



## Abraham Zuckerman 09.0174

*Oral Interview conducted by Alex Kaplan*

*Mr. Zuckerman lived in Cracow, Poland before the Holocaust and was about thirteen years old. He spent some teenage years during the war in a Nazi Concentration camp. Prior to Hitler invading Poland his father was a hat maker.*

### **Prior to and just up to Hitler invading Poland**

**Kaplan:** What was your day-to-day life like for an average Jewish person?

**Zuckerman:** My day-to-day was mostly schooling. Went to school from the morning to the night. I had the Polish curriculum and the Hebrew curriculum. School was from like nine o'clock in the morning to six or seven o'clock at night with breaks.

**Kaplan:** What did you enjoy in school?

**Zuckerman:** Most of the enjoyment was on the Hebrew side. Most of the time you study the Bible: mostly studied the law, the Jewish Hebrew law.

**Kaplan:** What was your relationship like with non-Jewish citizens?

**Zuckerman:** We had no problem with the non-Jewish people. It wasn't a love affair between the non-Jews and Jews but there was no problem. We went to our schools and they went to public schools. I did not go to public school, I went to Hebrew school. The Jews did not attend too much to the public schools because in Europe, in Poland, they are a very religious country.

**Kaplan:** How did you react to the Nazi invasion of Poland? What do you remember about that?

**Zuckerman:** I was about thirteen years old, maybe not even. In Europe, thirteen years old is not like a thirteen year old in America. I was still a Mamma's baby. Hitler invaded in September 1939. He invaded Poland the first day and we had to run to bunkers and air shelters. Most of the time I lived in an apartment building, an apartment like you see in Europe, big

apartment buildings. You were protected, if not protected you ran out of the house when the bombs started to fall. Then, when it quieted down you went back to the home. We couldn't go to school, anymore. We had to do everything in private, what we could do. Little by little that stopped too. You know the laws. So you could not do anything.

**Kaplan:** Did you have to wear the gold Jewish star?

**Zuckerman:** Oh ya, I had to wear the Jewish star. Jews, that was the law.



## Sylvester B. Knap 02.0507

*Oral interview conducted by Rafal S. Knap (grandson)*

*Sylvester Knap was born in Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland, in 1929. His father was a musician and finished [his education] in a conservatorium in Warsaw. He was a maestro and taught high school music.*

**Rafel:** What kind of education or job training did you have?

**Knap:** At the time the when the second World War started I was ten years old; I was just in the third grade.

**Rafel:** How was it that you ended up in one of the camps?

**Knap:** When the Germans took over Poland they liquidated higher education because they were saying that all Slovaks should be labor no higher education. So there was no high school, there was no university, so when I finished elementary school I was attending underground teaching. So we were meeting each week in different places to, let's say, study to finish. . . I was you know first class high school, then we had to move out of the city because they were spying on us already, and mother took us to Czestohowa.

**Rafel:** Were these the Nazis that were spying on you?

**Knap:** Yes, the Nazis knew that there was some teachings underground. So we moved to Czestohowa. Even there on my way home from the underground classes they where rounding up people, so they just blocked one street and then the second street, and the soldiers you know were just grabbing you and putting [you] without any questions into prison. So, from that prison from Czestohowa they took me to Leipzig (now it's a Polish city there) without any reason. From Leipzig they took us to the concentration camp.

**Rafel:** Were any of your family, or friends...did any of them participate in the resistance group?

**Knap:** My uncles, one was chief of the underground

in AK; second was captain of the underground army; one got killed cause they got him for being a Polish bandit and they shot him; and the fourth one, too, he escaped from Poland after the war from Russia and got [to] the Americans.



## Rolande Faucon 98.0427

*Rolande Faucon lived in a small town near Epernay in France with her mother, father and four other siblings. At the start of the war she was about fifteen years old. Her father worked on the highway and her mother was a stay-at-home mom.*

**Sinco:** So, maybe we can start a little bit before the war time era. I know you said you were about fifteen when the war started so what about your childhood and kind of your family situation?

**Faucon:** Before the war got started, we went to school and then we studied music. My older brother was playing the saxophone. My sister and I learned first Solfège music, just the notes, you know, the music. After that we studied mandolin and then the piano. Of course, that was a part of our youth, okay? We had a very lively home. All of the young children in our own age usually met at our house. And from there we would go to the movie, and, of course, when the war started, there was no more buses so we used to walk to the movie, about five miles, also to the opera about every weekend, in Epernay, a small town next to my small town. Then there was nothing unusual until the war, of course; the war came on September 3, 1939. We had two large chateaux in Mareuil-sur-Ay. One of them was occupied, one of the big champagne manufacturer's lived in that one. And the other one was also a very beautiful chateau. The owner lived in Paris; she only came about, oh, twice a year; but in October of '39 the English came down and they installed a hospital station in the chateau. We had the English in our town for a while until May 1940.

When we started getting bombed, the English left for Dunkerque [Dunkirk] and back to England. I had an uncle who was killed during the fighting at Dunkerque. Then on May 19th, we were bombed. We had a big cave under my house so a lot people, most of the neighbors, joined us. The cave was full, full of neighbors.

Yeah, it was scary, hearing the bombs. They were small bombs during those times. Before October and September '39 until May 19th, it was rather quiet. We were wondering what the war was all about; you are a child, a teenager. Then on May 21 my father put us on a train to go to the center of France to my grandparents' house. He [my father] couldn't live with us because he had to take care of the town. It took us three days to go three hundred kilometers, I would say. We slept on the straw. They [train personnel] made us get off the train, so the French Military train could go by. Their train was riddled with bullets, no windows left. Anyway we finally got to my Grandmother's house in the center of France, and, of course, the Germans met us there. During the following years. . .we were occupied by Germans. We came back home and everything was gone: the silverware, the good dishes, the pots and pans, the mattress off the beds. Everything was gone. However, the city helped us recuperate or helped us get some of the things we needed to survive. We were occupied by the Germans and we had the S.S. military: they occupied the chateaux of course. Then, after that we were restricted. We were unable to go out at night after dark. You had to have blinds on all your windows, so no light would come through, otherwise they [the Germans] would shoot through your windows.

Yeah, right, a blackout. And then part of the. . .one of the paintings I've made with the big GI and the scenes going in his pockets. One scene illustrates where I used to go to my piano lesson in Epernay and I always stopped on the railroad bridge because I loved to smell the smoke for some reason [laughs].

I was on my bicycle and that's when I used to see those cattle cars and I could see those faces crying and asking for food and water. And the Germans wouldn't let you get near, of course, I was above, but I could tell some of the French people were trying to get near by and help out, but the guards wouldn't let them. I remember those little faces crying out of the [railroad cars], not really knowing or understanding what was going on or where they were going. Of course, they were going to the concentration camps, you see. And, of course, all throughout the war we were really starved. I tell you, as a teenager I was really, really hungry. I don't think I've ever been so hungry as then.

**Sinco:** There just wasn't food available in the town?

**Faucon:** No. No, you see everything was stopped, you know. There was no more transportation, no more trains or buses, and I remember riding my bicycle a lot, going looking on the farm for eggs because my brother was just a baby. So for eggs or milk or whatever we could get—and it was always good. I remember one time when we got fresh eggs, we only got about three. I ate one, it was still warm. I ate a whole egg like that.

**Sinco:** Raw?

**Faucon:** What raw? You crack the end of the fresh and still-warm egg, make a small opening, and then you swallow. It's pretty good!

**Sinco:** Right, well when you're that hungry, yes certainly.

**Faucon:** Oh yes, it was really bad, really bad, being hungry.

**Sinco:** And was there, did school stop, too, at this time?

**Faucon:** Well, actually I graduated from school when I was twelve years old. Then I started school in the next town—Epernay—taking Home Economics; but then I had to quit because no more buses, no more bicycle tires or anything. So during the war my mother was really worried with us traveling with the Germans on the highway.

**Sinco:** Okay, yeah. So, it was too far to go.

**Faucon:** So, no, the school kept going on until May. And then in May we evacuated. Of course, the school used to go on to the end of June or July, I can't even remember; but, anyway, the school stopped then, for awhile.

**Sinco:** And how long were you at your Grandmother's?

**Faucon:** Well, at my Grandmother's we must have been there a couple of months. We came back home. That's when we found that everything was gone. We had to refurbish everything.

**Sinco:** Was it more settled? Is that maybe why your parents...? Do you know why your parents decided

to go back to the house?

**Faucon:** Well, that's where our home was and the Germans already had been at my Grandmother's house, too. The whole place was taken care of by the Germans, so there was no sense in staying in one place. . . They bombed us in May in 1940. When they bombed us at the time, just before that, the English military knew the Germans were coming. See we had two bridges: a river called La Mame and a canal Literal a la Mame. And then before the Germans came, the English blew up the bridges and when the Germans came they rebuild part of it. And, of course, when the Americans came, the Germans blew them [the bridges] back up again. But that's the way the Americans came on their pontoon boat. They crossed the river and the canal; they crossed the narrowest part of the river. I don't know why they came that way [on the way to Bastogne], but that 's the way they came through our little town. And the first day they came, they were very cautious. They came on pontoon boats with their rifles. They would walk close to the buildings. Just like the painting where the soldiers were going up the stairs. That's the way I remember the [first American soldiers coming to my town] going up steps, leaning against the walls until they figured out if they wouldn't be hit [by gun fire]. I remember they gave us chewing gum so much chewing gum I couldn't open my mouth the next day! [laughs]

**Sinco:** [laughs] That's a lot of chewing gum!

**Faucon:** Right. And, of course, when the Americans came we were so happy. My mother was cooking gizzard stew that day. We had gizzards for a change. Some gizzard stew, some American who spoke French came by and said, "We would love to eat with you, would you mind? We'll give you our ration." And, of course, we didn't have much to eat, but we were so happy to have about two or three of them [American soldiers]. And they would give us their K-rations. With the Nescafe and the ham and the cans with ham in it, it was just so wonderful.

**Sinco:** And, do you remember what you guys talked about?

**Faucon:** Oh, they were very limited in their talking French and I didn't speak English, of course.

**Sinco:** Oh okay, and they didn't speak much French.

**Faucon:** And neither did my family. And some of them could speak French, but not very fluent, in fact, very little. They were on their way to Bastogne. When they started to Bastogne, one of the G.I.s who could speak some French came with a bunch of socks, and you know we never took in laundry, but they said, oh it would be so nice if you could wash our socks, so I remember I was the one who got the

job of washing. I don't know how many black socks I washed that day and hung them up outside. But when they came back they were still wet. And I don't know which were [whose]; they were all the same anyway. [laughs] Again, they gave us some of their K-rations and that was wonderful, you know.

**Sinco:** [laughs] So, there was some interaction between the citizens and the soldiers. Did you think, did you notice that other people were doing favors for the soldiers?

**Faucon:** Oh yes, we were all so happy. Everybody was ready to do favors. Well, we had a courtyard with a front door with two double doors. We kept the doors open looking at the G.I.s go by. My father gave them champagne and wine. They [G.I.s] were in a truck and we were throwing stuff at them [laughs] and they were throwing their stuff back. It was such a happy time, even though we were still starving. We didn't have much food for a long time, afterwards. Even after the Americans came, communication really wasn't very good. But then during the war we had to be careful. My older brother was taken to go work in Germany as a laborer. He could have been in hiding, but he was too afraid that my father would be taken, then.

**Sinco:** Oh, so he stepped up.

**Faucon:** So he went, yes. And when he came back he was so skinny. He said he never starved so much in his life.

**Sinco:** Even despite the work he was doing.

**Faucon:** Yes.

**Sinco:** And how long was he gone?

**Faucon:** He was gone for over a year.

**Sinco:** And did you have any correspondence with him?

**Faucon:** Yes, the Germans would send checks, money for his labor at home, but he, himself, was starving. It was kind of strange. . .well, and, of course, when you are a teenager you don't worry as much as you do when you are older.

**Sinco:** And did you find, did you have a lot of scares where. . . I know you keep mentioning that the town next door was being bombed or planes being shot down. Did you find that you had to go down to your cave very often?

**Faucon:** Oh yes! We went inside the cave and, in fact, after awhile we had to go to the bigger cave—the champagne cave. And a lot of people would bring their sleeping bag and go in the champagne cave. My parents only went to the cave a couple of times. My mother did not seem to be too afraid, but,

see, my father had been in the First World War. The sounds of the bombs were horrible to him. But then I remember I could hear the American planes, I could hear the sound of the planes for miles. I would go sit on my parents' bed and I was shaking. My mother said, "Won't you just go back to sleep?" — but no, I could hear those planes. I was really, really afraid during the war of those planes and the bombs and everything. That's one thing I was really, really disturbed over. I was so happy when the war ended.

**Sinco:** What is your strongest memory of the war or wartime?

**Faucon:** The strongest memory, well, I guess part of it was being afraid all the time; being afraid about just about anything. I was afraid of the planes when they would fly over, wondered when they would drop bombs. Afraid not to have any food to eat, any more; afraid, not really of dying, but of being crippled from the war, because dying to me was nothing, it never was. I've always thought dying was nothing compared to, if you can't do what you want to do anymore, if you are in a chair or whatever.

*Paintings by Ms. Faucon are in the Collection of the Institute on WWII including the painting in this exhibition.*



## Giulia Koritschoner Hine

*Giulia was about fourteen in 1939. She was born in Vienna, Austria, and lived there with her mother and older stepsister who was Susanne Weiss and her grandfather Paul Hasterlik.*

**Susan:** And what were their occupations?

**Giulia:** Well, my mother eventually became a salesperson for a concern that sold coal to industrialists, the concern having been founded by my father, and he studied to be a geologist and became an industrialist.

**Susan:** . . . so your father was a geologist?

**Giulia:** Yes.

**Susan:** When did your father die?

**Giulia:** He died—we think he died in 1928.

**Susan:** Could you tell us about grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, as you were growing up in Vienna?

**Giulia:** Well, the main figure in my life was my mother's father, my grandfather, and his name Paul Hasterlik. He sort of took the place of a father figure for me. But he was—I thought he was God in person, really, for a long time, because he was so mellow and so nice and so intelligent and he knew everything, he never got angry, and so on and so forth. My mother had a sister, Auguste, and we called her Gusti or Gu, and she was quite in and out of my life. She often had to babysit us children, and she also taught me the piano. She was a pianist, but I wasn't. And my grandmother, Paul's wife, was a concert pianist. He was a medical doctor, a dentist, and he had a job with—actually what you would call disease control of Austria in the city hall in Vienna. His main interest was epidemics of tropical diseases; oral type for cholera, not necessarily tropical. And I don't know if I may jump all the way to Theresienstadt, but I'm sure he worked in such capacity in Theresienstadt because they had the threats of these diseases all the time.

**Susan:** Who else was part of your growing up? Your

young youth?

**Giulia:** A relative was my sister's father who came once upon a Sunday and took us for a walk in the Vienna woods.

**Susan:** Mr. Weiss.

**Giulia:** Mr. Weiss. And then I had pseudo-fathers, and one outstanding one— his name was Heinrich Kopetz. Actually what they were were admirers of my mother. He was in the house very much and I liked him very much. He was very upbeat and happy and terribly positive. He never saw or said anything negative about anybody except Hitler or Stalin that I know, and there will be more about him. And then there was another admirer and he was Thomas Heller. He was the son of Hugo Heller, quite a well-known book dealer in Vienna who, by the way, published Freud's first works. Thomas Heller was the opposite. He was grumpy, he was negative, he didn't smile, he didn't talk to the children much, but he played wonderful piano and he played a lot of classical music and fantastic jazz. Then there were lots of friends of my mother [who were] in and out [of the house].

**Susan:** Talk a little bit about the whole lifestyle in Vienna in those days.

**Giulia:** Well, it was between the two wars, I suppose. I know my mother was very rebellious towards my grandmother and so was the aunt; I mean those two daughters drove the parents nuts. And my mother used to be a flapper, which had been a hippie at that time, but it was the whole atmosphere around the people I saw and heard was that of throwing over the old way of life which was some[what] Victorian, and it was open and free sex and it was talking about philosophy and psychoanalysis, and communism,

socialism. We were (in our house) mostly musicians and many writers which later became very famous, [which was] what I discovered when I started to read. My mother circulated, along with all of these people in the coffee houses in Vienna—the coffee houses were kind of breeding grounds of ideas and upheaval-thoughts and so I was surrounded by kind of a turmoil of thinking and discussions and hectic screaming discussions over political or scientific or artistic endeavors, and my grandfather also was very interested in it and he took part. On the other hand he was a very, how should I say, kind person. He was extremely kind and he treated very many poor artists for free, and we had—one of the artists painted his painting, which you will see—and we had some Egon Schiele hanging in our apartment, and the famous painters which became famous later, who were starving for work. At the time between the two wars there was terrible unemployment and many people went hungry. This Thomas admirer, Thomas Heller, who later became my mother's husband, third husband, he played in the bars. He played jazz in the bars to make money. So we had an accumulation of very interesting people, many were very crazy, I must say, and it was a hilariously free society I should say.

**Susan:** What was that like as a child growing up in that kind of world?

**Giulia:** . . . I also, of course, was a good Catholic, which clashed somewhat with the rest of what I saw. I remember when I was a little girl my mother took me through the Museum of Fine Arts in Vienna, which was beautiful. Anything, Brueghels and Michelangelos and Rubens, and in church I learned that you're not to look at anything sexy. I mean, not naked people, please. But they were plastered all over the walls of the museum and I always had—I walked through the museum with my eyes down on the floor, and my mother said "well why don't you look at the pictures," and I didn't dare tell her that I was not allowed to. My grandfather was Catholic, my mother was Catholic, aunt, all my closest relatives were Catholic except for my sister whose father had been really Jewish religious and she—my mother—had to promise when she divorced him that she brought up the child Jewish. My sister went to Temple and that was all I knew about Judaism.

**Susan:** Let's go back a second to you—as a child, then, did you have friends of your own or did you live pretty much in this adult world of comings and goings?

**Giulia:** No, I had one very good friend and she lived very close by. She was an only child. Her mother was an actress at the Burg Theater, which was the main theater in Vienna. A beautiful woman. And her father was a psychoanalyst, a pupil of Freud, and we grew up like sisters. We were always together—always.

This friendship has lasted until today. I've been there, she's been here many times, we have gone all over the world by car in America.

**Susan:** Now you said your whole family was Catholic?

**Giulia:** Yes.

**Susan:** Were they religious Catholics? What?

**Giulia:** No, I was the only one who had to go to church.

**Susan:** Would you talk about that?

**Giulia:** Well, my mother insisted that I go to church and Sunday School and confession, and whatever. And I did, and I was fairly brainwashed and believed everything they told me.

**Susan:** Did your mother go to church with you?

**Giulia:** No, never.

**Susan:** And your grandfather?

**Giulia:** No. Nobody went to church.

**Susan:** What was school like for you?

**Giulia:** School was one long horror. I feared the teachers. I didn't learn much. I had a bad memory; I still have. I didn't like school. I wasn't very good at it. The only good grade I ever got was in gym. . . . As I grew, I made it into gymnasium which after four years of elementary I had to take a test and you're either accepted or you're chaff. With lots of tutors and things, I made it into the higher school, and then I promptly flunked Latin, and that meant you had to repeat the whole year in all subjects. And then luckily Hitler came to power and I could leave this horrible school.

**Susan:** As a Catholic, what do you remember about anti-Semitism, or what was your experience with anti-Semitism?

**Giulia:** Well, the Catholic teachings I think instilled in me a kind of anti-Semitism in church because whenever Christ was mentioned, it was kind of as if he had been the first Christian after the bad Jews, so I think maybe my feeling about Jews not being worth anything was partly from the church's teaching. Partly there were a lot of jokes, you know like the Polish jokes here, about Jews around my house and I know the whole family looked down on the ghetto Jews, which there were—you could see on the streets and some were merchants—and so you were not allowed to be like them or to talk like them or to use expressions that they used. We used other kind of Jewish expressions in the house, which were on, I mean for the more intelligentsia, the Jewish one. So it was a kind of mish-mash of using Jewish thinking but not liking the certain type of Jews.

**Susan:** And by ghetto Jew you mean a religious Jew?

**Giulia:** Yeah, the ones in the black caftans with the locks down their ears and speaking Yiddish or very Jewish German, and not having the high German language and being dirty or sleazy or taking advantage in business. It was all kind of a bad taste in your mouth.

**Susan:** We were talking about anti-Semitism as you experienced it or knew about it in Vienna when you were a child, so there was some of that going on in your household, some talk, or anti-Semitic feelings—

**Giulia:** Expressions, yeah. You shouldn't talk like Jews.

**Susan:** Did you have Jewish friends?

**Giulia:** I suppose. I mean, you know how it is when you have friends, you don't discriminate. They were in my class, we had several Jewish children. I didn't see them as such at all until later as it was pointed out.

**Susan:** And your mother's friends and the artists that were coming into the house, were there—

**Giulia:** Mostly Jewish. I know she—there was a long love story with her and Ernst Polak and the whole, that particular coffee house where he held forth was filled with Jewish artists and writers. He was married to Milena Jesenska who was the friend of Kafka and therefore [he] was a friend of Kafka, and Polak inspired these writers. . . There was Karl Kraus (phonetic) and I have a whole list I can't remember, but there were all these well known names which were mostly Jewish people I would think. Very few non-Jewish.

**Susan:** So in terms of any anti-Semitic feelings—

**Giulia:** They were all Jews but they talked as if they weren't.

**Susan:** So if they were Jewish—

**Giulia:** They were themselves anti-Semites.

**Susan:** What do you mean?

**Giulia:** As far as I can tell, the worst anti-Semites are some Jews. They don't want anything to do with them. They think that it's second rate class or race.

**Susan:** But in the intelligentsia group that your mother was involved with, religion wasn't an issue so much—

**Giulia:** No.

**Susan:** —as a class issue, so to say?

**Giulia:** Yeah, it was more a class issue. Religion was hardly ever mentioned. I think—I can't believe that any of these [people] were religious.

**Susan:** Could you tell us when you first heard of Adolf Hitler?

**Giulia:** No. I mean, I can't say I remember. . . .

**Susan:** So you were still very young, but after Hitler came to power in 1933, could you tell us how—when did things begin to change, if at all, for you, noticeably for you, in Vienna?

**Giulia:** Only when Hitler marched into Austria.

**Susan:** In March of 1938 when Hitler annexed Austria. Could you tell us what changed? How did things change?

**Giulia:** Well actually, my mother and Thomas and I were on a ski trip for a few days not too far from Vienna. It was March, it was nice snow. I did a lot of skiing. And they heard on the radio I suppose that Hitler had marched into Austria, and my mother got extremely upset and what later became my stepfather, Thomas, decided we have to go home to Vienna. . . And suddenly we came to the train station and the train pulled in and I couldn't believe it. Out of all the windows were little swastika flags. Little paper flags. I mean the whole thing was full inside and out and young men in uniform, in Nazi uniform. It was already—the train was full. They didn't bother us, but it was as if, you know, it was the army with flags. That didn't do any good for my mother's mood, either. It was curious for me to see it. I didn't quite understand what had happened, but it was astonishing. And then life really changed. . . The streets were full of flags, swastikas, and armbands and people. If they didn't have uniforms they had armbands and yowling. It was a very festive affair except I saw that my family didn't enjoy it at all, so they were worried and short tempered and grumpy and, so that was the first impression.

**Susan:** Is there anyone that was a friend of your mother's that you recall or anyone that was in and out of the house that was pro-Nazi?

**Giulia:** No. Not a one. . . I can't tell, but very soon, very soon, I don't know how my mother knew, [we were told, I] was told, we were Jewish. I have no idea how that—whether somebody came to the door or she got a letter or—but I was told I was Jewish. I thought, well what? Yeah, you're now Jewish. So I said "I'm not." Well you are. So, in any case I went to school and in class immediately they said anybody who is Jewish, you have to raise your hand, you raised the hand, I figured well that's what I was told. So we had to sit in the back rows and that went on for a little bit and then we were told I couldn't walk with non-Jewish girlfriends to school. It was all-girl school and boys school separate. And I couldn't talk to them. I couldn't have anything to do with my friends. All these friends I went to church with. And it was a horrible thing. Every house, I suppose in Austria and Germany and everywhere, had to have a picture of Hitler in the entrance hall of the building. And the concierge put one out. And every day somebody had

thrown human dirt on it. And then the concierge—they put up a screen around it, and still they cleaned it every day and it [the dirt] was always there. And then my mother was terribly worried that they thought it was us. And they would take all the Jews in the building and do something to them. We were pleading with everybody in the house not to do it. I don't know who did it. And it was really scary. . . . And then my mother had a very good friend, Ellen Christiansen from Berlin, who had a real Berlin Schnauze she could speak Berlin-type—we loved to hear it, and she took a room in our apartment to keep the Nazis away. So every time the doorbell rang, whoever it was she went to the door and she said “oh yeah?” And they were Nazi thugs. They were so afraid of her speech, and she was tall and blonde and beautiful. They said “oh, excuse me, it's the wrong door,” you know. So she stayed long after that and then she was—she got a notice she had to leave the Jewish house, couldn't stay there anymore.

**Susan:** Can we go back a minute to—you said you don't remember who told you or who told the family that you were Jewish?

**Giulia:** No, I have no idea.

**Susan:** Did you talk to your grandfather about it?

**Giulia:** No. Well, maybe I did. I don't remember. I know he was—the only thing I remember about him being Jewish was he took me—once in awhile he took me to the cemetery which was way out far in my eyes, by street car to the end of the world in Vienna, and it was a huge cemetery, and he took me to his father's grave and he always put little rocks around the grave stone. And he told me it was a Jewish thing. That's all I knew about Judaism, but it gave me the feeling that he was a nice [man]—he was nice to Jews. He didn't hate them or despise them because he did these little stones.

**Susan:** And how did he become Catholic then, later?

**Giulia:** He became Catholic, well, of course, Catholic because it was a Catholic country. He wanted to get into medical school and had a better chance being non-Jewish. . . .

**Susan:** Were any of his brothers or siblings practicing Jews?

**Giulia:** My grandmother was Jewish because her name, her maiden name was Regenstreif which was a typical Jewish name.

**Susan:** So here you were in school now, you were about [how many] years old when you were—

**Giulia:** They stuffed us into Jew school where only the Jews—only Jewish teachers and Jewish children.

**Susan:** Was it separate buildings?

**Giulia:** Separate building all together, somewhere else and totally overcrowded. I mean you couldn't teach or learn. It was like sardines and noisy and people were upset. I mean, the teachers were upset, the kids were upset. It was terrible. When we came out of school, the Viennese people, some lined up to yell at us and throw things at us and “dirty Jews” and “pigs” or whatever they said. It was just horrible. So I fled to my church. I went to my priest and told him, I said “protect me. I want the church to protect me. I'm supposed to be a Jew and these people are going to kill me with their rocks,” and “besides I'm not a Jew, I'm a Catholic,” and I wanted to stay in the church. I don't want to go out there. And he said “no, I can't do that,” and I said “why not? Because they teach you that the church—even the building will protect you,” and then he gave me this story about that God had cut out a fate for me and I have to bear the fate that God wants me to have and that I shouldn't squabble with God's will. It made me so angry. It didn't make me sad and it didn't make me afraid or anything, I was really angry because I mean I was [Catholic] and I could see the hypocrisy. It suddenly came to my mind that this whole thing was for the birds. It was kind of the last time I really went to church with any feeling. Later I had to go to church, but I didn't believe in anything in it. I mean I threw out the baby with the bathtub and then all these things slowly came to my mind that I had heard as a child from the free thinkers.

**Susan:** What happened to your grandfather when he was identified as a Jew as well in 1938?

**Giulia:** My grandmother died in the summer of '38 just after Hitler had come, and she wasn't all that old. Maybe in her late '60s, but she had suffered from what they called softening of the brain, which could have been Alzheimer's or something, and more and more she didn't make any sense. She couldn't find things anymore. She was really really sick. . . . My aunt was frantic to get out of Austria. She was married to what is now a famous writer, Von Doderer, and they hadn't talked to each other for years because as soon as they were married they didn't talk to each other anymore, and she tried to get a divorce. He wouldn't give it to her on the spot and he was [a] non-Jew. Not only was he a non-Jew, he was one of the Nazi party-goers before Hitler ever came to Austria. That didn't sit too well with us. So they fought and fought and she couldn't leave the country, it seems, to go to America without having been divorced. Don't ask me why. He gave it at the last moment and she made it out in late '38 and everybody was talking about leaving. My mother didn't want to leave my grandfather, and he said “go ahead, go ahead, I'll stay.” He didn't want to leave. Then she didn't know whether she should leave or not. I mean, he was 70-odd years old. But we had

many good friends who said they would take care of him. Jews and non-Jews actually.

**Susan:** So what happened next?

**Giulia:** So then next happened that my mother had a very good old friend who had lots of money who was Jewish. He was some kind of a stock broker, and he gave her money to buy a passport for herself and me because we had the same name. It was Hungarian of all things, and so we could travel out of the country. My sister couldn't be on the passport. She had a different name. She was also not even Catholic, whatever, and my sister, I can't tell if it was before I left, but anyhow, my mother took me by the arm and we went on the train and we went to Switzerland Christmas Eve '38, and we came to Zurich. . . then she applied to the Kinderhilfswerk which is an organization—was an organization—in Switzerland to take in refugee or orphanage children and place them with Swiss families. Maximum for three months. . . they told me a woman is going to pick me up from Schaffhausen in Switzerland, which is on the northeast corner of Switzerland on the River Rhine, and I was at the office of this organization with my mother and in came a lady, about 45 or so, with her hair straight back in a bun and dumpy clothes and dumpy everything, and I thought it was the maid of the people that would adopt me. Little did I know it was it [the foster mother]. I couldn't believe [it]. I was a snob. I mean, she could have been the mother of our maid. But anyhow, I lived through it for seven years.

**Susan:** But '38 Kristallnacht, November '38, do you remember? You were still there in Vienna? Do you remember anything about it?

**Giulia:** No.

**Susan:** You don't recall Nazis coming into the house, you had that friend there that protected you to some degree?

**Giulia:** Well, there were Nazis in the staircase, yeah, and the Nazis on the street and everywhere and people were very much afraid. I must say I was not really afraid, but to tell you the truth I was angry because—I was mostly angry because I wanted to be proud of the Hitler Youth because they had such nice—they had the right stockings, they had the gymnastics and stuff and the flags and had all these sports events. That's what I wanted to do because I wanted to become a circus performer.

**Susan:** That was your dream?

**Giulia:** That was my dream. So I kind of hated the Jews for making me Jewish so I couldn't be part of the Hitler Youth. The insights came much later.

**Susan:** . . . where was your sister at this point?

**Giulia:** My sister was still in Vienna and somewhere

around this time, I don't remember, my mother knew a lady who knew a lady I guess who had a son in Kenya, in East Africa, the capital is Nairobi, and the son was in Nairobi. I guess his parents are there too, so it was the relative of his parents that were still in Vienna, and this was a Jewish family, and this relative told my mother that this young man, Robert Seeman was looking for a wife from Vienna. A Jewish wife, I suppose. And at that time it was possible that if you could prove that somebody outside of Austria wants to marry you, you were permitted to leave Austria and it was one of the few ways Jews could come out. And my mother took the chance and said yes, my sister who was [there], she should go and marry this man. You don't have to be married for more than hours, you can get a divorce, and so just to get out. So after my mother dropped me in Switzerland, she went back to get my sister off somehow, and she put together a dowry of linen and silver and I don't know what, and new clothes for my sister, which she loved, and everything picked up and in big trunks and took her to Italy to take what we thought was a beautiful Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mary ship, to go to Africa by herself. My sister was very innocent. I mean, by today's standard she was like a one year old. They came to the harbor and it was a freighter, no swimming pools or anything, and my mother had a fit. She saw all these burly sailors and she had to put Susie on the boat to Africa. Going to be married.

**Susan:** And—

**Giulia:** Then she went back to Vienna.

**Susan:** Your mother?

**Giulia:** My mother went back to Vienna and was torn between should she stay and help my grandfather get out, who really didn't want to leave. Everybody urged him, and my aunt who had already arrived in America tried to, she sent an affidavit which she didn't earn enough money and it wasn't valid, but the whole family tried to get him out and he didn't want to, really. He said yes, yes, but my mother moved in with him. She sold some furniture and stuff and moved in with him and then he was, while she was there, he was pushed out of a street car by the Nazis and, you know, he was big and tall and heavy and old, and of course he broke his hip and all that. So she nursed him and she didn't want to leave him. On the other hand, she wanted to pick me up in Switzerland and go to America to join her sister. Finally, it became obvious that one should not stay and she came to Switzerland to pick me up from this family and—

**Susan:** When was this?

**Giulia:** That was in summer '39. No sooner did she

come and Hitler marched into Poland—

**Susan:** In September.

**Giulia:** Yeah, so it was about this time and the Swiss threw everybody out who had a transit visa, and she had a transit visa and she had to leave. She had to leave within hours and my papers were nowhere near ready to leave. I forget what red tape, and so she had to—she went as far as England to wait for me and my sister was more or less on the boat. It took forever through the Suez Canal. I have letters about the trip. So, Thomas also made it to England during that time. Many of our friends, many not, and many to Australia, some to South America—all over the place. And we were totally dispersed. I mean. . .

**Susan:** So here you were in a strange family. Could you talk about what it was like?

**Giulia:** It was a terrible shock. Of course I thought I was only going to be there for a few weeks and so I took it kind of “oh well,” you know, it’s an experience so to speak. . . It was a very very pious woman who had lost her husband to cancer, [and] with a daughter, and part of the rest of the family were alcoholics, so she belonged to a temperance movement and was active in it, and she was a very strict Zwinglian Protestant and. . . although I had to go to Catholic church. She said “you’re Catholic, you can’t go to the Protestant church.” I didn’t like to go, but I just traipsed there. She lived her religion in the home. It was constant prayer and [she] read the bible before eating and so on and so forth. And that wasn’t so bad. I got familiar with the bible very well, but Catholics don’t, you know, but Protestants do. But she was anti-sin and everything was a sin. And that was news to me. On my way to school, there was the movie house of the town, it was Schaffhausen and there were always pictures of Clark Gable and Shirley Temple and things, and I had been going to the movies in Vienna, and she forbade me to walk on that sidewalk. I had to cross the street away from the movie house, go past it and cross back toward the sidewalk just so I don’t see the pictures. I was not allowed to listen to the radio except classical music. No jazz. That was sinful. I wasn’t allowed to dance jazz, which I liked, because we were always dancing at home. I can’t think of anything that wasn’t a sin. Kind of an experience.

**Susan:** This family that you lived with, what was their name? What was her name?

**Giulia:** Her name was Alice Sigerist.

**Susan:** They didn’t consider you a Jew at all. Did you talk about the fact that you had had to leave because of Jewish heritage?

**Giulia:** Oh yeah, and she actually was very proud to be such a good person to take in a poor Jewish kid.

She would drag me around and say this is my little Jew kid. She was not an anti-Semite and none of her [family were]. She had a huge family which all became my uncles and aunts and cousins and it was as if I had a second family. I stayed for seven years.

**Susan:** And how do you know the [grandfather] was deported?

**Giulia:** I—I knew it. Maybe I—when Boni came back on furlough, you know for two weeks or so from the army, he knew. I mean, the people—the couple told —told him that they bought food and there was nobody there.

**Susan:** Did you find out later it was Theresienstadt?

**Giulia:** Yeah, because I got a card in Switzerland much later in ‘44 that he had died in Theresienstadt and I don’t know who sent the card because there was no name.

**Susan:** What year was he deported and what year do you think he died?

**Giulia:** ‘42 to ‘44. And so it was a terrible thing for me because I loved him so much, I mean he was my God. And it was slowly during these years I decided I was a Jew.

**Susan:** Do you remember there being fear amongst the Swiss that the Germans would come into Switzerland?

**Giulia:** Constantly. Constantly. There were barricades, there were tank traps, I mean—there was nothing but armies, soldiers. There was no gasoline because it was for the army, there was no food because it went to the army, there was no clothing, there was nothing because it all went to the army. They always collected money for this and that. In school, we sat and listened to the lectures and we all knitted socks for the army and gloves for the trigger finger and in sewing class, which I hated, we made nightgowns for the Red Cross in case of casualties. Everything was war, and there were bombs. You could hear all the bombing and it was heavily rationed food and—I still wore the same clothes I came with when I was fully grown and my foster mother had made lengthenings [sic] with all kinds of different fabrics and—but it was in 1941. . . .

**Susan:** And your mother, was she in England all this time [1942]?

**Giulia:** No, my mother left England in ‘40 through all the submarines and boats—U-boats and their torpedoes. On a ship while London was being bombarded and made it to New York—which is a miracle.



## Leni Mittelacher Collection 05.0080

*Leni was born in 1923 and was the youngest of five children. She was born in a tiny village Ulfen, Germany on the border of Thuringia. Around 1932 they had to move to Marburg, Germany. Her father was a Lutheran minister and died in 1932.*

**Mittelacher:** . . .Meanwhile, Hitler came to power, which, my father was so strict against it, that he. . . I was told by father, “Don’t vote for that guy, he’s bad news.” And even nowadays, when we go back to Ulfen, some of the old people remember that. . .

**Mittelacher:** . . .And then I was going to be drafted to. . . in ‘41 to work, no, not work, but to get in one of those camps where they had to do movements they had to do in public, working or duty. . .

**Denman:** Earlier you were talking about how your mom was not a favorite of Hitler. . .

**Mittelacher:** No, no she was not.

**Denman:** And so what, what were you all worrying about in this town? I mean, were you getting newspapers, radio, mean, how did you hear about stuff? You must have heard, what? About the invasion of Poland...

**Mittelacher:** It started in ‘33. . .

**Denman:** Right . . .

**Mittelacher:** And, and, and everybody that was more than say about ten years old had to, had to join one of these youth group. Youth groups. You know, like this was called [inaudible]. I don’t even know what the “M” stands for. Well, maybe I’ll have to ask Martin. B-D-M was its initials. It was a youth group, and you had to join it. But for some strange reason, I don’t know how my mother worked it, but I never joined it.

**Mittelacher:** And then I heard, something that way, I can never remember that. . . And anyway, so we went, went to this time, and everybody had to join

something. The girls had to be in the [inaudible], you know, the Hitler Youth, and I [inaudible], we lived, we moved from this big apartment place into a smaller, smaller apartment, and we only rented a room. And the house belonged to the assistant county. . ., what do you call it? What do you call the highest, highest. . .?

**Denman:** Like a mayor?

**Mittelacher:** Yeah, that’s for the town, but for the county. . .

**Denman:** Commissioner?

**Mittelacher:** Yeah; like a manager, or something.

**Denman:** Okay. County manager, or administrator?

**Mittelacher:** County administrator.

**Denman:** Huh.

**Mittelacher:** He told my mother, soon as Leni gets out of school, “I want to hire her.”

**Denman:** Okay.

**Mittelacher:** So, but before he could hire me, I had to be half a year on the farm, because everybody in ‘41, everybody had already concluded, you had to do something for the good of the other people.

**Denman:** Getting back to when Germany invaded Poland in ‘39, which you, I’m sure, heard it a little differently, but what do you remember your reaction being when, when it looked like things were real, I guess even before then, when Germany went into Austria?

**Mittelacher:** And into Czechoslovakia. . . and my, my father that got killed into Czechoslovakia.

**Denman:** Hmm.

**Mittelacher:** . . . and, and they moved in, and everybody in Czechoslovakia went down the streets, and all were waving their hands, and there was, the reception was joyful. These people came out to greet him. But, but when they went into Poland, and the other two times, whenever they lost, the [inaudible] occupations, and nobody stood up against him, and, and what was his name? The English guy that came over to our. . .? Chamberlain? Was it Chamberlain? Yeah.

**Denman:** The prime minister.

**Mittelacher:** Prime minister. Yeah, I had hoped that he could talk to. . . We heard about this meeting and that he would be into, to talk Hitler out of going on with his plans. You know, at that time, everybody knew he was going to do something. And so, when the. . . I remember that when the. . . I think about September 2, in '39. . .

**Denman:** September '39?

**Mittelacher:** Yeah, when they announced that the war was beginning. We didn't have a radio, but Mr. Kemp upstairs had this radio, and so we all went upstairs to listen to it, and my mother started crying like a little baby. We were still about sixteen years old, you know, you don't have the same feelings and all. And she said, "How awful! How awful!" And she was right away thinking of going all the way up to the highest [inaudible] in the army, in the service. And she cried, she said, "How can he do this to us?" That's what happened. And it went on and didn't stop until we were down completely, you know? We had, in-between, we had times when it got a little better, I mean as far as the economy, and food and all that, but most of it was pretty bad.

**Denman:** In your, in the place where you were staying, did you ever hear of, of any, you know, resistance, or underground, or anybody who was...? What were, what were you hearing?

**Mittelacher:** . . . my uncle in, in Geisa on the farm, he tried to save a Jewish family. He had, they had a little house in the village where he, where they had two of these workers with, with, with their wives. And they had usually workers that stayed for, not just for a few months but the whole year. On the farm they had this apartment, or whatever you want to call it, and he had this house in the village not too far from the farm, and he tried to hide the Jewish family there. But he was found out. They found the family, but he used to go to them, at for two weeks, every night, brought them some food, some cooked food from the kitchen. And that was in '37. Then somebody called the [inaudible].

**Denman:** On your, on your uncle?

**Mittelacher:** Yeah, on my uncle. He was taking food there, so they expected that somebody was hiding there, the Jewish family.

**Denman:** Did anything happen to your uncle?

**Mittelacher:** No, the funny thing is, that did not happen, because he had very, very good friends in Geisa, like the mayor, and people, and they talked to them.

**Denman:** So they, they took the Jews but not him?

**Mittelacher:** Right.

**Denman:** But the members of his family were okay?

**Mittelacher:** They were okay.

**Mittelacher:** And I remember the first morning after the Americans moved in. Somebody. . . Maybe it wasn't, maybe it was in the morning when we were going to pick up the papers, but an American truck came by and threw out some, what do you call it? Some. . .

**Denman:** Leaflets?

**Mittelacher:** Yeah, leaflets or papers. And [inaudible] and I picked one up, and we looked at it, and on it there was a photograph, and on it was a pile of dead people, and underneath it said what camp. I don't know which one it mentioned there, but. . . And that the Jewish people had been killed by Hitler, by Hitler in the millions, or something. We were so floored, we didn't know what to, what to say, or do. And we, I mean, we knew there was something going on, but the mounds of these people being killed, we didn't know that. It came out right after the war, from all these, um, now we didn't have newspapers, but we got some of these leaflets once in a while they threw them out, and. . . So, that's the way it was, and. . .