

EI-1020

HANNAH NACHUM

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 28, 1905

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AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 94

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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GERMANY, 1939

AGE: 34

SHIP: PENDANT

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay, today is August 12th, 1998, and I'm here in Bangor, Maine, with Hannah Nachum, born Hannah Hesse.

NACHUM: Right

LEVINE: And with us today is Santrud Miservy [PH], who also immigrated from Germany, but later, in the sixties.

MISERVY: Sixty-seven.

LEVINE: Sixty-seven. Okay, if you would start again, for the tape, with your birth date and where you were born.

NACHUM: My birth date is March 28th, 1905, and I was born in Zurich, Switzerland.

LEVINE: Did you live in Zurich for a while?

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NACHUM: I don't remember. I was a little girl when I lived there, but I don't remember anything about my being a baby, or living—

LEVINE: In Zurich?

NACHUM: Where, I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay.

NACHUM: I have very faint—what can I say?—memories. Very faint. I couldn't tell you. I see a street, and I see an apartment, but I don't know where it was. I can't remember.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

NACHUM: Richard.

LEVINE: Richard. And your mother?

NACHUM: Henrietta.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

NACHUM: Ottenheimer.

LEVINE: O-T-?

NACHUM: T-T-E-N-H-E-I-M-E-R, Ottenheimer.

LEVINE: Okay, and were you the only child, or were there other children when you were born?

NACHUM: Not when I was born. Later I had a brother, Alex. And he died—well, it was nineteen—when did he die? 1928? Maybe '31, 1931. We had a [clears throat] kind of influenza or something going, and he, he died of that. He was only nineteen.

LEVINE: Do you remember that? It was an epidemic, influenza? It was an influenza epidemic that he died in?

NACHUM: Yeah, in something like—it had another name. Grippe. We called it grippe, you know?

MISERVY: Flu.

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NACHUM: The grippe? We called it that. It just takes your whole body; it poisons your body and goes into your brain. [Coughs] Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: So, where did you move to when you left Zurich? Where did the family move after Zurich?

NACHUM: Oh, we moved to Hamburg. Hamburg.

LEVINE: And was that where you lived up until you left?

NACHUM: That's where I lived in Hamburg. From the time I got there, I must have been about five or six when we moved. All I remember about coming to Hamburg, going over a big bridge over a river, a big bridge, and going to a hotel. That's about all I can remember about coming to Hamburg.

LEVINE: Were you in school?

NACHUM: No, I was five.

LEVINE: You were five, uh-huh, uh-huh. And what was life like in Hamburg? What are your early memories of Hamburg, and where you lived?

NACHUM: Very—very happy, very good. I was a child; I didn't have no care! I didn't know where the money came from that fed me. I remember my parents had a store, deli, a delicatessen. And then I remember after they sold it, and became private citizens. My father did his own thing; my mother didn't work anywhere.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NACHUM: And you know, then [pause]—

LEVINE: Do you remember starting school?

NACHUM: I remember when I started school. I had a long walk to go to school. And when I was about ten, I went to a Jewish school. This was—not a Jewish school I went to for three years maybe, but then I went to a Jewish school. The building is still standing in Hamburg; it's used for kind of a memorial or something, I don't know. [Clears throat]

LEVINE: So you stopped going to the public school? You went strictly to the Jewish school?

NACHUM: Yeah, it wasn't a public school. I went to a private school for a few years, and then I went to this Jewish school.

LEVINE: So was your family very religious?

NACHUM: No, no, not religious at all. We knew, we kept the holidays, but other than that—and went to synagogue for the holidays. But no, not religious at all. My grandparents were very religious—very religious.

LEVINE: Were your grandparents in Hamburg?

NACHUM: No, they lived in Germany, in a little place called Geilingen Baden [PH]. It had a big Jewish community. It was completely wiped out in 19—completely! There was not one soul left. Very up-coming community. No poor people. And when I went back to Germany in nineteen—to Switzerland. I didn't—I just went back to Germany to visit the cemetery. And that must have been in 1967. And then I went again in 1983, and visited the grave. And where the synagogue was standing, there's a big memorial, telling—this was the synagogue of the Jewish community of Geilingen, and everybody was killed. Sent to a concentration camp and killed.

LEVINE: Do you have any early childhood memories of times with your grandparents?

NACHUM: Do I have memory of my grand--? Oh, yes!

LEVINE: How do you remember them?

NACHUM: Yes, of course!

LEVINE: What are the things you remember about them?

NACHUM: It seems that we loved each other more than usual grandparents do, and when I had school vacation I visited my grandparents from Hamburg to Geilingen. My grandparents were very religious. Friday night was—my grandmother wouldn't cook on Saturdays; it was all done on Fridays. And it was always a feast. She would bake bread and cakes, and prepare dinners. And it was very happy. It was a very happy time, when we had our dinner, our Shabbat dinner. And when the Shabbat was over, we all came, and she would bless everybody, the children, you know, bless the children for the coming week. And that was really the highlight of my memory! It was so, so wonderful! I see her before me. She was just a little woman, gray hair, she was--a very sweet face. And then she would bless whoever was there, as child. You know, I wasn't the only grandchild visiting.

LEVINE: How would she do it? Would she put her hand--?

NACHUM: Yeah, she would—we'd stand in front of her, and she would put her hands over our head, and say the prayer. That's very Jewish. I mean, I don't know whether people do that today anymore.

LEVINE: I haven't heard it, but yeah.

NACHUM: Yeah. It was a very—it was a very warm feeling, a very warm relationship. And sometimes I thought [pause] more of my grandmother than I thought of my mother.

LEVINE: These were your mother's parents?

NACHUM: Yeah. I never knew my father's parents; they died young. They lived in Meckleburg [PH], in northern Germany. I never—but my father took me to see the place he was born, and he lived, yeah.

LEVINE: Why was it that it was decided you would go to a Jewish school, if the family wasn't--?

NACHUM: Because it [pause]—it was more security for me. I felt lost among the other children. There were no other Jewish children, and this was really the thing to do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was there prejudice against the Jewish children when you were growing up there?

NACHUM: This school that accepted me, [clears throat] didn't seem to have anything against, because they knew I was Jewish. But my father tried to get me into a school that's called a lyceum, for girls, and for some reason, for the reason I was Jewish, I know, I was refused. And my uncle was very upset about it! Very upset! But I was very happy to go to this, it's called Israelitetochte Schule [PH]. That means Israelite School for Girls, tochte [PH] means—

MISERVY: Daughter.

NACHUM: Tochte? Was not tochte?

MISERVY: Daughter.

NACHUM: Daughter. Tochte is daughter, yeah. I went to that school, and was very happy. It was a very good school. And—

LEVINE: How long did you attend the Jewish school?

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NACHUM: I couldn't tell you. I don't know how old I was when I [pause]—all I know, I had to learn a lot to catch up with my school age, you know? And I was fifteen when I graduated from school there—fifteen, 1920. I don't know how many years, but I graduated from that school either 1920 or '21.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then what did you do after you graduated?

NACHUM: Then I went to business school.

LEVINE: And then did you work in the business world?

NACHUM: Yes. And I went to business school, then I had a cousin who came to Hamburg, and he opened up a [pause]—what do you call? Sometimes I can't think of the English word! He opened up a part of business he did in Berlin, and I worked for him for a while. But that wasn't very satisfactory for me, and I got another job with a big company who handled sail ships. Sail ships. I worked there with the Captain of one of the—with the Captain, and he took care of all the other ships, you know. They chartered those ships out, and we have to—I had to keep track of payroll for the people on board, send it to their families when they were at sea. And when the ships came into port, I had to see that they got supplied with all the supplies they needed, and sail repairing, and whatever. It was very interesting. And besides, I was a secretary to the Captain who run this department, which was also very nice.

LEVINE: So did you stay working there, then?

NACHUM: Oh, for quite a while, yeah. I stayed there 'til [pause]—let me see, '28 I was married. And then, well, I stayed within this business 'til about 1930, working for different people. Working for different people. Then in 1933, it got very difficult.

LEVINE: What happened in '33?

NACHUM: Well, the Nazis came, you know.

LEVINE: It was building?

NACHUM: And nobody wanted—could afford to employ a Jewish person.

LEVINE: What would happen if somebody did employ a Jewish person in 1933?

NACHUM: It was general rules; nobody could go against rules, you know. It's not the people that owned the business. They had to apply by the rules. So nobody would employ a Jewish person, but I had one man was a Jewish

man, and he had a partner, and the partner took over. And I still worked some—worked for them. Different hours, you know, different hours.

LEVINE: Now you were married at that time?

NACHUM: Oh, yes, I was married in 1928.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband? How did you meet your husband?

NACHUM: By a friend. We used to get together evenings. Friday evenings we used to get together. And we—I met him there. We got married in 1928. In 1929 my first daughter was born. In 1934 my second daughter was born.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

NACHUM: Martin. Martin, Martin, M-A-R-T-I-N.

LEVINE: And your daughters?

NACHUM: My first daughter's name was Inger Marion, and my second daughter's name was Rachel Doris. And, well, then it got really difficult, and we had to do something. And we tried to write to people in South Africa, and Australia, and God knows where! [Laughs] And Brazil. But nobody really could help us. Then finally my husband got permission to come to the United States, and that was in 1938, in December 1938. So he left, and we stayed in Hamburg. I had to give up all my apart--things, and sold things. And I lived with my parents 'til I could leave in April 20, 1939. I went to, with my children, to Holland, and from there we took the boat, the Pendant, to New York.

LEVINE: Could you say anything about how you got the necessary papers, how you got to get to leave?

NACHUM: Difficult! Very difficult! My husband went first [clears throat], because there was not enough support for—he couldn't support us to come to this country. So he went first. Then he got a job, and the people here in Bangor were very helpful.

LEVINE: He came to Bangor when he came to this country?

NACHUM: He came first to New York, and then he came to Bangor, because the cousin of ours [sighs] lived in Bangor, and he could stay with him. I'm getting very tired. I can't—I don't think I can tell you much more today, all right?

LEVINE: Okay, okay.

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NACHUM: I'd be happy to write something down for you.

LEVINE: Okay.

NACHUM: But my voice, and the memories.

LEVINE: Painful?

NACHUM: Ah!

LEVINE: Yeah.

NACHUM: Very sad.

LEVINE: Yes, yes. Yeah.

NACHUM: So, I'd be happy to write.

LEVINE: Okay, why don't we do that, then? I don't want you to make it unpleasant.

NACHUM: And also my—I did it once for my grandson, and he may have a tape.

LEVINE: Oh, oh, that would be nice.

NACHUM: I could do that.

LEVINE: I could copy it.

NACHUM: Yes.

LEVINE: And send it back to him, if that would be—

NACHUM: Yeah, yeah, I will call him tonight.

LEVINE: Oh, that would be very nice.

NACHUM: And ask him does he have the tape. And he, but I'm know I'm kind of out of breath.

LEVINE: Okay, well thank you.

NACHUM: You're welcome.

LEVINE: You know, whatever you can send.

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NACHUM: Yeah, you have to give me your name and address.

LEVINE: I'll give you a card, and you can send whatever.

NACHUM: Yeah, I'll be happy to do that. [Clears throat] But I think that's all I can do for today! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Okay, okay. Okay, well I've been speaking with Hannah Nachum, and it's August 12th, 1998. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and we're going to sign off here. And perhaps we'll have information on file.

NACHUM: Yeah, maybe on your way back to New York, you don't stop here.

LEVINE: I leave south of here. But I come to Maine other times, so maybe another time.

NACHUM: Yeah, maybe.

LEVINE: Okay, okay, thank you.

NACHUM: You're welcome.

LEVINE: Okay. [Tape off/on]

NACHUM: --lived in a very small community, and there were only Catholics and Jews. And they got along wonderful together. It was, I can only remember happy—happy times. Nothing ever made me feel second-class.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NACHUM: I was always very proud of what I was.

LEVINE: It must have come as kind of a shock when the laws were made.

NACHUM: It was! Hard to understand.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NACHUM: Hard to understand.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

NACHUM: Yeah, well, I'll tell you more.

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LEVINE: Okay.

NACHUM: I'll ask Jeffrey to send the tape.

LEVINE: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW