway, it happened, you know, people passed me on the street, I was not bodily hurt, nobody hurt me. That was...you have to think it was 1936 to '37, but people who knew me all my life, they went on the other side when they saw me coming. These were the things which were really unbelievable to me and unreal. We had a Jewish

teacher, actually, he was a rabbi. In my opinion, he was one of the best rabbis that ever was, although he did not have the rabbi title. He taught me more in Jewish history and Hebrew than I ever thought I would need, but I did, I taught Hebrew here. He was not only a teacher of the Jewish children, he also had a choir. All the men in that little town belonged to that choir and he was the director, he was the person who taught them all the sounds.

Interviewer: Cantor?

Elsa Frank: Huh?

Interviewer: Cantor?

Elsa Frank: No, no, no, not cantor. You have to know that and I think this is very hard to understand. It had nothing to do with Jewish. He was—

Male: Choir director?

Elsa Frank: —the director of that...the choir director of all these men. It had nothing to do with being a cantor. He taught them all the German songs and everything you can imagine because this is...I wish I could make that clear. I can tell that it is very hard for...are you Jewish?

Male: No.

Elsa Frank: No, well, it is—

Interviewer: Well go ahead, this is for posterity so you go ahead and make the point.

Elsa Frank: Well, yeah, well, he was very much loved by everybody in Hochst and when he had his 25<sup>th</sup> year Jubileum, that he was for 25 years, they gave him a ball where everybody came, if it was a doctor, a lawyer, if it was a plain worker, everybody came to honor him on that day. Well, I also have to tell you that also, my

boyfriends were mostly non-Jewish and one especially, he died in 1929, it was a very, very hard time. When I say boyfriends, it is not like today that, you know, we were just friends, we've been to the movies, to dances but...I told you that my mother died in 1936.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Elsa Frank: I come from one thing to another.

Interviewer: Let's go back to the period where you said that Mr. May was asking you about coming to America and—

Elsa Frank: Well, okay, yeah, and so that...you want me to tell you now when I went to America? I left in...well, he told me, he sent me the papers and I did, and he did and I went in...in June '37, I took the boat to America. Even then, it was a terrible thing for me to leave. I knew I had to leave.

Interviewer: Where did you arrive?

Elsa Frank: What was that?

Interviewer: Where did you arrive?

Elsa Frank: Where?

Interviewer: What part of America? Did you come directly to Nashville?

Elsa Frank: Oh, in New York.

Interviewer: Okay.

Elsa Frank: Yeah, I came by boat.

Interviewer: I understand.

Elsa Frank: Yeah.

Interviewer: But did you go from New York directly to—

Elsa Frank: Oh, I was two weeks in New York with friends who had come—

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm.

Elsa Frank: Mr. May—

Interviewer: Let's wait until—

Male: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay. When we last left, you had arrived in America.

Elsa Frank: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you were mentioning coming to Nashville and with a job.

Elsa Frank: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, let's go into that a little bit.



Elsa Frank: Yeah. Mr. May and his daughter-in-law came to pick me up. I had to go of course by train from New York to Nashville. I think it took about 26 hours at that time. But they were on the station and Jack May, the first thing was, "You can already start tomorrow in the office if you want to." It was on a Wednesday. To me, that was just the greatest thing that could have happened. And his daughter-in-law says, "Let her wait until Monday." I'll never forget that. It's the little things you can never forget. But anyway, what do you like for me to tell you now? When I went back to Germany the first time...

Interviewer: Now, was that several years later or...we kind of want to make sure that we—

Elsa Frank: No, I came in 1937. In 1962, I went with a group to Europe with another girlfriend from here.

Interviewer: You know, it might be easier if we kind of cover the period between '37 and '62 and then—

Elsa Frank: Okay, '37 and '62, well, I wasn't married, I came by myself. In 1938, my fiancé...actually, we were engaged in Germany but we didn't know if we ever would see each other again but I went to...every Friday, I was invited to the Mays' for dinner and Jack...and Mortimer May was his son and he was also great in every way to help. I have to tell you more about him. And they made...they said, "Well then, do you have a boyfriend Elsa?" And I said, "Well, I have somebody in Germany but I don't know, I need papers if he wants to come here." And then Jack said, "I'd give him the papers," and then it was not only...then Mortimer, his son, spoke up and said, "Now, you give Elsa the papers, I give her fiancé the papers." See, and I was so afraid I would not have anybody to bring him over but anyway, he came a year later and two months later, we got married. We were the first refugee couple who got married in Nashville. So anyway, then, three years later, we were parents of a son and another three, four years later, another one. We have two sons. Oh, one lives in Charlotte, he's married, has two...I have two grandsons. The other one is in Colorado, he's not married but I went to see him.

Interviewer: During this period, were you settled and were married and had a job and so forth.

Elsa Frank: Yeah.

Interviewer: Your lives at that point were fairly secure, did you...once you were able to have your fiancée come to America, did you have any...did you try to find out about what was going on still in Germany?

Elsa Frank: Oh of course. You can imagine, my father was still there and we also brought over some cousins of mine because we got papers for them too which...they live now in San Antonio. But also, we found out, the last letter I got from my father—I still have it in case you are interested—was...I got a letter in 1942, we had written to him that he was a grandfather, and he wrote, he was in the meantime, they put him in a home for old age people. And of course, he couldn't write anything, they got the middle name for the Jewish men was Israel, you know that? And for the women, Sarah. It showed that they were Jewish. That also shows you how stupid the whole thing was. The last letter I got from my father, it came from Max Israel Herzfeld. Yeah, and he was...he said how happy he was...that he had a grandson, how he hopes maybe...and then of course, you could tell that he had no hope to ever to see him, okay. But in 1942, he was sent to Theresienstadt, it was the whole...all of those people.

Interviewer: Had you been given the middle name Sarah before you came over? Was that after?

Elsa Frank: No, no, I did not have it. I was still...my passport still says I'm German. You see? Nothing at all about that. And also, I did not tell you, I had a lot of help from the mayor in order...when I wanted to immigrate to America, the mayor from our little town came to our house on a Saturday night and said Elsa, I heard you can go to America. I want you to go as fast as you can because I know a lot of things and I will help you in any way I can to make it easy for you, which he did.

Interviewer: So, going back to the point you're on now, your children had been born here?

Elsa Frank: Yes, and by the way, the youngest one is born on the Fourth of July. The newspaper had...had in the paper, a firecracker was born to Mr. and Mrs. [unintelligible 0:28:08.8] Frank.

Interviewer: Well now, at that point in time, when your children were born and ready to be educated and maybe received some Jewish training, what kind of decisions were made at that point between you and your husband?

Elsa Frank: Well, we...my husband worked also in the May Hosiery Mills first but very short time, then he sold vacuum cleaners, Electrolux, and then he had a little store where he went to people and sold ready-to-wear things. He died in 1956, heart attack. My children were 11 and 15 and if you know, we've had a hard time. I worked in the May Hosiery Mills and then when Norman...when I was pregnant with Norman in 1945, I quit because my husband had done pretty good. Even his English wasn't very good and I also tell you, when he sold Electrolux, he was a very good salesman but one day he came home, I said, "Well, did you sell anything?" He said, "Yeah, I sold an Electrolux to a woman who I demonstrated and I told her everything and when I was through, she said, 'Well, I'm going to take it, also, I didn't understand a word you were saying.'" So now, I also was very, very lucky here, when I was here the first year when I wasn't married. I had room and board in one of the very well-to-do families. She wanted to have somebody at night to stay with her in her house. And in the morning, there came two servants, a man and a woman, and they gave me breakfast and I was sitting there, I felt like I was...yeah, I was very, very lucky and I stayed there until the last day before we married, you know when I married. And she couldn't get over it, how could we get married on that little money we're making? But we made it.

Interviewer: Well now, your husband became fairly prosperous?

Elsa Frank: No, we didn't become prosperous.

Interviewer: You said he was a good salesman.

Elsa Frank: Well, he made a good living, I could quit working but then when he had his first heart attack, I got a job again with The Kroger Company. I was 20 years there.

Interviewer: Now, you mentioned that, as you said, your children were born in Nashville.

Elsa Frank: Yeah.

Interviewer: And educated here. What kind of religious education did you—

Elsa Frank: Oh now, well, we belong to a temple. Oh yes, and well actually, Melvin, the oldest one, was bar mitzvah and then the youngest one, when he was 13 years old, my husband had the heart attack and I just couldn't get through to see myself having a bar mitzvah and he didn't have a bar mitzvah but of course, both of them, they are confirmed. And the oldest one, especially, he is very active. He doesn't even belong to a temple. He belongs to the conservative and his wife, they are very active there.

Interviewer: A lot has been written about the children of survivors but what about the experiences of the children of refugees, how foreign are your experiences to them? Are they very real in terms of what you've told them or—

Elsa Frank: They have a tape also from what I told...how I grew up and everything. They are very, very interested. And...oh, you're talking about my children, I'm thinking of my grandchildren even. They know all about it. Yes, they know and they're very, very interested in that.

Interviewer: Now, since they've gone on and have lives of their own and you've...I guess, what's appropriate to ask, how you view it now because so many years have gone by and yet it's a situation that's so real and it's probably...

Elsa Frank: There isn't a day go by where I don't think about it. But again, I left 1937, the rest of it which was so horrible, I wasn't there. But of course, believe me, I know what happened and we will never forget and I will never, ever forget it and I told them that when I came here too. And I will try to forgive some of the things which happened. Some of them, you can never forgive but forget, you can nothing. I told them that. Well, I didn't even tell you, when I came back for the first time in 1962—

Interviewer: Please do.

Elsa Frank: Okay. In 1962, I told you, I went on a...it was a group to Europe and one of my best girlfriends went with me and we...our first stop was London where we were supposed to stay for three days. And that was something I had in my mind, I didn't dare to tell anybody. I do want to go back and see how it is now in Germany, in Hochst, didn't tell. But after one day, I told her, the group leader, that I would like to meet him in Germany again, that was the next stop. And I

will meet him but I want to leave two days earlier. So I left and I went by plane, London to Frankfurt, you know, have you heard of Frankfurt?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Elsa Frank: And from there, by train to Hochst. And the closer I came, the more upset I became. And even tranquilizer, which I had never taken before, didn't do any good. Well, I'll get up...it's about a three-quarter hour train ride from Frankfurt to Hochst and when I got out, I was...even the train station was like I had in my mind, even the children with their books waiting for the train, the same train to take them to the same town where I had my education, and I went down the Bahnhof Strasse, the street and I knew, where everybody used to live and of course, nobody can imagine how it was, how upset I was. But I went down and went and then all I wanted to do, where I was telling myself is to go to the grave of my mother. See, we had a Jewish cemetery there in Hochst but not only the people from Hochst, the Jews, but from the whole neighborhood, all the little towns that...they were buried there. So, this is what I've told...I went down the street and went to the office where I knew, where the mayor used to live. Where the mayor had his office, you know, the...what do you call that? The...well, what do you call—

Interviewer: City Hall?

Elsa Frank: Yeah, City Hall, exactly. And I went up the steps and two men came down and I asked them if they know where the mayor was. And one of them said, I am the mayor, just go upstairs and take a seat, I'll be back in a minute. So I was sitting there across our former house and of course, tears coming down. And the mayor came back, I...that was in '62 you have to remember. I excused myself for my behavior and I told him that I came from Hochst. He knew...he was not from Hochst. He was from a little town. At that time, they were so afraid to have...maybe a Nazi would become mayor that they sent somebody from another town who they knew beforehand that he wasn't a Nazi. Is that clear or not?

Interviewer: This was the time of the trials?

Elsa Frank: Yeah, the change, yes. And he told me he knows all about the Germans...the Hochst, the Jews who lived here. He gave me a book where he wrote in deepest

remorse, educate it to you, and was a hope of peace and...but he never was a Nazi but that's how it is that he felt. Anyway, look, I could tell you, I could sit here all day and will tell you, I don't think you wanted me to do that. Do you?

Interviewer: To tell me what?

Elsa Frank: Well, what else I have to tell you, it's so much. Well I asked him, I said, I only came back, I want to see, I want to go to the cemetery where my mother is buried. He said, we tried to keep the cemetery in good condition but quite a few of the stones were demolished in those terrible years. Well, like a miracle, my mother's stone was completely all right and I have pictures of it when I went there. Well, in the next room was the secretary of the mayor sitting, and she heard that and she had heard about me too. She was of course younger but her mother was one of my good friends too so she called her mother and by the time I came down the steps, half of the inhabitants were there, to welcome me. They couldn't believe that...they were so happy that I had come back and they told me...they asked me about other Jewish people because everybody knew each other. Not only the people you knew, you knew everybody's dog, everybody's cat, that's how that place was. So, I told them from some I knew that went to Israel or to America and then they asked me about others, and I said, "They are with the six million which you have killed." I told them that. Well, the man, the second man who came down when I asked about the mayor, I told the mayor that nobody would know me after 25 years. So he said, it was his secretary, call up [Paul Kreide (sp) 0:39:59.5] was his name and in came the same man who had come down with him. And the mayor said, "[Paul (sp) 0:40:06.9], who did you say that lady was?" He said, "Oh, that is Elsa Herzfeld. Her mother always gave me bread with her homemade raspberry preserves." And so, everybody knew then who I was. That's when all these people came. They asked me if I had seen Kada. That was my best girlfriend. And everybody knew how close we were as teenagers. So I said "No, does she still live here?" "Oh, yes," so they called her and we met in the middle of the street. And she said she never could forgive herself what she did. She had married and she had married, actually, also a good story, she married a man, a lawyer. And Kada...that's her name, Kada, had told me, shortly after I left, how she found out how rotten Hitler and everything including his...her mother had a little grocery store, actually, fruit and vegetable store and had sold a cauliflower to an old Jewish lady living next to her and that had been observed. And the Nazis came in the middle of the night, took her mother to prison because she had sold a cauliflower to an old Jewish lady. I just want to tell you that I...to give you an idea of how things were. But she went to the prison and asked if they would take her instead of her old mother but there was a lawyer there who helped her to free her mother and also let her go and this lawyer became her husband. And he told me that there is not a day going by where Kada is not talking about our former friendship and that was the happiest day of her life. In the

meantime, we write...and of course, we are friends again. See, I guess a lot of people would say, "How can you be friends with somebody again?" Yes I can, because I know how it was. I also told her that it had come that far, that I cannot forgive you, that some of those highly intelligent people didn't see beforehand what was in store for them. But they all went with the flow, that I can never forgive, but I can understand that you couldn't tell me you're sorry my mother died. Well, you want me to quit?

Interviewer: No, no, not at all. But it seems, talking now when you mentioned that—

Male: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay, you mentioned that you saw that you had some compassion for your girlfriend's situation and that her hands were basically tied and that things had gotten to that point. Once you were over here in relatives' safety and others like you, there was this outrage that was being communicated to American government officials that we've been told that they chose to look the other way but can you kind of talk a little bit about what was done to alert Roosevelt and so forth?

Elsa Frank: Well, we all know that Roosevelt did not do what he could have done. Again, they said now, that even...they heard the stories, those horrible stories from what happened. And as an excuse, they said, they couldn't believe it, that actually the things which happened. We know that Roosevelt did not do what he could have done, as much as I admired him on most things. We were worried about...see, we went to other Jewish people who...and begged for affidavits for our relatives. And some of...we could bring some over but what have...you probably can hear more about that from other people. We were so worried, you know, and we thought, will it not ever end.

Interviewer: By the same token, you mentioned that this has been now, 50 years, well, 60 years ago, this has happened and we've had two generations that have grown up since then to the point where you have people today actually saying that it never happened. How does someone who has been through it—

Elsa Frank: Listen, who said that would never happen?

Interviewer: That had—

Elsa Frank: That it did never happen? There is...I know there is somebody in Chicago or professor or something, well, when I told them in Germany, they said, they couldn't believe that there are still some people who said it didn't happen. You won't...I don't know if you would find in Germany somebody who will tell you it has never happened. I don't know. I didn't meet any of those. Maybe there are but the ones I have found, they tried to do everything to make it a little bit easier on them to understand. Not to understand but to get through with it. They are just...feel as bad and I tell you again, I'm talking about the people I have met now in those years.

Interviewer: But you hear that's being said now even in this country, a lot among the hate groups, they use that as justification for—

Elsa Frank: Oh, I know. Yeah, I know that. They say it never happened. And I told them that didn't...those people in Germany, I said, "Do you know there are still some people who say it has never happened?" No they won't. We can't understand that. It's all so, you know, how anybody can believe anybody who will say it cannot...it did not happen, these people...we always have people like these.

Interviewer: But do you just look at that attitude as a bunch of crazies or do you see this as a serious threat to—

Elsa Frank: I don't see...there are too many people who know and who will not believe that, who will not even argue about it because it just doesn't need any arguing.

Interviewer: But this is the last generation of people who were around, who have it on tape, but is there going to be a danger later on because we are...as the years go by, we are so far removed.

Elsa Frank: Well, look, I cannot tell what will happen later on but as I...I was always an optimist and I do not believe that anything like this could ever happen again or that anybody ever would say that didn't happen. It's all documented.



Interviewer: Do you have any particular sense of fear about the talk of the reunification of Germany?

Elsa Frank: Yes. I wouldn't say fear. I would say more anxious. I had a letter the other day, yesterday actually, from that mayor who I told you in 1962 who I met and we are...became great friends again. Well, we never were enemies because he is a very big Socialist, and he wrote me a long letter, of course in German, what he thinks about it. And he said that the fear is there if they become big again. We do not hope, we do not think so, we do not hope so, but it's always in the back of our mind. And he is for the...that they will be together, he is for that but he also thinks and hope that...he does not...he feels like I do. I do not believe that anything will happen again, that a man like a Hitler would come. But, we didn't believe it at that time. I remember when I said, very first, when they talked about it, I said, "Okay, let me see what he can do." You see, not ever thinking what could actually...because Germany was in a terrible shape. You know that there was no work, nothing, and he promised work and all of that, and then before that happened that he was talking about the Jews also, although, we should have known because he had written *Mein Kampf* and nobody read it. See?

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm.

Elsa Frank: Nobody read that. He had written it out exactly what he would do and how he felt about the Jews. We just didn't pay attention. The Jews, we German Jews who were too ignorant. I wouldn't say ignorant, it was just such an impossibility that things like this could happen.

Interviewer: So, you don't find it incomprehensible that we didn't pay attention because it just...

Elsa Frank: Well, that America didn't pay attention?

Interviewer: At the time. That you're saying that *Mein Kampf* was kind of dismissed as the work of a—

Elsa Frank: Well yeah, of a madman, you know, but at that time, very few people...well, I don't know if anybody could see what really would have...what would happen in 1942 in all of the concentration camps and the gas chambers.

Interviewer: We've touched quite a few bases.

Elsa Frank: Hmm-hmm.

Interviewer: If you were to be able to speak with everybody one-on-one who'll be viewing this tape, what is the...of all the things that you've had to tell us, what is the point that you would like to leave with everyone as being the most important if they were to listen to nothing else that you had to say?

Elsa Frank: Okay. I'd tell you one thing, let your voice be heard before the fear of speaking out is there. Do you understand what I say or not? Don't wait until it is impossible to speak. Speak when you see something and when you see something on the right side which is bad, don't put your head towards the left side and don't look at it, but look and do something about it. Don't wait until it is too late, because that's what we did.

Interviewer: Is there anything that we've left out that you feel is important?

Elsa Frank: Well...

Interviewer: Obviously, we can't cover it all by any stretch of imagination.

Elsa Frank: Oh, I know.

Interviewer: But we covered the important points.

Elsa Frank: Well, you look at different things, I...there are so many things which happened when I came back. I had a very good friend who was the oldest son of [unintelligible 0:52:27] in Hochst and I went there and asked where Franz is,

that was his name, and the waitress said, "Oh, you know Franz?" I said, "Yeah, I knew him before you did." And she said, "Well, he lives in a nearby town." And in the evening when I was there, had my supper, I was with some other people around, she told me I was wanted on the telephone and she had called Franz and had told him somebody wanted to talk to him. So, when he got over it, who was on the other side, we spent a day together in Frankfurt before I met my other people again and all we were talking about was former times. He was of course not Jewish, you realize that, and we were talking about when we went to another town with our bicycles to a dance and I had told him, "Drive ahead so the Nazis here won't see us together." And well, as I say, so many things which I could tell you. We met, in the meantime, he had married and I have been in his house several times now. And we always, every time that talk comes about Nazis which you can't help, he had never done anything to, you know, but he had also never done anything to avoid that horrible...and that is what he felt guilty about, that he did not open his mouth. Every time that it came, he went out of the room and cried, he could not get over it, that it had happened because we were just as good friends as one can be. Well, a lot of more things, I think maybe Hedy Lustig told you about the time, a week...oh, a year ago, last November when we were invited, all the Jewish people, you heard about that?

Interviewer: Yes.

Elsa Frank: Did she bring pictures too?

Male: I'm trying to remember...I believe, she did have some pictures but not from that trip. I think from—

Elsa Frank: Oh, not from that trip? Well, they did not know what they can do for us. We of course had room and board in the best places which they had paid for, everything they paid for except they didn't pay for the airplane ticket. Some towns even did do that. They do that now in every town practically. They just...they wanted to come, the people, back and show them how they feel now. You see, and I for one appreciate that. You cannot blame these people who weren't even alive and try now so much to do something for those Jews. They didn't do anything wrong. They weren't even alive and they brought that book, that's what I wanted...this is the synagogue in Hochst.

Interviewer: One thing that I would like you to clarify is that you've said at several points throughout our conversation that basically, somebody else might tell us different but this is your story.

Elsa Frank: Yes.

Interviewer: Why do you feel that...because you are a refugee as opposed to a survivor, is that what you're saying? Were your stories different somebody else's or—

Elsa Frank: No, because a very few people are 80 years old who have lived in Germany in a little town where there was no difference between Jews, and everybody loved each other. It was just as I told you about that rabbi in Hochst. They made now, they called...they made a street and called it [unintelligible Wieg 0:56:44.8] a street called after him, you see? And these people didn't know him either, who did all that but they heard about it.

Interviewer: All right.

Elsa Frank: So, well, what else do you want to know? It's enough. But you see here, this book is what...they brought out the things which I had no idea, all the houses in here of all the Jewish people who lived there. Our house is there, everybody's house, and they have all the dates when the first Jews came to Hochst. All the names and of course, our name is there. All the business that...when there was a wedding for instance, [unintelligible 0:57:46.6] oldest daughter got married that was in the...and it was a wedding where everybody was invited and it was in all the papers. I don't know if I make myself clear. It has nothing to do with Jewish at all, and they have all that, and I have it too. I have everything about it which is of course for my children and grandchildren. One of these days when I have time, I'm going to translate it but I don't think I'll ever do it. I teach German now in Hillsboro High School, adults, people from 18 to 80. This is my 20<sup>th</sup> year I teach. I even...usually, I don't teach in summer but they asked me that some people want so I have one summer school on Thursday and I have about 10 people coming privately to my house and I do, I did teach Hebrew here in the temple. Until now, they have enough Cantor teachers now. I used to teach to the bar mitzvah boys, but I learned that in Germany of course, to learn Hebrew. Now, I don't speak it much but I read it and can translate prayer. I was also awarded Woman of the Year of my Business and Professional Women's Club and have a lot of good friends and I feel very good, very happy.

Interviewer: That might be the appropriate place to end.

Elsa Frank:

Hmm?

Interviewer:

I said that might be the appropriate place to end. I think that's a very optimistic note.