Lore Oppenheim
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Interviewer: We're speaking with Lore Oppenheim, a German refugee. And we might begin by talking a little bit about your time in Germany as a child, the very beginning…tell me a little bit about…

Lore Oppenheim: All right. My childhood in Germany was very normal. Until the age of 10, 11 I lived in middle class home. And I was an only child, unfortunately. And I did all the things every other child does here and that was just a normal childhood experience. However, then at age 10, Hitler came to power and that changed things a bit. People were more afraid and Holocaust started. By the time I was 11—and let me first go back to the German school system. You have elementary grades from one to four. And then the population is divided up. Those that can afford to send their children, the girls to lyceums and the boys to what's called gymnasium. These are what we have today as high schools, as sort of private high schools. They're public high schools actually, but you pay a fee, a fairly healthy fee. Then there is a third group of people and they can have a free education, also starting at fifth grade, but that education is mostly limited to the three as reading, writing and arithmetic. Their math consists of arithmetic. No algebra, no geometry, not any of that. No foreign languages, or at best one. That is the public school education after the fourth grade starting age five to 10th or 12th grade, whenever…probably at the 10th grade that I would say they'd graduate. And it was a very simplified education, it was easier, and it cost less. It cost the government less because they had less subjects, larger classes, not as nice buildings, no chemistry labs, and so on. I was supposed to go to the lyceum and I started to go, then I guess I was close to 11, it must have been between '33 and '34 and I went there for a few weeks and it was very nice. I had my friends from grade school, from the first four grades and I went with them, naturally. And then all of a sudden, after three or four weeks of that, a new law came out; many laws came out in Germany very quickly, that the Jewish children whose father possibly were inducted into the army during World War I, but who did not fight…did not have frontline duties, did not fight on the front, only 1% of those children could go into a lyceum class. There were 2%. It was myself and another child. And they drew lots or whatever, and they decide the other child could stay and I could not, so I had to drop out.

Interviewer: And what was the reason they give for that at that time?

Lore Oppenheim: I don't know, they tried to give the Jewish children as little education as they possibly could, and it was just an arbitrary German Nazi law.

Interviewer: But nobody questioned it?

Lore Oppenheim: No, of course not, how can you question. You don't question laws in Germany. So my parents were in a quandary in what to do with me. To send me away…we lived in Wiesbaden, Germany, a town that is of course at this point widely known for the army hospital there, but it was a nice town. And we had several choices, possibly only two actually, three. One, to go to a Jewish school, at that point there was a Jewish school, however, that school was a Volksschule, one of those elementary schools that only taught reading, writing and arithmetic. No foreign languages, no math, and so unlike number three as I stated before. So that was a very, very simplified education, which really was not suitable for anyone that might want to pursue higher education or even leave Germany. I mean, it was just low…for lower grade, too low-functioning. Then the other option was for me to go away to Frankfurt or somewhere and board there somewhere and go to school there. There were two very excellent Jewish schools there, Jewish high schools, I could have gone too, but that was over an hour away from our hometown by train. And it was felt that a 10-year-old you don't want to send away from home that early. The third option was a [unintelligible 0:05:03.5], which is a boarding school, which we had a Jewish boarding school in our town. It was run by a couple of teachers and they took Jewish children, took students, all ages, usually from 10 to the upper grades and mostly from the upper grades, and gave them a very academic education and sort of made them little ladies, well-rounded ladies, all the nice things that you're supposed to know. Well, they also took day students, so my parents said, "Well, let's send her to [unintelligible 0:05:45.0]," I think it was called. "Let's send Lore there," and I went there and they were two nice teachers there, three actually, one was only part-time. It was run by two ladies that lived there, a French lady who did some of the French classes, and a Ms. Goldstein who taught all the English, and then there was a Mr. Haupt, who lived in the town, who was not Jewish, but who taught geography, foreign languages, math, whatever else hadn't been taught by the other two. And there also was supposed to be a little housekeeping taught there, and that sort of thing. It was fine and good. It was very nice, except there was only one other child there. So this was a school of two children and two and a half teachers. So that went on for a couple of years. I had my…I had a fairly nice education. There was a good experience. The other child left and here these two lady teachers were stuck with this gorgeous building and, of course, I didn't know anything about mortgages or anything at that time, or taxes and whatever expenses were entailed, the cook left, and they were still teaching me. And then the man, Mr. Haupt, was teaching me in his apartment because it was closer and this way he didn't have to travel so far. So it was easier for him, which was fine with me. So, but after a while, one morning, we got a phone call that the last remaining teacher in

this [unintelligible 0:07:21.0] had committed suicide, so that was the end of that. Because she…how could they afford? How could she run a school with one student, no matter how much they would charge, it was impossible. So that was a slight shock of course, and I don't know whether I was 11 or 12 or 13, somewhere in that area, probably 12. So the other…the gentleman teacher, Mr. Haupt, said that he'll give me the rest of the education, private…everything was private tutoring…private tutoring from his home. And that's what we did. I went there every morning around 8:15 and I think he was a bit lazy and I was supposed to do some assignments when I came because it would give him a chance to get up and have breakfast. So I think he got the better part of the deal. And I had my classes until 11 or 12 o'clock, and then I went home and I don't remember what I did in the afternoon. I might have had…I think I had Hebrew classes in the afternoon. We had that. Hebrew classes were required by the government, or religious education was a requirement, was part of the curriculum.

Interviewer: What was the setting for your religious education?

Lore Oppenheim: Pardon me?

Interviewer: What was the setting for your religious education?

Lore Oppenheim: All the Jewish children were…religious education at first was in the schools at which we attended. Like in my grade school, one of the rabbis came in everyday or Tuesdays and Thursday from 10 to 11 and gave the religious education. As did the Catholic priest educate the…at the same time the Catholic children, or Protestant minister the Protestant children. Eventually that was discontinued, they moved all the Jewish children, one or two afternoons a week into a public school. We had our classes there. So there were about 10, 12 children and we had our…but that was a very good Jewish education we had. Maybe not as good as now, but we had a good Hebrew education.

Interviewer: Did you have a sense at that age of 10 and 11…you said that the Jewish children were separate from the Protestants, protestants from the Catholic, did you have a sense that it was any different to be Jewish than it was than the Protestants had a sense of being different from the Catholics?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, of course, because they were separated on purpose. So that each one, there was no Sunday school. No Sunday school. All the religion was taught as part of the curriculum, and the respective ministers attended and when the classes were over everybody got together again for math or whatever was the next class. So there really wasn't…it wasn't a big deal at all because that's the way it was being done. Then later on we were all together in one school, and then the Jewish children had sort of a free

period, but I don't think that made too much of an impression on me. That really didn't hit home that much. It was just a fact that I was very bored. It was a lonesome thing to have private tutoring from age 10 or 11 until you're 15, 16 years old, 14 or 15, whatever it was. So I didn't have enough contact with other children and that was difficult. I belong to Jewish organizations and I had contact with them, and it was a very limited situation. My education was great in some aspects and poor in others. I had excellent, excellent instruction in foreign languages. I had good geography classes. I had fair math classes. They were nothing to write home about. I had…what did I have? I had chemistry, but I didn't have physics and so on the forth. So then at one point in my education, that was pretty late, I must have been 15, 16 by then. The Jewish school in Frankfurt, there was a [Philanthropie (sp) 0:11:36.2], which was a very large, beautiful, old Jewish school. They had a curriculum that was based on the Cambridge College curriculum in England. And they had their curriculum and I don't remember if they had teachers from them or just the curriculum, but all of a sudden I went there. My parents…and that was a year and a half and then you get your English matriculation, you were supposed to do that. It was 1937 that…or early '38 that I started there. I think the school year started in April, and we started April 1st, '38, and I was supposed to go for a few years and ended up because if I had stayed with the tutor, I would just continue with lessons, there was no college degree…no high school degree. There was no [unintelligible 0:12:28.2], which is what one strives for, nothing at the end, you just stopped. So I went there. It was difficult. It was two-thirds of the classes were taught in English all of a sudden instead of in German.

Interviewer: How did you adjust?

Lore Oppenheim: You worked very hard. You worked very hard. It was difficult, but it was manageable. And of course it was good, for instance, all of their students, they were all from the [Philanthropie (sp) 0:13:00.4] mostly, they had…they didn't have chemistry, so they started with chemistry, I had had chemistry, but they had had physics and I didn't have physics. So for them having some knowledge starting with physics and English wasn't bad. For me it was terrible, I didn't know anything about physics, so I had to pick up physics in a foreign language and it wasn't very easy. And you worked hard. I mean I was a good student, average to good student. It was more for excellent students basically, so those of us that were average to good worked hard at it, but it was manageable.

Interviewer: Where did the motivation come from in that setting? In other words, you mentioned how difficult it was, there had to be something internal because…

Lore Oppenheim: Well, you wanted an education. You knew you had to leave Germany and

I wanted something to conclude my education. This would have given me the finishing touches so that I could start college or could start vocationally or career-wise or something, but you had to do something. And my parents, said that's a good school so…and I enjoyed being there. For once again I was in a classroom with 20 other kids. I lived with a very nice family that had young people. I just enjoyed it. I basically enjoyed it. So I certainly wasn't going to go back to the tutoring with the teacher that I was sick and tired of, you know what I mean? Can you visualize yourself with one teacher for years and years and years and years? That would get on your nerves.

Interviewer: So I think at that point we might break and come back.

Lore Oppenheim: Okay.

Male: Did you miss being away from your parents?

Lore Oppenheim: Not that much. I mean it was five days a week. I mean, I was a teenager and I was glad for the independence I had.

Male: What were some of the other…did you have a lot of friends now that you're in a school with a lot of other kids?

Lore Oppenheim: A couple of them. It's hard, I was not used to having that many close friends, and yeah I had a few friends, two or three friends, and I was friendly, very close with some of the people that I live with the…they had a young lady who was the organist in our town and I liked her very much. And she took me—she belonged to music groups and she would take me along to her music groups and that was very interesting. I met very nice, interesting people there. So it really was a very good experience. I wasn't sure, but it was awfully hard, I'm not sure, but I could have, I would have done well for the two years, I'm not sure. I hung in there and I did fairly well, but it was complicated.

Male: Okay.

Lore Oppenheim: Okay.

Interviewer: Well, we might start exactly where you left off, and what's so interesting is the fact that you had this drive to succeed and excel, at what point going through this—you mentioned starting off basically at the age of 10 or 11 with your education…talking about the fact that at this point in your life you…I guess it developed by this time, an awareness of the education that had been lacking. Was just sort of a gradual process?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, I suppose I grew up feeling that education was a very, very

important thing. That I had to have an education in order to succeed in life in order to live independent, halfway decent living, to make a decent living and live a good life, you had to have an education. That's, I guess, the way I felt, and the accepted the thing was to get through school of some sort.

Interviewer: So we have you now grappling with a foreign language and taking science courses and…

Lore Oppenheim: Science courses in a foreign language, can somebody try that. It is not easy. Also English and French in a foreign language. I mean almost everything, 80% was done in a foreign language. I think chemistry was not…a couple of courses were not. But one worked hard and one hung in there. And in German schools you work hard. Before that I didn't have to work so hard.

Interviewer: So we have you to take these difficult courses in your teenage years…

Lore Oppenheim: Yeah, right. Okay, but then November 10th, 1938 came, and the Holocaust really started full strength there, and I picked up that morning and went home, but we knew a lot of people were in concentration camps, one was afraid of being in the subway, on the bus, on the train, everywhere, but I made my way home. Meanwhile, my parents were taking English lessons, and one of the ladies from that school that [unintelligible 0:18:18.4] that I went to originally, used to go there every Thursday, it was a Thursday, go there…that's Kristallnacht, the day before Kristallnacht or the day after, I don't remember which, it was a day after I think. The businesses were all destroyed and all that sort of thing. And on the way to our house, I met this French teacher and the first thing I said to her, "Is my father all right?" So she said, "He is not home, but he has not been imprisoned." My father and my uncle…and my uncle lived with us at that time, was two men. So by the time I got home, mother told me that my father had left the house and was going to be with friends somewhere. Where, they didn't exactly know. Well, he had to go, but some friends…I didn't expect that some way they would go there and try and capture him because people…Nazis, they would come into the house and arrest all the men, put them into concentration camp. So my uncle had went to the hospital quick and got a hernia operation that day. He figured he was safe there and he needed hernia operation anyhow, or prostate I think it was. Okay, he had an operation, and my father left to be with friends and he stayed away a few days and then he came back, but he was all right, he was not taken into concentration camp, but that was a conclusion of that education for me.

Interviewer: Well, how did you know? You said that you knew this was happening. Was it word of mouth? Obviously, the press was controlled.

Lore Oppenheim: Yes, of course. Of course, everybody knew right away what was happening. They knew…the business was destroyed. The typewriters were thrown out of the windows. My parents had a wholesale food business, and that was all destroyed. They couldn't go back there. The synagogue was burned down. You knew that. You knew everything was happening. All the people—there were telephones. People were arrested...

Interviewer: It would just seem that it would be so unbelievable that you would question whether, are you sure got the story right and all this…

Lore Oppenheim: Well, that's why I went home right away, and then I didn't go back to school, that was the end of that school. So then I stayed home for a while. Now, what am I going to do? Then, at that point it became very, very imperative that we did everything we possibly could to get out of Germany. We had tried to get an American visa before, but we were denied because I had a rash on my leg. It was a new dermatitis, and the doctor also said my father had a heart condition. Well, my father never in his life had a heart condition and he lived to the age of 101. I don't think the doctor who lived hard and fast…the American doctor in Germany who lived hard and fast could possibly have lived to a 101. But the visa was denied us and that was not very fair because we were basically healthy of course, but there was a lot of graft going on as to visas, American visas. People had numbers, quota numbers, and when our quota number came up, 1830 something whatever it was…we were denied the visa, but we know that a lot of graft had been going on with money and sex and everything else. I think it was more sex and money. And so, what are we going to do now? There are all kinds of interesting stories coming to my mind. Okay. Well, we decided…well after a few weeks at home, I was getting bored again. I said, "Look, I need an education…I need to learn something. I can't go to a foreign country," by that time I was 15 or 16. "I can't go somewhere and not be able, to support myself or help support my parents, you have to work. I don't know nothing. I don't know anything to make a living at." So I was always was interested in health. I was always interested in children, so then an opportunity opened up of a children's orphanage that would take teenage students and teach them how to take care of children, how to take care of a home. Basically, that's how they got their free help, and we payed tuition as well. It wasn't academically too much of an education, but it was a practical education. Now, I went there and it lasted, it was also a couple of years of course, and lasted for about a year or so that I went. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed working with children very much and I again was with peers, with people my age, which was very nice and I made friends, of course. It seems that I was always searching for situations where there were peers my age. So what happened then? Wait a minute. Okay, and after a year or so my parents

finally found a way of leaving Germany, and that was an interesting story. Now, can I go into a little…

Interviewer: Please.

Lore Oppenheim: …separate story? My mother's brother and his wife had immigrated to the Dominican Republic. My uncle was a specialist in fertilizer production and he got a very good job with the government making fertilizer out of bird droppings and various other chemical things. My aunt was a piano teacher and she taught the president's child piano. That was number one. One day, my uncle was driving out into the country with a native chauffer, and in sort of the middle of the country, middle of nowhere, he sees there was a car that had broken down, and again a native chauffer and a Caucasian person was in that car. So my uncle said, "there are not many foreign people around, let me find out if he needs any help." So he went to the car and he said, "Excuse me, I'm on my way back to [unintelligible 0:24:41.7], may I give you a ride? You need a ride." And the man said, "Oh yes, I'd be so grateful to you. I'd like to get out of this situation. The car broke down, there's no one here to fix it and no other people that I know, so I'll be happy to accept the ride." And they got into the car and on the way he told my uncle, he said, "Incidentally, I'm the assistant American consul in the Dominican Republic. I think you saved my life, if I can ever do a favor to you, please let me know." So my uncle said, "Yes, you could do me a big favor, my sister and brother-in-law and their daughter have a visa to the Dominican Republican because they couldn't get one to the United States; however, in order to come to the Dominican Republic, they need a transit visa through the United States because the boat goes via New York, and they cannot get that…have trouble getting that transit visa." He said, "No problem. I'll call Frankfurt and I'll arrange for them to receive the transit visa." So…I might have jumped ahead.

Interviewer: Go back to where you're comfortable with it…

Lore Oppenheim: Okay. So this story came second…the story first came that we were…after I left the children's home, we were trying to get…come to the United States or the Dominican Republic. I think it was already the Dominican Republic. And we were going through Lisbon and Italy—Italy was at that time not in the war—by United States to the Dominican Republic. We got as far as, I think, Munich. I don't remember which town we were going, it wasn't Lisbon, it was a different way. Okay, we got as far as Munich. They took all the Jewish people off the train and said—we were supposed to go through Italy, not Lisbon, through Italy—that all…Italy has entered the war with Germany as part of the Axis. "No more Jewish people may enter Italy; you have to go back to where you were." So we didn't have a choice. I had been just vaccinated because I

needed that for wherever we were supposed to go, and I was running a high fever on top of it all. And so we got off the train, went into the train dining room of the station, had a cup of coffee and tried to figure out what we're going to do next, we have to go back. I started to go to the ladies' room and a gentleman stopped me. Of course at that point, one is very paranoid and very, very suspicious. The gentleman stopped me and he said, "Excuse me, I'm from the Jewish Federation." They love that. "Have you been stopped, kept from entering Italy, are you on the way out of Germany?" I'm sure we looked that. So we said, "Yes." He said, "Well, we have housing for you in a hotel nearby, and then we'll make arrangements so that you could be back to your hometown again." Because you didn't have tickets or anything and you couldn't bring any money with you. So you really didn't have much, your money was sitting in a Germany bank somewhere in your hometown, but you have with you was a few dollars, $4 or whatever, but I did also have the house key because I forgot to leave at home. So we said, "Okay," and he put us up in a hotel and two days later we went back home. Well, back home already two other families were in our apartment, because you could only…we had a very large apartment; they permitted only one room, one or two rooms per family to live in. So they were already, well we were three families in there and my uncle in this three-bedroom apartment. So, what could we do? We went back and we adjusted to life and stayed in Germany until another opportunity should arise. Meanwhile again, yeah, I was stranded education-wise, what was I going to do next? You don't know want to hang around at home. I tried to…one doctor that was trying to teach me to become an assistant in a doctor's office, and that was okay. I liked that, but then he left or whatever happened. He left and that petered out. So I decided to become a nurse, and I entered nurse's training in the Jewish hospital in Berlin, which was fine, which I enjoyed and I liked it and it went for about a year. And then all of a sudden, they chose people or the hospital know that at that point…should I go back to that Dominican Republic thing or does it stay on the tape? It stays on. Okay, by that time my uncle had given a ride to this American consul and he had made arrangements to get visas again for us through Frankfurt over Dominican Republic and it was just a matter of trying to find a boat…finding tickets on the boat and my father was working very hard on that, so they knew…the hospital knew that I was going to leave within the next few months or few weeks to get there. So that really wasn't very nice, but they were asked…they said, "You can keep your students, but we need five or six student nurses that you could spare for forced labor in a German factory." So knowing that I wasn't going to stay there very long, they picked me. So for a few days I was winding spools in a factory.

Interviewer: Spools of thread?

Lore Oppenheim: Spools of thread. Yeah, it was a thread factory. So I did that and my

mother said, “You’re coming home now, we’re going to work on the immigration, you come home and stay home, we want you right there where we are.” That’s it. So I went home and I stayed there and then meanwhile this gentleman from the Dominican Republic, the American consul, had arranged for our visas and we actually got on a train to leave Germany again. Now, that was 1941. You see, we started out in ‘38 with this trying to leave, but this was 1941 already, that was August…August ‘41. We went and at that time it really was…we were on the last train, as it turned out, to the last boat that left Germany. I mean it was that close. We didn’t know it was that close. And it was a train ride from Germany through France, through Spain, through Portugal, into Lisbon. And the interesting thing was that every time the train stopped somewhere for some reason, probably to change engines or something, we had to pull all the shades down in the train so that nobody could look and see all those Jews leaving Germany. Yeah, it was all part of persecution. They found every little bit…every little way of persecuting people, to persecute, and they did. And so we finally made it to Lisbon and we made it on the boat and there the boat was…it was a very nice boat except that we were downstairs in dormitories. Men and women dormitories and mixed dormitories, it really didn’t matter too much. So we got to the dormitories, now we only had a transit visa for the United States. We were not…we did not have any visa to stay there. We were supposed to leave one boat and immediately go on to the next boat and leave for the Dominican Republic once we hit the New York harbor. Okay, we hit New York Harbor, what happens…the war had become…I think the United States had not entered the war yet, but it was coming close to entering the war. We arrived on Labor Day 1941 in New York. We couldn’t embark because it was Labor Day, because the ship would have had… they would have had to pay much higher fee. So we stayed on the boat an extra day, and then instead of getting unto the boat to the Dominican Republic, the political situation had changed, we had…they put us on Ellis Island. They didn’t know quite know what to do. They said “You cannot use your transit visa, you cannot leave the States. You could have looked, you could be looking into the harbor, looked in our boats and could be spying on us. We won’t let you out.” “All right, that’s fine with us, who wanted to go to the Dominican Republic in the first place?” It was not the place to go. So we stayed on Ellis Island, which was not bad, and again I got a little bit of education because there was a nurse who was teaching me to take care of infants. Now, it was not…I knew how to take care…there were several families with infants there, and they were very happy to let me babysit and increase my experience in taking care of infants since that’s what I wanted to do anyhow. So, after about six…we became friendly with other families there. And after about six weeks, they said, “Okay, you can leave Ellis Island on a visitor’s visa, but you don’t have a permanent working permit.” Oh, they had working permits, I don’t quite remember exactly, because we were able to work. We were allowed to

work somehow in certain situations, but not in others. So there was one family there and said, "Oh my sister and brother-in-law live there and they have three children, they need a baby nurse. One of them is a baby, could you please? Would you be interested?" And I said, "Sure." So then I started my career as baby nurse. And then got to the United States that way.

Interviewer: You said it took three years to get out, was it…what's it like to live in kind of three years of that horror and tension about trying…was that difficult?

Lore Oppenheim: Very nerve-wracking. It was a very nerve-wracking experience and because you're afraid of every loud footstep that you hear on the street or in the house, because you think somebody is going to come and get you, yourself, your father, your mother, or somebody else. You had to pass the house where the Nazis were holding prisoners at times, it was on the road to visiting a girl friend, so it was a very frightening experience, very nerve-wracking, where everybody is very, very tense. One of the things we had to do was pull down black-out shades and you couldn't turn a light on. If you went to a room to turn on the light on the black out shade, this could be your death. They could imprison you and then kill you for that, because they say, "You are a spy, you wanted the Allied planes to come right here." And one time we really did. Once, someone in the house walked into a bedroom, flipped the light on, and the shade wasn't down yet. And a warden came, all these volunteer wardens that were hanging around came and said, oh, blah, blah, blah, it was big deal. But fortunately, the thing was smoothed over and nothing happened. But you never know when anything is going to happen. You never know when…get imprisoned or tortured or anything, it went on for years, it was a very nerve-wracking experience. But also one of the things I resented so very much was that I was deprived of any kind of normal teenage years. There was no normalcy to my life. There were no boyfriends around because most everyone was gone; I think I had a date one or two times. The girls that I liked from other schools that were non-Jewish, of course they would pass you right by the street and look straight in your eye and not smile or see anything. So you lost all those friends and your Jewish friends gradually all left and it was a very horrible experience. I still resent…I think that's one of the things I resent the most, that you were deprived. There is a period of growing up from age 10 to 21 that I'm missing that I probably didn't know emotion growing up at all or whatever. It's sort of…I feel it's a big void in my life, and I'm talking to other Holocaust victims, it certainly is not a big deal that I have missed. I didn't have any of the horrible experience, but I still resent it. And I was in Germany last year…two years ago, we had a family reunion in Switzerland and I went there for two days to my hometown, two and a half days, actually. I spent two and a half days in Germany. And I was full of anger, really. I would cash a traveler check in a bank that my father used

to deal with. I picked that bank to cash my traveler's check. And I feel like going in there, like saying, as I was dealing with them, "Who are you? You're not supposed to be here. This is ours." I went into our house. We had a beautiful, big house. I meant to bring…I should have brought that picture, I thought of it too late. And there is this three large, large apartments and two little apartments, one on top and one on bottom. I walked up there and there were 24 units in that building. Two very large ones and they cut up all the rest of it, like our floor, our apartment was an entire big floor, they cut that up into any number of units. And I walk up there, the thing looked so strange to me. On the way to my…I was with a cousin who grow up with me, and he had orchestrated this very carefully, and so on and so forth. And I walked up the street, which I thought always was a long street that would take me about 10 minutes to walk up, and here within five minutes I'm standing in front of this big house. And I said, "Alfred, that looks like our house, but we haven't walked that much yet." Everything that seemed like a big distance and today it looks real close together. I don't know why a lot of people have said that. So he said, "Yes it is," the house was beautifully restored, repainted, nothing had happened to it. The little garden that we had…we had a garden who very carefully had fruit trees that were only about three feet high, made delicious pears and other fruit and flowers, something that was carefully nourished because it was a small garden, was a parking lot. And I walk up the steps to our…I walk up to our apartment, and there is a girl…and I look around, I find there's nothing there, but a hallway with closed doors. So finally somebody came and looked at me questioningly and said, "Can I help you? What do you want here?" And I said, "Oh, I used to live here. I just want to see what it looks like now." I really had wanted to look out of the windows to get the view, but I wasn't able to do that. Oh, she looked at me. She opened the door to her apartment, she opened it about 10 inches, slithered in and slammed the door shut and locked it.

Interviewer: So I want to go into that a little more, but come back for the moment because we're trying to keep this…the chronological order to the point where you are at. You're on Ellis Island and you're taking care of the little children.

Lore Oppenheim: Okay. Right. And then I took the job as the baby nurse. And that went fine and then I took…I stayed with that family six months or so, and then I decided to take a better paying job because I knew baby nurses, young ones, were in demand. So I took another job with another family, just taking care of one child. This was three children, including two teenagers and one not very healthy baby. And I took a job with another one with a physician and that was fine. And as I was growing into my very late teens and maybe closer to 20, I said to myself, "What kind of life is this? I cannot work. I can't meet anyone because I'm never free in the evenings, or once or twice a week. I'm free one Sunday a month, how can I date,

how can I meet…how can I live a normal life?" And I meet a lot of other young people and they all had jobs in offices or stores and I didn't like to work in offices or stores. I liked to work with children, and I said to myself, "Well, I guess I better get an education and try again one more time. I've got to find some sort of an education where I could finish off with a diploma or license or something." So I looked around the various hospitals and also talked to my friends who knew the field quite well, and decided to study occupational therapy, to go to college. The first thing I did was wanting to go to college. Well, I didn't want to teach, what was I going to do? I didn't want…I was thinking of nursing, and that didn't quite work out, I don't know. I tried at Colombia University and I really did not have the credentials for college with all the schooling I had, I still didn't have any credentials. I didn't have a high school diploma. I had like 12 years of one kind of class and eight years of another kind of class and just was so mix up that Colombia said, "You really need to somehow finish your high school education before you can do this." I said, "I have two years of college in some of the subjects." Well it just…nothing worked right. So then I decided, okay, I have decided, I waited a little bit longer, decided to go into occupational therapy. Because nursing really, I was afraid the hours again would not do well with having my own family. The pediatrician of the child I took care says, "Why do you want to go to college? I can get you all the jobs you want." I said, "No, thank you. I want to have a family of my own one day and you can't be loyal to two families." So meanwhile the war had started and nursing really was at a premium, I mean I could have made all kinds of money as a baby nurse, but I didn't want to stick with it. But I enjoyed the family I was living with. I liked that very much it was a young family and that was fine. I also learned English there and I learned to become American, as Americanized as possible. It was a very good entry. Something I recommend for the Russian families. It was a good way of getting used to things. And I finally explored occupational therapy and NYU, New York University, was teaching it, and so I decided to go. They said, "Well, okay, but you can enter as special student, but you need to finish up high school credits before. You have gotten enough credits in English, you're missing about seven to eight credits." That's a lot of credits to miss.

Interviewer: When were you supposed to be doing this, simultaneously or…?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, I decided to do it simultaneously. I decided I've got to get started one way or the other. I said, "Okay, I'll start as special student and then finish the high school credits as I go along," because I figure if I have to take college English, which I would take, that already helped me along with this high school English, so I don't have to go…I wasn't about to go back to high school, and I was limited in funds. I have to figure out how I was going to use the funds that I had earned while I was baby nursing and my parents…I didn't want to take any money from them. They were

having a hard time of themselves. So I figured, it wouldn't be easier if I did it simultaneously. I don't know whether that was or wasn't. But anyhow, I started that and then my advisor didn't realize…knew I started as special student, but as time went on she didn't realize I was a special student. And you start off with one curriculum, you get a sheet as a freshman. They say, in order to graduate in 1950 in occupational therapy, you have to have so many courses of psychology, so many of anatomy, so many of physiology and all those things. And then next year they decide, well it wasn't quite right, let's do the next students two years later, let's change the curriculum a little bit, and they change their curriculum very often. But once you have your green sheet with you, original curriculum you're stuck with that. Well, I didn't have a green sheet with a curriculum and my advisor did not…it's not too much a way of it, you wouldn't have put up with all that. And I was going to stay in the school and I was going to continue one way or the other, so eventually I went to one of those college prep schools and explained my story to them. They said, "Yes, we can help you get your high school credits for all those courses if you attend classes for two weeks," a limited amount of time, because I had the knowledge by then. And then someone at school said, "Well, we will give you the exam in French and you can make up three or four credits in French. And I had English credits I made up in the school, and then German credits I made up somehow too, so I really made French and German credits up without going back to school, by taking the entrance exams, the regions exams, New York regions exams, which were difficult. And the English, I took the courses. They said, "If you take the courses and you should be able to pass the exam, then we will give you credit," it was an accredited school. So I work my credits to them and then one day I came to my advisor, I said, "Here." I matriculated finally.

Interviewer: How long did all this process take?

Lore Oppenheim: Two, three years. At least two years. He said, "You mean? You're just matriculating now, everything has been changed, you've taken all these courses meanwhile, and they don't apply. Some of them don't apply and we've changed the curriculum." So we didn't like the changes and back and forth and we pressed anger by the advisor. We eventually got it all straightened out and I got my five years of education as an occupational therapist including my clinical…10 months of clinical affiliation. I got all that done. Meanwhile, I thought I could work, do some of this high school stuff and take maximum amount of credits, which wasn't a greatest idea, but anyway, I somehow got through, got my diploma and became an occupational therapist and got my job. And that was what I wanted. I wanted a vocation, a career that I could use always. I'm still an occupational therapist. I'm very glad I fought for that education. I worked very hard for the education, but it was all very, very much worthwhile. And I think what I'm trying to prove is that no matter how

adverse the conditions are, if you want education badly enough you really can get it, but it's so nice to have and I'm very proud of it.

Interviewer: So at that point you were…having had the educational opportunities, however you received them—

Lore Oppenheim: However I received them.

Interviewer: You were able to at that point you were not lacking at all in the training and background and so forth?

Lore Oppenheim: Oh no. You couldn't graduate and it's a licensing thing. I'm licensed, then registered with the American Occupational Therapy, so I was then licensed in the state of Tennessee and I have all my credentials. I mean, I had those in 1950, I finally got that. All right, it took me from1934 to 1951 or '50 to receive…I had a normal education from 1932 to 1936 or '28…from 1928 to 1932 or '33, I had a normal education. Then I had all this crazy mixed-up stuff from 1933 to 1950, and then ended up again with a normal ending to my education.

Interviewer: Now, 1950, what transpired at this point for you?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, I took a job as an occupational therapist with the cerebral palsy…United Cerebral Palsy of Passaic, New Jersey in an outpatient clinic and I work there for a year. Then interestingly enough, I'm an occupational therapist and mostly in hospitals and I have my affiliations in hospitals, but I decided to work in schools.

Interviewer: What brought you to that decision just because there were so many?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, I wanted to work with the children. I wanted long term, I wanted to see my patients longer than for six weeks or eight weeks or three months that they were in the hospital, and then they go home, you'll never see them again. You don't know how far they have gotten. I work with mostly it was physical disability patients. So I decided—and also the hours are better—and so at first I worked in outpatient clinic then I took a job in the south of New York with the school system and I liked that, we started a camp and it's still in existence. And then by that time I had married and I had one child, and then I didn't work the first few years until this child was three years old. Three and a half years old and could go to a good Jewish day school in New York in [unintelligible 0:52:35.8]. And then I took a job with the school system, New York school system in Long Island on Brooklyn, and I worked with the several…again school for handicapped children as part of the public school. Took that until my second child came, by that…then we moved, then I didn't work for a while and we moved to Nashville from New York.

Interviewer: What timeframe are we talking about now?

Lore Oppenheim: 1957…'58, we moved in 1958. My daughter was born in '57, November '57 and we moved in September '58, Rosh Hashanah, right after Rosh Hashanah. And then I didn't work for a few years or about three years and then I decided to go back to work and I worked at Junior League Home for Crippled Children two days a week, again with handicapped children.

Interviewer: What brought you to Nashville? You say you didn't work at the point where you just came to Nashville, what was the decision that—?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, it was a business proposition for my husband. He wanted to work here with my brother and sister-in-law, and they had a factory and they were anxious for him to join them because they wanted someone from the family to be involved with the business. So it was a good opportunity, it was a good stepping stone for them and for us because my husband was in the jewelry business and New York wasn't very good at that time. Everybody bought wholesale. And so after, when my daughter was about three and a half or three somewhere…anyhow, probably about two. I was first offered just working on a grant…Bill Wilkerson had gotten a grant for occupational therapy, and I was there until that grant was used up and then I took a two-day week job at Junior League Home for Crippled Children, and then for a while I didn't work again, I was busy with my own children, and then I went with public health, Tennessee Department of Public Health, full time, and I was with them for nine years doing home visits, working with schools, setting up programs in schools, doing home care and working with activity coordinators in nursing homes. Two colleagues and I started all the activity programs in all of the nursing homes in Tennessee; I had the middle Tennessee ones. We train the activity coordinators. We insisted that the directors hire activity coordinators and we helped them get started in the programs. And we were their crying towel, the activity coordinators' towel when things didn't go right.

Interviewer: Talk to me a little bit about—

Lore Oppenheim: Can we just finish where I am now and then…For the last 10 years, I've been working at the Tennessee School for the Blind with the multi-handicapped blind children, and I have [unintelligible 0:55:44.5] cerebral palsy and mental retardation and all various paraplegia, spina bifida. We had all the various physical handicaps that happened to have blindness associated with it, or the blind children that happened to be physically handicapped, and I've enjoyed that very much and I have very strong program there.

Interviewer: As a result of the experiences you've had getting your education I guess would be paramount here: what have you…how have you provided for your children in terms of their own secular education and also their Jewish education?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, when my children were needing me the most, I would only work two days a week and during that time I had help at home. And I had my job arranged so that I could stay home until the children were on the bus to school and I got back in time to pick them up from the bus and take them to Hebrew school, the two days and Sunday schools, and so on. At that time, there weren't that many opportunities for day care and so on. Mother's did not work as much at that time. And I saw to it that that came first, my children…family and children came first before the career. I've probably missed out on a lot. I probably could be a lot further in my career if I had not done that, but that's the way I chose to do it.

Interviewer: But you've come a long way.

Lore Oppenheim: I've come a long way. I should be able to be director of programs or something, but I somehow stayed away from that because I couldn't coordinate. I didn't want a job that would keep me tied up all day everyday and evenings and so on the forth. I had to provide for my family first. I mean, that was part of our deal at the time.

Interviewer: And as a refugee, we hear so much about survivors and how a number of them go through what is called survivor's guilt, I'm sure you're familiar with that.

Lore Oppenheim: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there any bonding experience that you as a refugee felt possibly about being fortunate enough to be a refugee?

Lore Oppenheim: Yes, I had some friends that didn't get out and I felt very, very guilty about that. And the day of actually leaving Germany was such a terrible, terrible experience for us because people kept on coming all day long to visit and say goodbye, and the saying goodbye was absolutely terrible because you knew you'd never see this people again, you knew they'd be killed somehow. It was very, very difficult. And my mother fell apart in the end. And I remember the last person who came up was a very nice lady, our dressmaker who had helped us out in many ways, but I couldn't come. I said, "You can't see my mother, she's just, terrible shape." And she was very upset about it, so mother did come out, but it was nice of me to say you can't, because I was protective because she had really fallen apart. But I had that for a very long time.

Interviewer: But when you can intellectualize that you're not…it wasn't your doing that the others were left behind, is that of any comfort or is the guilt so overwhelming that…

Lore Oppenheim: No, I don't think it's so overwhelming. I mean it's a fact. It's a matter of fact, this is what happened, what can you do about it? I'm sure I suffered from it quite a long time. I lost some very good friends and I was very concerned about them, and searched for them and so on, relatives too. I had family, my uncle perished, and my parents were with me, but we were a large family and I was just thinking the other day. My children are complaining there aren't that many cousins. I still have…there are four or five cousins that are still alive. First off my father was, I think, one of the youngest of nine children. Everyone had offspring, but there's almost no one left. The cousins met just a year…two years ago, almost two years ago. One cousin decided to go to Switzerland on vacation. The second one said, the one living in England said, "Oh it's not so far so from us, I'm going to come too." The two cousins, one in Israel said, "Oh I'm going to come. If you're going to be there, I'm going to come too." Another one said, from Israel, "We are going to make a trip, but we'll see you too." Somebody said, "But why don't you go too?" I had no intention of going. We had our vacation that year. My daughter had been very sick. But I said, "No." And then my daughter-in-law says to me, "Mother, if everybody goes why don't you go too?" I said, "You know, it's a very good idea. I think I'll go." My daughter said, "Mother go, go." And I was at her house in fact when I made the final reservations, and I decided to go. And there were two cousins from Israel, one cousin from England, one cousin from France, one cousin who lives in Baltimore, she was the one that pulled it all together because she has a lot of charisma and everybody loves her. One cousin from Baltimore whose wife works for the University of Maryland and teaches American soldiers bookkeeping in Germany and that's…they have an opportunity to start their college business career, business college at the University of Maryland through courses taught at the Army base, and she travels to all the army bases giving these courses. While they came, in fact they were the ones that live in the hometown; otherwise, I wouldn't have gone. And so we were all there, we all met. They're not all together, but over a period of a few weeks all of us were there, everybody meet everyone.

Interviewer: Can you describe how you felt? I mean that must have been…

Lore Oppenheim: It felt very good. It felt…I always liked these cousins. It felt like home. It felt…for once I don't have much family here. My parents are deceased and the only family on my side of the family, there is the one cousin in Baltimore and her brother who happens to be in Germany right now but who will come back, and two second cousins in California, the children of a cousin in California, and that's all family here and I miss it terribly. I

really do. And my children are complaining, we don't have any family to visit. My daughter had a baby naming, her husband's family. There were 40 odd people came for the baby naming, from our family five came: my husband, myself, my son, and my son's two children. My son's wife was ill. So that's it. And Carol said, "I hate it that we have so few family members." And really not many stick together. I mean we happen to stick together fairly well, but on the other sides of the family they don't stick together. You make close friends, but there's nothing like family.

Interviewer: Sure.

Lore Oppenheim: And you really would like your children to have family too, and it's not there, you're missing something, but we all…I survived and I didn't have concentration camp experience. My parents didn't, so I feel very lucky really.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier on and we said we'd come back to it, the feeling of going back and seeing other people living where you used to live.

Lore Oppenheim: Oh, it was awful. I felt like throwing them out physically and I finally—and I know my hostility showed through. I finally left the building. I really wanted to go and look into one of the apartments and look out the windows and one of them was an architectural office, one was something else, but my cousin was waiting downstairs too, we had all kinds of other plans. So I finally left because I was afraid somebody would call the police, because the building didn't belong to us anymore, somebody had bought it for a very small amount of money and making a fortune, I think that's what made me so angry. Some German bought the house, didn't pay as much money for it and is making a fortune out of it. I mean, rent from 22, 24 people. It's a lot of money, and I resented that very much. And then I decided to spend the rest of the day—I was only one day in the hometown actually—going toy shopping for the grandchildren, I love to buy toys since I've sort of experienced…

Interviewer: Do you have any feelings just from the standpoint of having maybe just kept up with politics and so forth, about the reunification of Germany, the potential for something like this happening again?

Lore Oppenheim: Yes, I feel very strongly about it. I'm very sad about the reunification. I don't like it. We don't need another strong Germany. We really don't need it. It's just what I said, just as I left the house, is the German word, "Deutchland, Deutchland, uber alles." They're going to have another big monstrous Germany, and there is no guarantee, no matter what anyone says, that they said, "Oh everything is going to be fine as long as the wrong person…they don't follow the wrong person." Who is there to say that in 50 years the wrong person won't get in there, or in 30 years or 20

years and they start all over again. We saw it on Charles Kurault this morning. Somebody voiced the same opinion. Some survivor…they had a program on, the people that met at – the American and Russian people that unified Germany at the…that got together, I don't know if you remember that unless it was on this morning. This big hugging that the American and Russian soldiers did when they got together, when they finally got together and had squashed the Germans, and one of them said…one of the people from that…they're having the reunions, I mean now that they just had a reunion, they said, "I feel very badly about the reunification. I think something can happen there any time again once they're reunified." And the reason they were divided was to keep them weak. So now they're going to be strong. And just as I left the house, I read the headline in the *Tennessean* today, how the United States, Russia, France, and England think it's good to reunite Germany. I don't think so. I really don't think so. They're going to have another superpower there and they don't need it. The Germans are smart. They don't need another superpower there. They're smart, they're frugal, they can do with less if it's for their country. They can adjust very well if they want something. If they want something badly enough they'll get it. There's no question about it.

Interviewer: Along these same lines, having lived through the times that you have lived through and seen so much in those years, we're faced now, we're documenting this for posterity, but we're faced even now with people saying it never happened.

Lore Oppenheim: What can I say? It did happen. What do you do to those people? Get them to read history books. Or some people just don't want to see that it happened. They're just denying it, then you have to go from the psychiatric point of denial, and if they're going to deny there's nothing you can do unless you can through psychologist and psychiatrist, keep them from denying things. People deny they have cancer if they don't want it to the last minute. I denied when my parents were getting old and my father was really and my mother…if anybody said anything that their mind wasn't quite right, I jumped on their throat. I knew it in my own mind, but I wouldn't let any…wouldn't admit it to anyone.

Interviewer: But do you feel that the people that say these things…is there a danger to these people of being taken seriously, or do you just sort of dismiss it as these other forms of denial where…

Lore Oppenheim: Well, some people will take them seriously. There are a lot of ignorant people around, and some people will take them seriously. I don't think there's much you can do about it. I mean, you can deny it and deny it and deny it and show people the difference, but if someone…it's a free country, if someone wants to deny it, there's nothing you can do about it, I

don't think.

Interviewer: And the documenting of your own experiences and the things that you've witnessed, in the time remaining, what is the most important thing, if you were to capsulize it, that you would really want to get across to people? If they were to listen to nothing else that you had to say, what would it be?

Lore Oppenheim: "Look what I have suffered to get an education." Number one, I mean it really wasn't any fun going to college, believe me it wasn't. I didn't have time to date and I didn't have the money to have fun or to go away on weekend trips or anything. It was just lucky that I went to university instead of to a college where there wasn't that much student life, but I had no time at all for student life. I was working the afternoons and evenings and during the day I went to classes and I had very little free time, and even less free money to spend. So it was not a college experience per se, but I didn't go for a college experience. I just had to have an education. I'm sorry, what was your question.

Interviewer: Well, just trying to get an idea of what…we've talked about so many different things, and wanting to give the degree of emphasis to what you feel is most important. What do you want people to take away from this? Years from now, you want people to look back on and the times in which you lived, and what is important to know about this whole experience?

Lore Oppenheim: That it is possible to get an education no matter how difficult things are. I think that's really the most important thing of the story. And that one can end up being a reasonably normal person. I hope I'm reasonably normal.

Interviewer: Is there anything that we've left out that you feel—

Lore Oppenheim: Huh?

Interviewer: Is there anything that we've left out.

Lore Oppenheim: No, but you can be a normal person even though conditions were adverse. You can survive, you can overcome it and eventually come out okay. We don't laugh enough at home. I was trying to think, "What's wrong with our house?" I'll go to other people's home, they laugh a lot. We don't laugh enough, but aside from that I think we are normal people living a normal life. And my husband is from the same town that I'm in except that we hadn't met until after the war, after the Holocaust, after I had been working, after I had established myself as occupational therapist, about a year after that. A funny thing happened too. I got married later than most of my friends and some of my friends because I wanted to finish school and I wanted to have an education first. I wasn't going to…I wanted to be able to work and be independent even though I was married. And a lot of

people said to me, "Why don't you forget about the educatio?." I know I was going with one boy and his family said, "Lore is so foolish. Look at all the money and time she is spending on education, she could be working in an office and make a nice salary, but instead of that she is going to NYU." Very few of my friends and peers, German-Jewish peers went…of that particular age group, went to a university to finish their education. Most of them took short courses, stenography or whatever, sewing or whatever, and then went on to work. Fortunately, I didn't have to support my parents. They were able to support themselves. And I think that's why I was able to pursue a career on my own.

Interviewer: You did mention your husband, and maybe there are some more things to be learned about him?

Lore Oppenheim: Well, he's a very nice guy and he came from the same hometown. His family was able to leave in 1938. He didn't have a lot of these experiences that I had, but there is enough…we have enough experience to have had in common that we've been able to have a good life and a good marriage.

Interviewer: You feel like you've been able to convey these experiences both to him and to your children? Is there anything in the telling that you think is missing that where you would have had been there really to appreciate?

Lore Oppenheim: I'm sorry, I don't quite…I can't quite relate to your question.

Interviewer: Well, I'm sure that as you're explaining the various things that have happened that sort of little mental images form that are really impossible to articulate.

Lore Oppenheim: Well, for many years I refused to talk about it and my own children know very little about that because I wouldn't talk about it. And just recently my daughter said, "Mother, please record all your experiences, we want to know, we don't know what's going on. We don't know what went on." And they have no idea really about this and I've never talked about it for some reason or other. Occasionally, I'd talk to a friend about it, if someone really shows a big interest, I'd tell them, but I don't think the children ever were interested enough to sit still long enough to listen to all that. It's a lot. And for years I wouldn't talk and also the children did not learn German at home. We did not speak German at all to our children and lot of people said, "Why don't you speak German? Why don't you let the children learn German as a main language, and then when they go to school, they have a foreign language and then they learned it already. It makes it so much easier for their education." And I just couldn't speak German. I just couldn't.

Interviewer: It's too painful?

Lore Oppenheim: It was too painful. I just didn't want the memories. I also had fears. I remember. I remember being in the New York subways and those trains rode by, I sometimes panicked and I know that—I almost went for psychiatric help—that if I were on the subway station…on 79th Street where the museum of Natural Histories and you see all these great big monkeys or dragons or whatever, already in the subway station, pictures of it. And at the same time, I have a train going by, I'd absolutely panicked and had to rush out, and it was very, very frightening. It was just…and also I had nightmares and if something like that would happen, I had nightmares for weeks. As far as the Holocaust programs, now that might be interesting. I attend very few of them, the Holocaust service and all that stuff because I feel, what's the sense to it, I know what it was all about. I don't need to be remembered. And the rest of the…and I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but the rest of the people don't make a big deal out of the…when we needed you, you weren't there. When we wanted you to help us and help us get us out of Germany, nobody was there, people were not there. And now, don't feel so sad about the Holocaust, the time to have felt sad about the Holocaust was 20, 30, 40 years ago. You should have felt sad at '30, '40 and '50 and tried to do something about, maybe they felt sad, yes, but they were afraid to do anything about it. They didn't want to ripple any waters there. Roosevelt was in and the labor movement didn't want a lot of…and everybody was afraid of it. And when people came they had to be assimilated quickly, reading some of the books…

Interviewer: One thing we didn't touch on I think is very important, is we're reading now about how Roosevelt and all the people at that time in this country knew about what was going on, but either put a priority of winning the war above all this…