Transcript:

Rosemary May

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Rosemary May:	…and my life was in the camps.
Interviewer:	It seems…
Male Interviewer:	Can we start? I want to get this thing running.
Interviewer:	Okay. I know.
Rosemary May:	You want to get done.
Male Interviewer:	No. I don't mean that, but I don't want you to tell us all this stuff and not be recording.
Interviewer:	You were talking, and there were some interesting things that you were saying.
Rosemary May:	Well, it gives you a hint as to what to make me come back to.
Interviewer:	Okay. This is an interview with Rosemary Arnold by Miriam Bassok. It's part of a Holocaust project by the Jewish Federation, and this really gives us a chance to record in person a survivor's account of what her experience was and what was meaningful out of that experience, so it's a chance to share that. The first questions are really information questions about name, and so what is your full name?

Rosemary May: My full name is Rosemary Suzanne Cremer May Arnold.

Interviewer: And, Rosemary, when were you born and where we you born?

Rosemary May: I was born February 6, 1929, in Neuwied, on the Rhine, Germany.

Interviewer: Oh, so the A/R is Auf Rhine? Is that what—

Rosemary May: On the Rhine, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And what was your father's name?

Rosemary May: Friedrich. His nickname was Fritz. He was mostly known a Fritz Cremer.

Interviewer: And how do you spell Cremer, because—

Rosemary May: C-R-E-M-E-R, an unusual spelling for Germany.

Interviewer: It is. And what was your father's birthday and where he was born?

Rosemary May: November 2, 1894, and he was born in Gelsdorf district of Ahrweiler, also in Germany.

Interviewer: What type of job did he do?

Rosemary May: We were in the retail business.

Interviewer: And what was your mother's maiden name?

Rosemary May: My mother's maiden name was [Bea (sp) 0:01:50]. Her full name was Caroline Theodora, called Tea Cremer, maiden name Bea.

Interviewer: And when was she born?

Rosemary May: November 27, 1894.

Interviewer: In what community?

Rosemary May: In Trier on the Mosel, Germany.

Interviewer: And what was her occupation?

Rosemary May: She also worked in the business.

Interviewer: So she and your father both worked that business together?

Rosemary May: Yes, yes. My mother was the one who actually started the business originally, and then after she got married…she got married because of it, whichever way you want to put it.

Interviewer: And, Rosemary, what are the names of your children and where they were born and what date?

Rosemary May: My children are Emily Caroline May. She lives in Nashville. She was born in Nashville, September 9, 1951. And my son's name is Frederick David, Rick. He was born November 24, 1953. He is now married and lives in Atlanta.

Interviewer: Very good. And now just taking a look at a number of questions on pre-war life, what was life like in your town or city before the war?

Rosemary May: As far as back as I can remember myself, I have some vague memories prior to age 6, but my primary memory goes back to age 6, when I was supposed to start school. I was no longer permitted to go to public school. Jews were not permitted to go to public school at that time already. We were not allowed to go to certain stores, to the movie house, swimming pool. Things of that nature were prohibited to Jews. So, I had a very definite feeling already then about being different.

Interviewer: The exclusion. Right. So, did you go to a different school?

Rosemary May: Well, the original religious schoolteacher, who was part of the synagogue, then became our public school teacher. All eight grades in one room, and that's how I started first grade, and I learned as much Hebrew during the first year, reading Hebrew, as I learned reading German. And it was quite an experience. At that time, I paid a lot of attention to what the older grades were learning, which was very fortunate because the only real formal education I had was the first three grades.

Interviewer: Okay. And so you got whatever you could assimilate then?

Rosemary May: Whatever I could soak up, I soaked up.

Interviewer: Okay.

Rosemary May: And then came Crystal Night, November 9, 1938, where the synagogues were put on fire, where at 2 o'clock in the morning my father was arrested, "protective custody." An hour later, they first destroyed all the display windows in the business. And then maybe two hours after that, a gang of men entered the business and destroyed everything inside, broke it, pitched it. And then they went into our home, which was upstairs, and all the china, all the crystal, and all the books were out the window, and the chairs and…whatever was small enough that fit through the window was pitched out. And I started to scream already when they were downstairs because I didn't what this was all about. And one of them called over, "Hey, Rosemary, don't worry. We're not going to hurt you or your mother." They knew me; I knew them. My father was sent on to Dachau. He came back. We were able to buy him out of Dachau two weeks later. And I have a picture showing him after he got back from Dachau; he was not the same man. And he had to sign a paper never to reveal where he had been aside from saying he was in Dachau. What had occurred there, what was

done to him, what he had seen done to others, and he also had to be out of Germany by January 1, 1939. And he was very fortunate; he had two sisters who lived in Holland, and they were able to get him a permit to enter Holland. But unbeknownst to him, the condition was that he could not be a free human being. He was immediately put into a camp. Holland couldn't absorb all these refugees. And my brother and I followed him on April 1st. That the children transports were just a hundred children, and it was from three months to the age of 16, and we also were immediately put in a camp.

Interviewer: The same camp?

Rosemary May: Not in the same city, no. My father was in Amsterdam or the outskirts of Amsterdam. My brother and I were in a nunnery in Rotterdam. And that was the time I had to start taking care of myself.

Interviewer: Yes.

Rosemary May: I was at that time 10 years old. And we were trying to get to America. We had most of our papers, but we were waiting for a final affidavit. We had to get an additional one, and that finally came, and we were to be given our visas on May 10, 1940, and leave on the 14th of May. Well, the Germans entered Holland the 10th of May, so that took care of that, no more. And as soon as the Germans really got a hold in Holland, they set aside an area in the middle of nowhere, right in the center of Holland, really totally desolated area, to build the Dutch concentration camp. And since they had people already in camps where it was very simple to just shift them over there, they did that with us. And we had to build Westerbork.

Interviewer: So, right from the ground up, from the start.

Rosemary May: From the ground up, yes. My father turned into a housepainter. My brother was…after the camp was constructed, he was administration. My mother became a barrack leader. You see, one of the Germans' bizarre way of doing this was they did not run the camps internally, none of them. They had the Jewish inmates run the camps internally, including punishment, doling out punishment. The capos, they were given the order to do such and such, and they just had to do it.

Interviewer: Because they, in fact, were prisoners too.

Rosemary May: Yes. And it was an order so they had to do it, I guess. I'm not—

Interviewer: You had some questions about that too.

Rosemary May: I personally have questions on it, yes. And by the end of '41, the transports came into the camp from Holland. They were gathering all the people out of Holland, and they brought them into the camp, and they had large barracks where they were all housed, 400 or 500, in one area. And then twice a week, a transport left for what we were told was labor camp in Germany. Reality, of course, was a lot different. It was Auschwitz, but that we didn't know. My job at that time was to be at every departure of a transport with a clipboard and a list of the people who were to be on that transport and mark them off as they had got on the train. Now, saying "on the train" is being very kind, it was cattle cars, 40 and 50 and 60 in one. The tiny little ventilation windows were all that was. Doors were sealed shut. Bathroom facilities were a bucket in the corner. Sometimes those buckets were emptied every day. Sometimes they were not emptied for days. And sometimes the train stayed in Westerbork for several hours. The people already locked in it before the train could even depart. That was my job.

Interviewer: So you would be standing there observing?

Rosemary May: Yeah. Hundred times. Now, you can imagine these people didn't just like you get on an airplane, very orderly, very nice. We didn't know what the fate was, but there was definite feeling that it would not be a comfortably good fate. So there was a lot of hesitation and a lot of pushing, shoving, and so forth and so forth. By the beginning of 1944, Holland was virtually free of Jews. One of the last to come in, where I had to be at the train, was Anne Frank, I met. We became friends for just three days, that's all. She was in Westerbork. Very sweet girl. She was same age as I. We could have been twins. And with her fame today, I kind of like to think of—we liked each other.

Interviewer: It was a…sure.

Rosemary May: Well, by January of ’44, Holland was virtually free of Jews. There were a few left and a few were hidden. We were sent off, off to Theresienstadt. I think the trip took three days.

Interviewer: Where is that?

Rosemary May: Theresienstadt is in the middle of Czechoslovakia. It’s about 90 miles from Prague. Well, we’d been in a concentration camp before, but this was much, much more so.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Rosemary May: First of all, in Westerbork, I had certain privileges having been part of the original builders of the camp, and being there four years, you know everybody, you know everything, you have ways of manipulating a little extra food here and there. I have a big scar on my leg where I went into a garbage can to grab out some food and really cut my leg badly. But there were possibilities there which were not in Theresienstadt. There we were crowded in one attic. Our bed was a straw sack about [gestures] this long, this wide. Lice, flees, bedbugs shared it with us, and before you even could try to go to sleep, you were very busy picking on yourself and getting them and killing them. I mean, you just have to rub them between in your fingernails. Sanitary conditions were terrible. Shower, once a month a shower. Cold water, of course. For the rest, they had some faucets with a trough like the animals drink out of, and that’s where men, women, and children cleaned up whatever they could. Bathroom facilities were holes in the floor and you aimed. Toilet paper, what’s that? I mean, this is something most people don’t talk about, but I think it gives a much clearer idea of the inhuman conditions.

Interviewer: Yes. What type of food situation was it?

Rosemary May: Food, we received a half a loaf of bread twice a week. Now, that sounds okay, right? But the bread was 80% rotten potatoes, the protein in it were the bugs. There was a little flour in it to kind of hold the thing together, and it was horrible.

Interviewer: It’s rancid.

Rosemary May: But if you have nothing else, you eat it. Cabbage soup, a cup of cabbage soup at lunch, and I think we got another cup of cabbage soup at night, I'm not sure on that. I did a good job of losing weight. Fortunately, I started out very overweight, and by the time the war was over, I was very slim. My mother, who never in her life weighed less than 250 pounds, being 5'1" tall maybe and, of course, 250 pounds for a little 5'1", she was fat. At liberation time, she was 80 pounds. She could not stand on her own feet.

Interviewer: Rosemary, was she in the same barracks with you or…?

Rosemary May: Yes. Through Theresienstadt, we were most of the time together. By September of '44, they decided to send transport out of Theresienstadt. Well, the first transport out was my father and brother. This was supposed to leave on Yom Kippur '44. There was some difficulty with the railroad tracks. There were some sabotage. The train couldn't leave until the following day. I think the sabotage was a little intervention from upstairs. From then on, more transports left. They wanted volunteers, but nobody volunteered. To follow the men to another labor camp was the word. Well, two transports later, I was on the list to leave. I was on the train to leave. And due to the work I had done in Theresienstadt where I was in the tailoring shop—and I worked like a demon, part of my upper English discipline—

Interviewer: You worked hard.

Rosemary May: So, if you do a job, you do it right. And also my personal reasoning was, if survive this, I've no one to take care of me, I have no money, nothing…everything is gone, so I will have to be able to support myself.

Interviewer: This is a skill.

Rosemary May: So, I used it at the same time where…I was working for the Germans, yes, but I also used it for myself to learn something. And when I was put on the transport, the [unintelligible 0:19:04], who was the overseer of the industry, did not find me at my machine, questioned them. They told them I was in the transport. And he had me pulled off the transport. I am totally convinced it was divine intervention. He had me transferred to the mica industry, which was very vital

for the German, which is splitting mica, which is a mineral, into very, very thin layers. It's used for airplanes, it's used for electrical appliances.

Interviewer: Okay.

Rosemary May: But sure enough I was again put on the transport and again pulled off. Now, that time, the young people who were on the transport, I was able to ascertain later on, were all used for medical experiments. So I've been extremely—

Interviewer: You were lucky.

Rosemary May: —extremely lucky.

Interviewer: Yes.

Rosemary May: Although I feel always I have to cut it. Nobody is going to sit for a couple of hours to hear my life story.

Interviewer: That's right.

Rosemary May: So, I've learned to edit.

Interviewer: To condense it.

Male Interviewer: Okay. We're rolling.

Rosemary May: You're ready?

Male Interviewer: Uhm-hmm.

Interviewer: We were talking about some of the young people and that they were sent on transports and then you later learned that they were used for—

Rosemary May: They were all used for medical experiments, which was a much, much worse fate than death.

Interviewer: Right.

Rosemary May: So, I was one of the very lucky ones who is still here.

Interviewer: I agree.

Rosemary May: And by January of ’45, Theresienstadt received transports in again, but these were transports from other concentration camps. They’re skeletons, they’re totally emaciated, where they were more dead than alive. After my full day of work in the mica, then my job became to nurse the skeletons. What could we do? Really nothing. There were no medications. There was no more food for them than what we had. Essentially what it amounted to was closing eyes, saying a final prayer. And to this day, I know I have done this more times than any registered nurse will in a career.

Interviewer: I can imagine. What did that do to you internally, Rosemary? What kind of impact do you think that had on you to have that job?

Rosemary May: It was more or less a voluntary job. I did not have to do this because this was again done the internal management. This was not that the Germans ordered that. As far as they were concerned, we could just let them rot. But this was part of my being in trying to help wherever possible, and I have no regrets. And some of the stories which the skeletons were able to tell yet, this is where we really found out for the first time about the annihilation, the actual…the gassing, which we did not know before. Theresienstadt did not have gas chambers yet. They were building them, but they didn’t have them yet. And about the big life burials and all these things, this is where I first found out about it, and where most of the ones in the camp found out about it, that we really realized that we were in a special situation. Theresienstadt was the elite camp. The Red Cross came to inspect, and there were special concerts, theater, kiosk where we could buy things. We were given Theresienstadt money which I have some saved. It

was a total façade, the picture which was presented to the Red Cross. People who were emaciated, who were sick, who were old, were not allowed on the street at all. They were not allowed to go to work even on the days of the inspection.

Interviewer: Camp was used as a show piece on the—

Rosemary May: It was strictly as a show piece. It was like a stage play. I mean, this is where I learned a little acting. And there were times in my life I've had to use that too.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Rosemary May: To overcome a bad situation. And it was totally unbelievable the way this was handled. There were only certain…they showed some actual homes where people were quartered, yes. But where normally there might have been 20 in one little room. For inspection, there were only four. Now, whether the Red Cross was really totally fooled on that, to this day I don't know. The show, *War and Remembrance*, showed part of it. In their last segment, they showed Theresienstadt, and they showed part of it. And they as much as indictated that Red Cross was in cahoots with some of the Germans, and they just didn't want to make a big, you know…

Interviewer: So that was part of the show piece, too, actually.

Rosemary May: Right, right.

Interviewer: Of the collusion…

Rosemary May: I mean, one was fooling the other or vice versa, who knows what they…

Interviewer: Did you begin to feel cynical about things?

Rosemary May: At that time, I didn't have time for cynicism. I mean, this may sound strange. We strictly went day by day, one foot in front of the other, like robots. If you

stop to really think about it, you couldn't have survived, because then it would have been too devastating. You did what you had to do when you had to do it. Like a little robot, you just get up and you stand readily and you stand there for hours, and you remember your number, so you can call your number out very well, and just keep on in the same world over and over and over again.

Interviewer: And that was the day-to-day routine.

Rosemary May: The day-to-day routine, yes. We would get a little bit humanity late at night. The little bitty groups would get together, and we would pray together, and we would sing a little song together real quiet-like so nobody would hear us because it wasn't allowed, but that was where the few minutes where we permitted humanity to enter us. For the rest, we were just like robots.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Rosemary May: Just keep going. And I've seen some of the best in human nature and I've seen some of the worst, right there in the camps.

Interviewer: So, the full spectrum.

Rosemary May: A full spectrum of emotion. The full spectrum of behavior. Incomprehensible. How very, very good some were and how very, very bad some were.

Interviewer: What distinguished the two, do you think?

Rosemary May: Selfishness. Beyond the point of self-preservation. I mean, self-preservation we all understood. We all wanted to live. But to do it at the expense of others, it's something I can't comprehend. We were told over and over again, if you misbehave in any way, if you do something you're not supposed to, not only will you be punished, but 50 others will be. You can't take responsibility for 50 other lives. And there were some who didn't care. So, there is not much I have not seen in my life.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Rosemary May: The good and the bad. And I was an expert in thievery. In the camps, I knew how to steal.

Interviewer: What did you steal?

Rosemary May: Whatever I could get food-wise. Whatever I could find. I remember early on, Erev Rosh Hashanah, in Westerbork still, I stole a green tomato. It wasn't even ripe yet. I was caught. I was put in the special prison, the prison within the camp for the whole day. And at that time, I was all of 11 or 12 years old. I did not know what was going to be done to me. My parents didn't know where in the world I was. And luckily—

Interviewer: So you went through a whole day of dread.

Rosemary May: The whole day, yes. Later on in Theresienstadt when we had to…after the regular workday, early on before the transports came in, I had to go to the railroad track with a lot of other people too, with the wheelbarrows and unload potatoes from the railroad tracks and store them in basements for the Germans. I became an expert at stealing potatoes. Tied a string around my legs, cut a hole in the pocket, and they went in. And as quickly as I…it was terribly dangerous. It could have cost me my life. No question about it. Had I been caught, that could've been the end of me. I did it anyway. And as soon as I would bring them to my mother, she would turn around and give them away to other people.

Interviewer: So her whole nature was to take care of other people too.

Rosemary May: Yeah. That was my mother's nature.

Interviewer: And you wanted her to have it.

Rosemary May: Well, I felt—I was already in those days, or even in Vestabook, I was the caretaker of the family. Not my parents.

Interviewer: So they couldn't give you that strength. You really had to survive on your own.

Rosemary May: Couldn't, wouldn't, I don't know. It was not a good setup as far as I'm concerned.

Interviewer: Rosemary, was that a change in their personality because of all that they encountered?

Rosemary May: No, no.

Interviewer: That was consistent with—

Rosemary May: This goes all the way back, this goes all the way back. I come from a dysfunctioning family.

Interviewer: Okay.

Rosemary May: They just were very selfish in many ways. I never felt like I had parents.

Interviewer: That you were personally cared about.

Rosemary May: No.

Interviewer: You had mentioned earlier before the cameras that there was a woman that you had met who really—

Rosemary May: Yes.

Interviewer: —especially looked out for you.

Rosemary May: There were people there whom I cleaved to almost. Like there was one lady, very, very prominent people. I think her husband was a judge or something. And she came from an aristocratic family, and she kind of saw what was going on, and she took me under her wing, and she gave me attention, and she let me talk to her. So I had…that is where part of my support system came from. Earlier on, it was Mrs. Hamburger. Later on, she was sent on the transport, it was some of the young people in my group, who were very, very supportive. And that's how I got my strength really.

Interviewer: You said that you had observed the best of human nature and also the worst, it sounds like Mrs. Hamburger and some of those others were part of the best.

Rosemary May: They were definitely the best, yes.

Interviewer: What else was some of what you observed as the best?

Rosemary May: I remember, this happened a few times, one day, where we were splitting the mica, one of the girls was an epileptic. Every time she had an attack, of course, we had to quickly hide her. We created some kind of a commotion, and I was part of that, to draw attention away from her. So within the little circle, somebody could take care of her. And we were able to take care of her until almost the end of '44. And then she was put on a transport where nobody could do anything. Those are the kind of things which are very much worth remembering, to see some of the good in people.

Interviewer: Are there some other things too?

Rosemary May: Not that I can remember offhand. I mean, this is…feelings, emotions are kind of locked away, because I was never permitted to have feelings and to have emotions. It's only started maybe two or three years ago that I have learned it's okay for me to have emotions.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Rosemary May: So during all these years, what did I feel? I don't know.

Interviewer: Because it was a luxury you couldn't afford right then?

Rosemary May: That's right. It was not only not a luxury I couldn't afford, it was prohibited.

Interviewer: What do you mean? In what sense?

Rosemary May: By my parents.

Interviewer: Okay.

Rosemary May: Actually prohibited, "Don't cry." Do, do, do, you know. The very militaristic uncle was on my father's side, whom I adored, and he in his way adored me. But feelings, emotions, uh-uh.

Interviewer: But his way of handling children and people was to just cut off, not give it any chance.

Rosemary May: Just cut it off. They cut it off in themselves, I think. I mean, they should have been born 50 years later. It might have helped them. And I finally learned through outside help.

Interviewer: Yes. If you want to comment on some of them, Rosemary, what were some of the worst of human things that you saw?

Rosemary May: Stealing food from your neighbor. Reporting someone else, that is to me one of the worst. Preserving your own life at the expense of someone else. And all these things happened.

Interviewer: You really developed your own code of honor then.

Rosemary May: Yeah.

Interviewer: I don’t know if you would have thought of it that way.

Rosemary May: Yeah, yes. To me, as little education as I had, I never forgot the Ten Commandments, and I took them very literal. On the train leaving the camp, after we were liberated by the Russians, and of course, couldn’t understand them, they couldn’t understand us, the day we were to be annihilated. That very day we were liberated.

Interviewer: Yeah. So all those interventions right at that time.

Rosemary May: That’s right, that’s right. And as we’d gotten back on the way to Holland, of course, the trains…the cars were opened, and most of the people jumped off and plundered little gardens. I at that time told myself, uh-huh, now I’m a human being again. I must conduct myself as a human being. No more. I just cut it off like that. During the years of incarceration, I had no qualms about stealing food, not from someone else, but from the general part.

Interviewer: Yes.

Rosemary May: But the minute I came out of the camp, no more.

Interviewer: That was no longer justified.

Rosemary May: No. It was just not acceptable as behavior goes.

Interviewer: So you were on the train back to Holland?

Rosemary May: Yeah. Trying to get back to Holland.

Interviewer: And you were with your mother at that time?

Rosemary May: I was with my mother, who was maybe 80 pounds, who couldn't even stand on her own feet, and I practically had to carry her. And we got back into Holland due to my brazenness at that time. As we got to the Dutch border, since we were not Dutch nationals, even though we had been part of a Dutch transport originally coming to Theresienstadt, the Dutch didn't want to let us enter. Then I said, "Okay, it's all right. I'll jump off the train. I'll get on the track. You can just run over me. I will not go back to Germany." And they knew that I was quite determined. So they let us enter Holland. And there, start from scratch.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in Holland?

Rosemary May: Until '47. Exactly two years. I had to learn the language again, didn't know the language too well, and I had to immediately start making a living.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Rosemary May: Scrubbing, being a cleaning woman, and then being an alteration then from home to home mended and ironed people's clothes, until finally I was able to get a job in a factory. And in no time, I worked my way up to assistant designer, and that's when I left for America. Finally, the papers got together, and my mother and I left for America, and I had a job in New York. The brother of the company I worked for in Amsterdam had a factory in New York, and I had a job before I even entered America, but I couldn't take it because my uncle and aunt had lost their child during the war here. They had just escaped out of Germany in 1940, and their child was killed by a playmate, "I have a gun," you know, bang, bang. The child was killed. So they begged me to come to Chicago which I did.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were staying with your relatives in Chicago.

Rosemary May: Right.

Interviewer: Then how long did you stay with them?

Rosemary May: After about six months, my mother and I moved out. My mother insisted on moving out. She was not really comfortable there. And we got a one-room in a

boardinghouse, questionable rep house, very questionable reputation of a house, which made it very difficult for me. I mean, there was no way I could have a social life knowing where I lived. But that didn't last too terribly long, and we stayed there about six months or so, and then we were able to get an apartment in the right part of town, and that's when I met my husband-to-be, and I got married in June of 1950 and moved to Nashville.

Interviewer: Okay.

Rosemary May: And I've been in Nashville for 40 years now.

Interviewer: That's almost a whole other chapter of your life.

Rosemary May: That's right. It is a whole other chapter of my life, believe me.

Interviewer: I can imagine. Rosemary, there's a number of summarizing questions, and then I'll let you just take it where you wish, but just a very general question, how did your wartime experiences change you? Do you look at other people and/or events of life differently?

Rosemary May: That's very difficult for me to answer because I was so very, very, very young, 10 years old, when things blew up. I don't know what kind of a person I would have been had all this not happened to me.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's almost impossible to predict, really.

Rosemary May: It's impossible to guess. I mean, it's really…we're just guessing. I don't know if I would have been a better person or not.

Interviewer: Just in a career sense, just for interest, if you had stayed in Germany and none of that had occurred, what would be the kind of lifestyle? Would you finish advanced education and expect to go for some professional degree or—?

Rosemary May: Yes. Had I not had the misfortune of the Holocaust, I probably would have been a doctor. I would have gone to medical school, and if that would not have been possible, definitely a designer, which I did study some of, and I still use it, so…

Interviewer: So there's many talents really that—

Rosemary Arnold: I'm very multi-faceted, really multi-faceted. My interests are very ripe as you put it.

Interviewer: How do you feel about being Jewish?

Rosemary May: How do I feel about it? I am…I would not convert. I would not get away from being Jewish under no circumstances. I have never denied being Jewish. Being proud of being Jewish? Not really, not really. I've raised my children, hopefully, as good Jews, but that's being good people.

Interviewer: Yes. So did it make you more orthodox in any sense or not necessarily?

Rosemary May: I've gone the gamut. I was raised reformed toward conservative. In the camps, I turned super orthodox because of the support system I was raised, and I mean, super orthodox. I fasted on Yom Kippur, even so in the camps. I did not eat bread on Pesach. And when I got out of the camp after the liberation, I was still orthodox. And then I found out that my brother had not survived. First, he was on every liberation list. And I talked to a friend of his en route that he had seen him at the time of liberation, and he was sick, but he was okay. I did not expect my father to survive. I mean, I was too much of a realist then already. But knowing my brother had been alive at the time of liberation, I had all hopes. And when I found out he did not survive, I lost it all. I did not want anything to do with religion anymore, but I ended up I couldn't live that way. Did not work.

Interviewer: What brought you back?

Rosemary May: I had to come back. I had to come totally back. I cannot live without God in my life and the support of the religious institutions and—

Interviewer: Sure.

Rosemary May: —the whole thing.

Interviewer: Well, so much of your story is a divine intervention story as well.

Rosemary May: Oh, I am totally convinced that I had three diving interventions in my life, twice in the camp and the third time seven years ago. So, there's no doubt in my mind, none.

Interviewer: You mentioned a little a bit about the influence that it had on your children, but what effect do you think your experiences have with your own raising your children?

Rosemary May: The way a Holocaust survivor or—let me rather put it just on me—the way I acted and reacted after the war was very much afraid, very, very fearful. So a lot of this fear was instilled on my children. "Don't do this, don't do that." If somebody looked at me the wrong way, I would withdraw. I felt very inferior, very inferior because after all I was a refugee.

Interviewer: Were you treated in an inferior way sometimes too?

Rosemary May: Yeah. That too, oh, yeah. So, their social life suffered by it, and their whole outlook on life. Children emulate their parents.

Interviewer: Yes.

Rosemary May: So they had to relearn a lot of things as adults, which didn't make it easy for them.

Interviewer: Do you have any dreams about your experience?

Rosemary May: Oh, yeah. Every time I talk about it, it very definitely has an effect that night. I mean, that I'm actually prepared for, and I stay very, very busy. I just…after I talk about it, I really get to work, physical hard work, to get it out of my system.

Interviewer: To get out all that energy.

Rosemary May: Yeah. To use like a potato masher, push it down again.

Interviewer: Well, it's such a force of both of those pulls.

Rosemary May: That's right, that's right. You just have to push it down again and try to get it back into its proper perspective.

Interviewer: Into a place, yes. This is one last question and then it's really open for us to look at the things that you brought out for your comments as well. Now, that you've told us your story, what would you like others to know, and is there a message that you would like others to remember about your experiences?

Rosemary May: Well, the reason I talk to the schools, in high schools and organizations and churches about it whenever I am asked, is we cannot afford to forget. They must remember not for the horror of it, but for the lessons we've learned from it. If we ourselves don't start being better people and caring about our neighbor, caring about humanity itself, whether it's black, blue, green, yellow, whatever faith, whatever nationality, it doesn't matter. We need to care about human beings and take care of this earth. If we don't, it can happen again. And this is my big worry. And that's the reason I talk about it, trying to awaken a sense of responsibility in people, and if with all this talk, whenever I speak to maybe a hundred school children, if one is influenced by my talk, I think I have succeeded. I keep trying for as long as I can.

Interviewer: I think you have succeeded. I think it's something that needs to be told and remembered.

Rosemary May: It needs to be, but whether it will be…30, 40 years from now, we will know, because then the survivors are gone, and what is left?

Interviewer: Is your sense in your own life that there's some residue of bitterness against the Germans or…?

Rosemary May: No, it's a lot of caution and apprehension. I don't take them at face value. Immediately when I meet one, I try to figure, how old were you then and what part did you play? And at the same time, I will not waste my energy on hate. It's a wasted energy. And not all were guilty either. A lot of the average German really didn't know. So if you start an eye for eye and condemning and condemning, where's it going to end?

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Rosemary May: Can't end that way.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for doing this, Rosemary.

Rosemary May: Thank you for taping it.

Interviewer: It's an important piece of work and we'll re-setup and get a chance to look at what you brought.

Male Interviewer: Rosemary, what's that?

Rosemary May: The large part right here is the food tickets. To get the cabbage soup, they are punched each time, and only certain numbers were valid on certain days. And right here is a health card. The Germans were extremely good in keeping records on everything and making big productions out of administrative work. And right here, this one in particular was a ticket for a concert, a Mozart concert, when the Red Cross was there to show how well we were being treated and how we get entertainment and all kinds of things. So…

Male Interviewer: Okay. What about the green card that you have there?

Rosemary May: The green one I have right here is the work card of my mother's who was in charge of one of the large barracks for the transports, and she had to be out after curfew, so she had to have her special work card. So if she was caught from one barrack to another that she would not get special punishment for it. And right here is an inoculation card, also it's a health card which belonged to my father. They just forgot to say that they ended up killing him. I'm being facetious.

Interviewer: But it's the truth.

Rosemary May: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have numbers branded on you?

Rosemary May: No. That was only done in Auschwitz. That was not done in any other camp. So you had to go through Auschwitz to have the number tattooed on your arm. This is what my father looked like when he came back from Dachau after two weeks only after Crystal Night. He originally was a very handsome man, and here he is more…

Interviewer: Well, they'd already shaved his head.

Rosemary May: Head was shaved and he had dropped 40 pounds in two weeks' time, and he must have seen a lot of horror.

Interviewer: Which he did not speak of because he was told not to.

Rosemary May: He was not allowed to speak of it, and he never did. He never, never revealed. Matter of fact, my uncle in Chicago who had also been arrested at that time in Crystal Night, he told me some things, now, 50 years later, but my father never did.

Interviewer: And your father did not survive the war?

Rosemary May: No. My father died…was killed whichever, November…December the 17th of '44. And here is the infamous yellow star which we had to wear at all times from 1940 on. No Jew was permitted ever to be without it. You could not put a coat on over it or you had to sew onto your coat also. They always had to be in sight including in the camps. This is one of the originals.

Interviewer: Was this just used in the camps or were there other dissidents and…?

Rosemary May: It was a law which was proclaimed throughout Germany and then in all the occupied countries also, from 1939, 1940, I'm not quite sure on the date, this was an order that all Jews had to be marked that way. Here is some of the scrap money which we were given in Theresienstadt to purchase things when the Red Cross came. Of course, the things we were able to purchase were immediately taken away from us again. Now, you may want to take a very close look on some of this money because I don't know how much of this is in existence today, so it might be a good idea to take a good picture of it.

Interviewer: There even seems to be a Jewish symbol of Moses and the Ten Commandments.

Rosemary May: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: On the top one.

Rosemary May: Oh, yeah.

Male Interviewer: What did you have to do to earn that?

Rosemary May: Four-hour coat work. I mean, it was a fuss. The whole thing. We could not really buy anything because only when the Red Cross came were these kiosks opened, and the moment the delegation left the area, it was taken away from us again to be used the next time. We could not keep any of it.

Interviewer: How were you able to keep that?

Rosemary May: The money?

Interviewer: The money.

Rosemary May: At the time of the liberation, nothing was taken away from us anymore. So whatever we wanted to take with us, it was also deloused, but then we could keep it. And those were my belongings. I mean, shoes, what kind of shoes did I have? Clothes, what kind of clothes did I have? Because we were not issued clothes. And I came from 10 to 16, quite a jump. I mean, things didn't get too tight, but they sure got too short, and I made one out of two. It was an experience.

Interviewer: It was an existence really.

Rosemary May: That's how I look at it today. It was an experience. I've learned how to deal with life at the best possible way, meaning that I've not all that well adjusted yet. But I've had—

Interviewer: But you did a very nice job.

Rosemary May: —quite a few experiences since then.

Interviewer: That have tested and really shown how you can handle things?

Rosemary May: Some of them were even worse than the camps, okay?

Interviewer: Okay.