

Transcript:

Walburga Engel

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Interviewer: In Munich, Germany, her dad's occupation, he was president of a company, and we're going to talk about that now. Her mom was born January 17th, 1902 in Dresden, Germany, and she was a housewife, an unusual housewife.

Walburga Engel: She was, yes. At that time, all women were housewives, I guess.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about your parents, your dad and what he did. What kind of company he was president of?

Walburga Engel: Okay. My father was trained as an engineer, and his specialty was X-rays that were developing at that time. He knew Röntgen personally. And my maternal grandfather was a physician who did X-rays, so they were a lovely combination, and they liked each other throughout. My father was very fond of his in-laws. After they divorced and my mother didn't do anything anymore, he kept paying for the maintenance of their graves all the years. And then after he died, my brother did it and then my brother gave it to me to do it, but I can't remember where the thing is now which is pretty terrible.

Interviewer: Where did they die? Was it in Germany?

Walburga Engel: My father died in Munich, and my maternal grandfather died in—where did he die—in Berlin, I think, yes.

Interviewer: This was during all the moving around?

Walburga Engel: No, he died in 1935 or something, right after Hitler came to power. It didn't affect him at that time, because in the beginning, they lived in Nuremberg, my

parents. And then my grandmother gave up their apartment. They owned a house in which they had an apartment and rented the apartment.

Interviewer: Where is this? This was in...?

Walburga Engel: In Nuremberg. They stored the furniture with a Christian family there. The housekeeper, who took them in the beginning—it was very interesting that the population was not at all all with Hitler. That's what I tried to say when I spoke there once. Eventually the part that was with Hitler then became so powerful that the ones that weren't with him had...

Interviewer: No choice.

Walburga Engel: No choice but to go with it or be exterminated themselves. That's why I say that so much fault lies with the countries that supported Hitler, because in the beginning they could have just smashed him, and then he would never have had all this power.

Interviewer: You kind of feel like it could have been stopped?

Walburga Engel: The what?

Interviewer: It could have been ended in the beginning if people saw that he was bad?

Walburga Engel: That's what it was. Everybody supported him, not only, but nobody let the Jews come in. The US was closed except to the Einsteins. Not everybody is an Einstein.

Interviewer: Where were you in 1935?

Walburga Engel: I was in [unintelligible 0:03:25]. When my grandfather died in Berlin, in 1936, it wasn't that terrible, that is. What was terrible was this. He was on a wheelchair. He was an old man in on a wheelchair, and he lived in Berlin because my mother had divorced at that time, that's right, and lived in Berlin. My grandmother

wanted a vacation, so for a certain period she sent him to us. When he went out on a wheelchair—he looked extremely Jewish—then some youngsters joke, make fun remarks and is very ugly. Now, my mother refused then to walk out with him with the wheelchair. I walked out with him all the time and talked back to these youngsters.

Interviewer: What did they say? What kinds of things?

Walburga Engel: His looks. Basically, they made ugly, funny remarks like they used in the countryside if somebody was laying something.

Interviewer: About his physical appearance?

Walburga Engel: About the physical, yes, appearance.

Interviewer: But they didn't call him names, they didn't know he was Jewish or they know he was...?

Walburga Engel: Oh, yes, that's why they remarked because he looked so Jewish. That's why they made these physical remarks.

Interviewer: Looking Jewish was...

Walburga Engel: Now, however, he had a male nurse, I took him out when the male nurse was on the day off, and that male nurse was a German male nurse. He was very nice and he said it is horrible that these youngsters do such a thing to a sick old man.

Interviewer: He knew what was right?

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: He knew how to be kind.

Walburga Engel: He knew, right, but my grandfather didn't understand any of it anymore.

Interviewer: He was very sick?

Walburga Engel: He was old and paralyzed...semi-paralyzed, but he was on the wheel chair and he had a male nurse. That's was it.

Interviewer: How did that affect you though?

Walburga Engel: That affected me. That's when I made up my mind, I'm going to do something about it because I liked him very much. It really made me made up my mind at that time.

Interviewer: That you were going to fight the cruelty?

Walburga Engel: Yes. That's right.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Walburga Engel: How old was I then? I was 11 or 12 years old.

Interviewer: A very impressionable adolescents, the beginning...

Walburga Engel: Wait a second. In the beginning I was, that was even in '32, when Hitler came to power, yes, 12 then, 12 years old.

Interviewer: You were 12?

Walburga Engel: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: That's that very delicate age. That's the beginning of becoming a woman, or puberty, and everything affects you deeply.

Walburga Engel: Yes, puberty came earlier for me than that. That wasn't anything mixed up, it's puberty, puberty.

Interviewer: But you were sensitive and you were going to fight.

Walburga Engel: Yes, sensitive because he was such a gentle man. And when my parents divorced, I stayed a year with my maternal grandparents in Nuremberg in their home, and he was so very nice and helped me with my homework because it was totally different curriculum, and so he was very, very nice.

Interviewer: You left Germany after that?

Walburga Engel: I left when my mother remarried. In 1934, I think, my mother remarried and then I moved with her to Italy in her new place. We gave up the place in Berlin. My grandmother then went to [San Mareno in Ponceon (sp) 0:07:21.7] where she lived for awhile then.

Interviewer: Did your mom live Germany, was there any reason, did Hitler motivate her to leave?

Walburga Engel: To remarry? I think so.

Interviewer: To marry and leave Germany.

Walburga Engel: I think that was the main. She had a lot of marriage proposals at the time but I think that the choice was determined that that was a way to get out of Germany.

Interviewer: Was she afraid for everybody?

Walburga Engel: She was very much afraid for herself.

Interviewer: Your mom was kind of royalty, wasn't she?

Walburga Engel: No. She wasn't royalty herself, but later she was connected with some other royalty. It is a very distinguished family. She didn't have much sense for all her other relatives. She had such nice relatives. I remember them very fondly, cousins and uncles. She had no brothers and sister. Once she was in Italy, she couldn't care less what happened to them, and so they all eventually went into the concentration camps and died in the grizzliest manner.

Interviewer: You haven't found any of them, they've all perished?

Walburga Engel: There is one distant one alive in Zurich, Switzerland still.

Interviewer: That you keep in touch with?

Walburga Engel: Not much. Not much because she's so distant. We didn't have much, when my brother was alive, he kept touch with her.

Interviewer: Did she marry a Jewish man? Was the man Jewish?

Walburga Engel: He was half Jewish, her second husband, yes.

Interviewer: So he was also afraid?

Walburga Engel: Literally, he wasn't affected until the very end. Until the very end then they went to Switzerland.

Interviewer: What was it in Italy when you were there? How long were you in Italy?

Walburga Engel: How long was I in Italy? I was in Italy from when she remarried in '33, at the end of '33. I think the beginning of '34, I don't remember now. Until...this is off and on, the period I was in Switzerland, until '49. That's right, my step-father died in '49.

Interviewer: So you were in Italy from around '34 but you had to leave in between?

Walburga Engel: Yes, in between in Switzerland, in Lausanne.

Interviewer: What was it like in Italy? What was the feeling there for you? That's when you were in the resistance then?

Walburga Engel: Yes. We lived in a small town. Most of the people were absolutely not involved favoring this. Of course, many people were fascist and wanted the Axis to win out of patriotism. In the small town, I couldn't say that there was an active anti-Semitism. There wasn't none. There were...Jews lost their jobs, eventually they were rounded up, but they were also much hidden. The little guy in Italy wasn't anti-Semitic, exceptions of course, were there. There, I didn't...like when my step-grandfather died, he died in Biel. That was in the heart of the German occupation there. He died, he was hidden, but he died, and they had a funeral and thousands of people went to the funeral.

Interviewer: They didn't want to stop that, there was no need to.

Walburga Engel: That's why I'm saying, you can't say that all of Europe was in favor of anti-Semitism. That's something they dreamed up here, I think. I had an uncle in Nuremberg who was a gynecologist and extremely well-liked. For the poor, he did it for free. He was extremely liked. When Hitler came to power, he took his little daughter and himself and suicided. It was terrible. On the funeral, again, thousands of people came to the funeral, like a public manifestation of sympathy for him. That was in the beginning of it. Later, nobody would have dared to do that.

Interviewer: How did that affect you? You knew about that? You knew about the suicide?

Walburga Engel: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: How did that affect you?

Walburga Engel: It affects me terrible, terrible because I think you shouldn't suicide, it's running away. He didn't see any way to do anything active, so he didn't want to expose his child to any horrors, so he just took her with him and they put on the gas in their kitchen.

Interviewer: You saw it as giving up?

Walburga Engel: Yes, I thought of it as giving up.

Interviewer: He's giving up his life and his daughter's.

Walburga Engel: Yes. I can understand, because he didn't want to expose that girl to such horror.

Interviewer: But you chose a different way.

Walburga Engel: What?

Interviewer: You chose a totally different way for yourself.

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: At that same time, did that make you more determined to fight?

Walburga Engel: Yes. All this made me more determined to fight. Now, the difficult problem is how do you fight? How do you fight and what do you do? When we were in Italy, until the Germans came, there wasn't much to fight; there wasn't much you could do. Afterwards, then the partisans formed up in the mountains, and

then you could do something. You could carry weapons to the mountains, and you could carry food, and you could do all these things. And these things, I thought were useful. And you could carry secret messages around which you took under your, in your mouth, so in case, you could swallow them.

Interviewer: You carried weapons and messages?

Walburga Engel: Yes, messages.

Interviewer: You were 15 or 16?

Walburga Engel: You can take messages. The messages you take in your mouth. If you get detected, nobody gets the message because you swallow it. You put it under your tongue, so then it is invisible and if it need be, you just get it up and swallow it, so that—

Interviewer: Were you afraid? Did you do this? You carried the messages?

Walburga Engel: I wasn't afraid. That's the strange thing. I wasn't afraid. I knew it was dangerous, but it didn't affect me that much because I really wasn't that much afraid because life wasn't so good that it was so much to lose. It didn't affect me that much.

Interviewer: Did you have the sense of this was something that you had to do, that you had to fight?

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: You weren't going to give up but you were going to—

Walburga Engel: Yes. I wasn't going to give up and I was going to fight because somebody had to fight and I thought not enough people were fighting.

Interviewer: Were you alone? When you brought up the weapons and when you carried messages, did you—

Walburga Engel: You do that alone. Sometimes you were with another person but most of the time you do that alone.

Interviewer: Was it a long walk or a long...

Walburga Engel: A long walk, it's very high heels, because you have to look like you...

Interviewer: Going out on the town.

Walburga Engel: Yes. That was the worst part, with the high heels and uncomfortable shoes and all the blood came in the feet because when you walk in difficult terrain with such uncomfortable shoes. That was the only thing that was really horrible.

Interviewer: It was painful then.

Walburga Engel: That was quite painful, yes, but it was safer than putting on hiking shoes because they would make you conspicuous.

Interviewer: You would immediately be someone they would...

Walburga Engel: Yes, so you always had to look like silly, on a leisure trip.

Interviewer: Leisure.

Walburga Engel: You had to do it.

Interviewer: What were the partisans like? What would happen when you brought whatever they needed?

Walburga Engel: Sure they were glad to get the weapons or medicine, medicinals they needed very much. They were a mixed batch, but some did it for the fight and some did it, at least they have a choice, the other one was being taken over and shipped to Germany, by the German soldier. Not all really did it out of enthusiasm. Some did it as a lesser evil.

Interviewer: Some of them were doing it to survive.

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: Some people were doing it because they knew that they were fighting something that was very evil.

Walburga Engel: Yes, the intellectual basically did it because they knew how to fight and when to fight, because they could have found a way to hide. But the masses, most of them just did it because the other alternative for young men was that the Germans would grab them and use them then in the German army.

Interviewer: They had to hide that way?

Walburga Engel: It was for hiding. Not for all, some really fought, but for some of them...

Interviewer: How many of them were there? How many people did you...?

Walburga Engel: There were plenty of people.

Interviewer: Did you see them? How long did you see them for? What happened to them?

Walburga Engel: What happened to them, one person, he was an intellectual. He was taken by the Germans, and then he was afraid that if they tortured him he would give up secrets, so he cut his vocal cords. Eventually however, he got them somewhat

restored, he married a nurse. And then afterwards, she treated him and he got his vocal cords. There are really cases of people that...

Interviewer: Real heroes.

Walburga Engel: Really heroic things.

Interviewer: How did you find out about him?

Walburga Engel: We had always contact with the anti-fascists. This I found useful. Some things they wanted me to do and I thought they were not worth the risk, like putting flowers on the graves of partisans to show for the German occupiers that there was interest, the people were with them. And I said, "It isn't worth risking my life for a bunch of flowers on the graves." That I found silly and that I refused to do.

Interviewer: You always weighed, what you thought was the best?

Walburga Engel: Yes, I weighed what was worth the price, that is, you have to do something constructive and you risked to get killed. If you get killed, you're no good for anything anymore, so to get killed for something that I didn't consider really constructive, I thought was a waste of time and energy.

Interviewer: You looked at how you could stay alive and help the most?

Walburga Engel: That's what I thought, yes.

Interviewer: Doing the most for the community and at the same time keep yourself alive.

Walburga Engel: That's right, because I thought I was more useful if I was alive. And then a certain moment, I was told that I couldn't function anymore, I was too well-known, so I went to Switzerland, went illegal, over the mountains. I was a pretty good mountain climber, so there was no problem.

Interviewer: How did they know you? How were you too well-known? What did you do that...?

Walburga Engel: They helped me to go over to the partisans and helped me to go to Switzerland.

Interviewer: Did you live with the partisans for awhile? How did you become—?

Walburga Engel: No. I lived in the house there. They didn't know me enough where I was.

Interviewer: You kept going back and forth so much?

Walburga Engel: Back and forth, yes.

Interviewer: That you became too visible?

Walburga Engel: Yes. Somebody told me that, and so they helped me and we went illegally to Switzerland.

Interviewer: By yourself?

Walburga Engel: In Switzerland, there was already a large group of people in the same situation, and then we were active in transmitting the radio messages.

Interviewer: This is your mother, your father?

Walburga Engel: No, my mother went to Switzerland. She was in Switzerland with my little sisters and also my step-father was there, and then I went later.

Interviewer: Who did you work with to transmit the radio messages, who—

Walburga Engel: There was a group of partisans in Switzerland that, Italian partisans in Switzerland, and they send radio messages, and so then we worked out these radio messages. That was a desk activity basically.

Interviewer: Compared to what you had done?

Walburga Engel: Yes. Then some people that used to cross over from Italy to Switzerland constantly, then you had to sew some messages into the lining of their coats or something, so they could...Yes.

Interviewer: Get the message back across? What did the messages say—?

Walburga Engel: ...of German troops, where they were. An espionage organization. They were in Switzerland, notified us, and then we did the messages in secret codes, transmitted them in secret codes over the radio to the partisans, then they were notified about these movements.

Interviewer: You warned them so they could stay safe and they could keep fighting.

Walburga Engel: Yes. They could also act. They used to go down and shoot. And we knew in Switzerland, we knew a little more what was to happen.

Interviewer: Did they go down and shoot, they went down and...Were they effective? Were times that you knew—

Walburga Engel: Yes, sometimes they were effective and sometimes our information was also wrong. It's not that easy to have always the correct information. Sometimes they made a mistake which was pretty grizzly, they bombed the wrong place.

Interviewer: What was the feeling like of the people like you who were supporting the partisans and giving everything you could to fight the Nazis, what was the feeling during all this when you were sending messages and hiking to Switzerland from Italy?

Walburga Engel: My feeling was, the more you did, the better, and hopefully it would end sooner.

Interviewer: You saw an end in sight, you didn't feel like...

Walburga Engel: Yes, I saw it. I never thought there was no end sight. I never, never thought there was no end in sight.

Interviewer: Did you always know what was happening to the Jews?

Walburga Engel: In the beginning I didn't know. In the beginning of it, because nobody believed it. Nobody believed that anybody would use human skin to make lamp shades. It seemed so outrageous and said, "Only some paranoid people invent these stories."

Interviewer: That's beyond horror.

Walburga Engel: Yes. That's why I say that some of the population, in Germany also, didn't believe it because it seemed so atrocious that it's virtually unbelievable.

Interviewer: For you in the beginning, it wasn't a believable thing and you always had that the end of war would come.

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: When did you believe it?

Walburga Engel: When I was told by people I thought would really know.

Interviewer: Were you in Switzerland then or were you in Italy?

Walburga Engel: Already in Italy. I think I knew about it. But it took me a long time to believe it because I thought some crazies invented crazy stories. I knew that they put people in concentration camps. I knew they would kill people. But the atrocities, it took me a while to believe them, because I thought only crazies invents such crazy stories.

Interviewer: What did that make you feel about those people that were doing that, or about people kind, about...

Walburga Engel: Humankind.

Interviewer: Humankind.

Walburga Engel: Humankind, I never thought was very great to begin with.

Interviewer: You didn't get thrown into a deep depression?

Walburga Engel: Yes. I felt human kind has reach some lows but humankind isn't good to begin with, so I didn't...

Interviewer: But for you did they reach the lowest of...

Walburga Engel: It didn't disturb me. It disturbed me, I wanted to do something about it, but it didn't disturb me psychologically because I never expected that much from humankind.

Interviewer: But you expected a lot from yourself?

Walburga Engel: Yes, because I was extremely healthy and strong, so I said, "If I don't do it, so many other people can't do it physically." That's what I thought. That's what finally I can put to good use. Something I have, which was great health and physical stamina.

Interviewer: So you never really let yourself sink, you kept yourself healthy and you kept working.

Walburga Engel: I was always healthy all my life. That's not... I thought that's one good thing and then I can make use of it.

Interviewer: You just kept doing, what were your conditions like, where did you sleep and what did you eat and what was it like in Italy and then in Switzerland?

Walburga Engel: When I ate and some of these were with partisans. I knew that if you put a lot of garlic and onion in, it's a disinfectant. I ate as much garlic and onion as I possibly could. The other disinfectant is wine but I'm not very alcoholic, so between the two, the garlic treatment...

Interviewer: The whole time?

Walburga Engel: Yes. Yes, I never got anything really and I think it wasn't an issue, but I think with all the garlic and the onions...

Interviewer: In Switzerland, were the conditions pretty bad?

Walburga Engel: In Switzerland, the conditions were excellent. In Switzerland we were in a very good hotel. If you had money, you didn't have to worry once you were out of Germany or Italy or any of the occupied countries.

Interviewer: So you got to take money out? You got out in time?

Walburga Engel: Right, but we already had money in Switzerland. In Switzerland, it was very good...

Interviewer: Did you have to live off your money or where you protected by the partisan group when you got to Switzerland?

Walburga Engel: No. I had my own money. That wasn't a problem in Switzerland. You see, wherever you are, if you have money...

Interviewer: You can take care of yourself.

Walburga Engel: You can take care, yes. The Swiss, of course, they didn't let people come in but they always want paying hotel guests. You see, that's what I find so dreadful all over the world. Like the US, the rich people could come in and the poor ones were left out.

Interviewer: You mean people couldn't leave?

Walburga Engel: People couldn't leave because the US wouldn't take them in.

Interviewer: Take them in.

Walburga Engel: They could have left in the beginning. In the beginning they could have all left, but they had no place to go.

Interviewer: Did you see people who were stuck?

Walburga Engel: Sure.

Interviewer: Families?

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: What did you see?

Walburga Engel: I couldn't help, that was the terrible thing. I couldn't help them.

Interviewer: What were the circumstances like?

Walburga Engel: Like relatives of mine. Some, they were just taken away, but then in the beginning, they wrote from the concentration camps and they didn't believe themselves that it would get so terrible. It's so beyond—besides, the people that have lived in Germany, the Jews in Germany, they're comfortable, they normally associated with everybody. That's what they're undoing because—so they didn't react forcefully in the beginning because they thought it's a wave that passes in exaggeration. Nobody took them and they finally realized that they have to go out, nobody took them. And then when they were taken to concentration camp...

Interviewer: So it was too late to get out? Even if they had the money, it got to be too late?

Walburga Engel: That's the point, that it was too late. That's why I said the whole world is guilty of this.

Interviewer: Of course you couldn't help them.

Walburga Engel: The what?

Interviewer: Of course you couldn't help them.

Walburga Engel: No, no.

Interviewer: Nobody could have helped them except for a country opening up and saying...

Walburga Engel: Later he wouldn't let them go, but in the beginning, all he wanted is to get rid of them.

Interviewer: So, it could have been stopped.

Walburga Engel: It could. Easy, very easily it could have been stopped, very easily without any war and blood. What made Hitler so great is that he could say, "Well, nobody wants them." That gave him a real asset.

Interviewer: It wasn't just Hitler, he had help.

Walburga Engel: What?

Interviewer: You're saying it wasn't just Hitler, he had help?

Walburga Engel: That's what I say. That's what I say.

Interviewer: He had help from the rest of the world.

Walburga Engel: That's what I'm saying, yes, and that's what I say. He was a monster but one monster...

Interviewer: Can't do it all.

Walburga Engel: Can't do it all.

Interviewer: So that's the mistake we made, we closed our eyes to what we could have done.

Walburga Engel: Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Interviewer: Now, if we re-evaluate history again, we could make the same mistake by saying it was all Hitler.

Walburga Engel: That's what I'm saying.

Interviewer: Because it wasn't, it was all of us.

Walburga Engel: It wasn't. It was the whole word that contributed. He alone couldn't have done it, and the whole word helped him. He said, "Well, nobody wants them; everybody dislikes the Jews as much as I do," and he could say this because that was the fact.

Interviewer: So he got a lot of reinforcement.

Walburga Engel: He got reinforcement, that's what I'm saying. That's what I'm saying. And he could have been stopped in the beginning. We would never have had these proportions.

Interviewer: So it was all of us. We're all guilty.

Walburga Engel: The what?

Interviewer: We're all guilty. It was all of us.

Walburga Engel: That's what I said, yes.

Interviewer: Do you see while all that was going on, did you watch families perish? Did you see what was going on? What was your main feeling, was it frustration, was it anger?

Walburga Engel: My main feeling was, first of all, the whole word was with it. You see, that's what made me so angry, I mean, you have one person that is evil that can happen, that is crazy, you see. But then to get the whole world to basically to support him, that I found was the worst of it. Don't you think?

Interviewer: Yes.

Walburga Engel: It's insane.

Interviewer: What did it do to you? What did it do to your feeling about...?

Walburga Engel: Humankind?

Interviewer: Yes.

Walburga Engel: Humankind is hopeless.

Interviewer: But then you were active. You didn't stop acting.

Walburga Engel: You have to do something to make it, that you have to react. That doesn't mean that humankind is a noble race, it isn't.

Interviewer: Did you then feel that you would always work to make things better?

Walburga Engel: Sure. I think everybody who can has to do something to make it better, and not everybody could. That's the point I'm trying to make.

Interviewer: I think so. When you grew up, did you grow up very, very Jewish? Did you grow up religious?

Walburga Engel: Do I grow up, what?

Interviewer: When you were growing up, did you grow up very religious, very Jewish?

Walburga Engel: No, no, not at all. Not at all. The only feeling of Jewish were my maternal grandparents, whom I liked very much, and all these relatives on my mother's side. I thought that they were such nice people.

Interviewer: The Jewish identity came from your love for them.

Walburga Engel: Yes. That's it basically. They were such nice people. And then the history books, I thought it was very interesting.

Interviewer: Five thousand years.

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you become more Jewish when all this was going on? Did it not make any sense to you why the Jews were being killed, murdered? Did you feel real connected with—?

Walburga Engel: I felt pretty connected, yes. I felt pretty connected. That doesn't have to do anything with the religion, however, yes.

Interviewer: So it was more of a connection, they are your people and that was the connection of...

Walburga Engel: That's what I felt. Yes, yes. Maybe I would have done it also if it had been the Turks or somebody. I have nothing to do it being the situation.

Interviewer: So it was the connection because you're Jewish but also a connection to the people?

Walburga Engel: Yes, people. Those are two things. I'm just saying, yes.

Interviewer: To make a better world.

Walburga Engel: Yes. That's right.

Interviewer: That's very Jewish.

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: Let's see. Did it change your life at all? Did you become more involved in Israel and Zionist kinds of things?

Walburga Engel: I was not much of a Zionist, because I didn't see much of a point in Israel, because the Jews should live happily and should be allowed to live happily wherever they lived. To me, that was not an issue in the beginning. It became an issue only when they had no other place to go.

Interviewer: When you saw that they were stuck?

Walburga Engel: Yes. That's the one time I thought "It's good that they have a place where they can go."

Interviewer: Did you see people getting out to Israel?

Walburga Engel: I had nothing to do with the people getting out to Israel, but I said, to me, it was never, at that time, I'm saying, any aspiration, but it was simply a haven.

Interviewer: How do you feel about it now?

Walburga Engel: This is such a difficult question.

Interviewer: I know.

Walburga Engel: It's a very, very difficult question. I just think that it could have been all done in another way. It had to be a conquest. There's no way out of that. But once the conquest is there, personally, I think all of them may have made the biggest mistakes. You know she ignored the little people that happened to be there and had never done anything to the Jews, the Romans, they were not the Romans that shipped the Jews away and destroyed the temple, they were just poor little Arabs that sat there and cultivated the land. I think Golda Meir had no sensitivity to that problem. I think that was a basic mistake.

Interviewer: So on the one hand you see it as a haven and then on the other hand you see it as a...

Walburga Engel: Yes. It has to be haven but it could be a haven that, before, I think all the mayhem was the one that made it so, like these people didn't exist.

Interviewer: As long as Israel stays open to...

Walburga Engel: I say, the little Arab farmer hasn't done anything to anybody and suddenly he finds himself in the middle of it. If in the beginning, they would have been treated kindly, I think it would have been much better. You can't undo history and maybe that is wrong in my assessment.

Interviewer: Are you glad it's there, do you feel like we need Israel, that the Jewish people need Israel?

Walburga Engel: I think the Jewish people need a haven.

Interviewer: And that is Israel?

Walburga Engel: Now, some people are territorialists and wanted to go to Australia and have a haven there, which would not have created any problem because it was virtually uninhabited.

Interviewer: Yes, it could have been Australia.

Walburga Engel: To me, that would have maybe been a possible solution. I don't know.

Interviewer: We always find somebody who doesn't fit no matter who we are.

Walburga Engel: It's a very difficult problem for me. I haven't solved it really.

Interviewer: You see the good in Israel and that we need Israel very much, but at the same time—and after what you've been through, you see the need—but at the same time, you don't like the pushing away of another group.

Walburga Engel: Of another group that really have no fault in this whole thing to begin with. I said they weren't the Romans that burned the temple, they were just a little guy that has this little farm there.

Interviewer: Have you been sensitive all your life to the extremes of, not necessarily good and evil but the balance of life and the connection and responsibility to other people? Did the Holocaust, did your living through, resisting tremendous evil, change the way you see things? Did you always look for the responsible way, for the caring way for people?

Walburga Engel: When you study the [unintelligible 0:38:50.3], the [unintelligible 0:38:55.3], they think that it's always a fight between good and evil in the world. Somehow, I'm pretty much inclined to see that.

Interviewer: The forces.

Walburga Engel: You see, I can't see much of a force of goodness governing the world because there is so little good. Everything you saw, and the whole world...like to eat. I have to kill this poor animal, and this animal kills another animal to eat. Anything is the whole life is based on pain. Pain is an integral part of life. I find this disturbing. If I had all the power to make the world, I sound blasphemous now what I'm saying, but if I could have done it without basing life on killing other life in a painful manner, I would have done it, differently, I don't know.

Interviewer: It sounds like you would set up a place where people are responsible to each other and caring.

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: And not so aggressive.

Walburga Engel: Yes, it's not only people.

Interviewer: I still think that's possible.

Walburga Engel: You're more optimistic than I. It isn't only people, it's the whole world, the big fish has to eat the little fish otherwise it wouldn't eat.

Interviewer: Survival of the fittest?

Walburga Engel: It's survival of the fittest. It isn't only the fittest, even the weakest has to survive. The cow has to eat the grass, I don't know whether the grass feels pain being chewed, I do not know, but it's possible.

Interviewer: You saw so much pain. You saw more than most of us see in our whole lives.

Walburga Engel: The what?

Interviewer: You saw more pain and more violence.

Walburga Engel: Violence, yes.

Interviewer: Than most of us...I don't think it's that I'm optimistic, I haven't seen as much as you.

Walburga Engel: Maybe you're more optimistic.

Interviewer: I don't know what would happen to me if I went through what you went through.

Walburga Engel: You have more confidence in the world.

Interviewer: But I didn't go through what you did.

Walburga Engel: You are younger, you have more confidence. I wish you well, yes. ...Basically divided by political allegiance. Their leaders, most of them were anti-fascist from before and some were socialist, some were communist, some were right-wing, the liberals in Italy meant, conservative.

Interviewer: Right-wing?

Walburga Engel: Yes. It's another word. Practically each political inclination have its own partisan group, and then the masses of course were these young men that had not much political allegiance. They really formed then what would be the government of Italy after the liberation.

Interviewer: They did?

Walburga Engel: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: And they're mostly non-Jews?

Walburga Engel: That was their goal. There were two things, one is to free Italy, and the other is to prepare a career, an organization for after, political organization afterwards. It was very, very politicized.

Interviewer: That's interesting. That was a dangerous way to go about it, but I guess that was the only way.

Walburga Engel: That's human nature. Not all people had in mind just simply to get rid of the Germans and the fascists. They also wanted to assert themselves in their own political party and got financing also like the communists got financing from Russia.

Interviewer: Do you remember people?

Walburga Engel: I know some people, yes.

Interviewer: Characters?

Walburga Engel: I forgot the names. Everybody had a pseudonym anyway.

Interviewer: Oh, they made up names?

Walburga Engel: Oh, yes. Everybody had a pseudonym. Everybody had a pseudonym.

Interviewer: Are some of them leaders now in Italy? Would you know if...

Walburga Engel: Oh, yes, and some became quite prominent politicians afterwards.

Interviewer: But they were all devoted to fighting fascism?

Walburga Engel: Yes. You see they were already active as anti-fascists before it became a war-like situation. And some had been imprisoned by Mussolini and liberated them when fascism fell the first time. And then they took to the mountains and formed these, the leadership of the partisan movement was really there. The anti-fascists that had fought fascism, they didn't have much military training but then...

Interviewer: Did they fight anyway, they shot?

Walburga Engel: That type of fighting isn't a very military one. Anyway, and they got weapons. Now, the weapons were dropped also by the Allies that if they announce, they would announce in the secret code, "Tonight at ten, we will drop weapons on mountain top," whatever, so then that mountain top would be encircled by people, so the weapons could be collected. Once they did a big operation and then the Allies dropped propaganda leaflet. In organizing the defense of this area, quite a few people died, and so that was an enormous resentment against the US because for weapons it was worth these people getting killed, but for propaganda leaflets, what do you do with them? It's not worth risking your life to distribute them. That left people pretty disillusioned.

Interviewer: That they weren't going to get the help they needed?

Walburga Engel: They left them disillusioned because for weapons, it's worth organizing, but for propaganda...

Interviewer: For propaganda you don't want to get killed?

Walburga Engel: No.

Interviewer: Not for leaflets.

Walburga Engel: No, for leaflets, that was absurd.

Interviewer: Did they not trust the Allies after that or was there a way... You never knew what you would get.

Walburga Engel: Some parties trusted that the Allies and others didn't trust them so much. Some people also went back and forth, when the Allies invaded the southern part of Italy, and some people went back and forth to the Allies and they occupied territory to bring information, so that was a...

Interviewer: That was more trustworthy because they were...

Walburga Engel: These people were very trustworthy, yes. They didn't have political goals in mind. There were two types of people in all these movement. The ones that just wanted to get rid of the occupation and do the best they could for the freedom of Italy and the other, that wanted this but basically wanted to make sure also that they had their political clout afterwards.

Interviewer: So they had some very self-serving goals?

Walburga Engel: Yes. It isn't likely but that they shoot each other, that never happened. But I don't know if it had gone on for a very long time if that wouldn't have been a result.

Interviewer: You really thought that there was conflict.

Walburga Engel: Yes. Everybody that was very politically involved had conflict, one, to be the chief in his own faction, and two, his faction being the winner at the end.

Interviewer: How were the decisions made then? How did they negotiate decisions? How did that work?

Walburga Engel: They didn't negotiate decisions; it's just meant they had to have more territory at that time and more weapons and so on.

Interviewer: They were trying to become powerful too?

Walburga Engel: Yes.

Interviewer: Then these groups on their own were becoming ironically powerful?

Walburga Engel: That's what I'm saying. These groups became powerful and then their leaders made a name for themselves and then run for election after the fall of fascism and the Germans and all. Then they ran for public office.

Interviewer: Who are the heroes? Who did you see? Were there true heroes that also ran for public office, or the people who really...

Walburga Engel: The heroes, like this guy that cut his vocal cords, and another guy that went back and forth. They're not that politically, and they really did it for the good. Not that the political-minded people didn't do it for the good cause. Some were very much concerned. In addition, they wanted it not only for the power but also they felt that they were so well-qualified that they could do so much good if they were in the position of leadership. It isn't simple selfishness.

Interviewer: Yes.