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Margaret Ebert interview for The Survivors of the Holocaust Oral History Project

Margaret Ebert

Barbara Turoff

HOLOCAUST HISTORY

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Interviewee: Dr. Margaret Ebert = ME Interviewer:

Dr. Robert Friedman = RF Transcribed by: R K Feist

Typed by: Lois M Goldberg

RF: This is Sunday, June 4, 1978. This is an interview of Dr. Margaret Ebert at the home of Hanna Goldberg in Yellow Springs, Ohio.
Mrs. Ebert, first of all I want to thank you for coming today and being a guinea pig. You and I talked several times already, first in discussing the questions which might be included in the questionnaire and then, yesterday we began to talk a bit more specifically about your own background. I wonder if you would tell me again; where you were born, and when.

ME: I was born in Karlsruhe, Baden, Germany (located 49.01N,8.24E) on June 12, 1898. I attended school there. It was an absolutely mixed school. I was the only Jewish girl during the entire time I was in school. I never had any Jewish friends in my class, since I was never connected with any. We lived in a very comfortable way. My parents both were absolutely German by nationality and Jewish as religion.

RF: How did you come to this town?

ME: My great-grandfather settled in town in 1712 or 13, shortly after the founding of the town. He was one of the very well estimated citizens. There was no question about religion at all. My grandfather inherited the store which had been founded in 1832 and my father came there as an employee and married the boss' daughter.

RF: So both of your parents were old citizens?

ME: My father grew up in Ludwigsburg (48.54N,9.11E) near Stuttgart (48.46N,9.11E) where his family had bought its house in 1708, shortly after the founding of that town. One of his ancestors had discovered a fire in the Stuttgart castle, he got the house as remuneration. The house is now back in the possession of the family, since it was not destroyed during the war.

RF: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

ME: I have one brother who emigrated before me and who is in Atlanta, Ga. He is Professor Emeritus from Georgia Tech.

RF: When did you leave Germany?

ME: I left Germany on May 14, 1940 or 1939. We had lived in the same apartment since my husband and I got married in 1925. We had both attended the University of Heidelberg (49.25N,8.42E). He studied law. I got my PhD in Social Work and Economics. He was a lawyer, as long as that was allowed by Hitler's laws. After that he worked in different lines and emigrated in 1939, shortly after the Kristallnacht (the night of Nov 10, 1938 when the various synagogues and Jewishly owned stores were desecrated, ransacked and burned and Jewish men were arrested at random) since we all tried to get our men out of Germany. He was lucky enough not to be taken to a concentration camp.

RF: When your husband came to the US, why were you unable to come with him?

ME: He did not come to the US because of the quota number for immigration into America. We all could not come immediately. We tried to get our men out of Germany. My husband lived in Scotland for a whole year.

RF: However you did not join him in Scotland?

ME: No, no! We met in the US, at the pier in NY, finally after a separation of one year; being separated during the start of the war, not being able to contact one another. It was terrible.

RF: Your children? Do you have children?

ME: I have one daughter who lived with me in Germany. She had the possibility to go to Switzerland after Kristallnacht. She got so homesick that she came back and we lived together in Karlsruhe until the war started and we were evacuated. [That contradicts the earlier departure date from Germany given as May 1939. However there Dr. Ebert had vacillated in her answers between 1940 and 39 so probably 1940 was the right year]. Then we moved to Manneheim (49.29N, 8.28E). During all this time I worked as social worker for the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the Jewish Emigration Association, and tried to get as many people out of Germany as possible.

RF: Tell me a little about your family and home life. For example you said that your parents and yourself felt as if you were Germans in terms of nationality and Jewish in terms of religion. What sorts of practices did you uphold in terms of religious aspects?

ME: We went to synagogue on all the High Holy Days. We celebrated the Seder (Passover meal) and such things, but we had three maids. One of them was in the employ of our family for sixty years. She was Catholic and she took my brother and me every morning for a walk. It was only natural that we went every time to the Cathedral in Karlsruhe where she said the Mass while we had to keep quiet. Then we went home. One day she came to my mother and said "Now when you were growing up I could follow you, but now your children run much faster than you". She didn't realize that she was 20 years older.

RF: Did your parents speak any other language besides German?

ME: Yes, we spoke one day French and the other day German, because my grandmother was French. So French

was nearly like a second language for me! I never learned English. I learned it when I came to this country. In school we had six years of Latin and four years of Greek.

RF: When you think back to your childhood and to your family life, do you think yourself as being amongst the wealthier people in your community.

ME: Yes, absolutely. We did not know what it meant not to have money.

We learned it when we came to the US with $.80 in our pocket.

RF: Can you tell me what your father did?

ME: My father, as I have said, inherited the office of my grandfather. They had about 100 employees in the office. They had branches in London, Buenos Aires, in Tel Aviv, and Rio de Janeiro. My parents traveled a lot, therefore it was only natural for us to meet people from other countries.

RF: What about involvement in the community?

ME: My grandfather already, was head of the city council, in Karlsruhe, and my father after the death of my grandfather, became President of the Chamber of Commerce and served on the "Reichpostrat" (council for the German mails) and the "Reicheisenbahnrat" (council for the German railroads). He was also an expert for iron and steel, at the German-French peace conference in Paris. For all these reasons we were fully accepted. He also served on the Board of the Karlsruhe Technical Institute. We didn't know anything except being German.

RF: You mentioned once before that your father had been elected to the Chamber of Commerce?

ME: Yes, he was asked and elected to be President of the Chamber of Commerce in Jan. 1933. In the beginning of Feb. 1933, the Executive Secretary of the Chamber came and asked: "Mr Elsace, wouldn't you please resign because after Hitler is in power we can't have a Jewish President." (Hitler was appointed Chancelor on Jan 30, 1933)

RF: What was his response to that?

ME: He said "Surely, immediately! You can have my resignation." What else could he do?

RF: Would you say that your parents associated with both Jews and non-Jews in the community?

ME: Absolutely. We had lots of non-Jewish friends. Maybe more of these than Jewish ones. To us there was no difference.

RF: Were your parents involved in activities in the community amongst the Jewish people?

ME: My grandfather was Synagogenrat, which means that he was one of the pillars of the Jewish community. My mother was head of the Jewish women's association. At this time it made no difference, that is until Hitler came to power.

RF: You told us a good bit about your childhood. Are there any special events in your childhood which you recall?

ME: Oh, yes! It was very nice. We celebrated Chanukah (the feast of the eight days of lights of the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the re-conquest by the Maccabees) in my grandparents house, in the front part. In the back part was our old Lieschen, the old maid about whom I talked, who had her Christmas tree. In back we sang the Christmas carols and in front we sang the Chanukah songs. Everyone joined in both.

RF: What languages do you speak now, other than German and English?

ME: French, as well as a little Italian.

RF: Would you say that you are most comfortable in English?

ME: Yes, Absolutely!

RF: This question is asked for purposes of this interview.

ME: Yes, absolutely. Because my daughter married a very beautiful American boy and, since she is married we have not spoken German at home because he doesn't know any, so it is simpler that we speak English all the time.

RF: I understand that you have grandchildren here also?

ME: I have six grandchildren. The oldest has graduated from Antioch and is now getting his Master's in education. The next one is married in Denmark to a Danish girl. The next is a girl, a young woman, who lives here. She is working here and going to Wright State University. One is at Evergreen College, in Washington. We expect all of them home this summer.

RF: Prior to Hitler coming to power, were you aware at any time, or do you recall being aware of any anti-Semitism?

ME: No! Absolutely not. Especially not since our town was half Catholic, half Protestant. The Jewish community was absolutely accepted, in every way. I never felt any anti-Semitism, until Hitler came to power.

RF: Tell me when you first became aware of anti-Semitism?

ME: After Jan 30, 1933, when some of our non-Jewish friends avoided meeting us. However, before then, I can't remember any anti-Semitism. Not even during the time when I was the only girl during one term at Karlsruhe Tech. That school was established for the war veterans. I counted as a war veteran since I had done some service in WWI. I was the only one amongst 1800 students. I didn't feel any anti-Semitism.

RF: By the time Hitler came to power your daughter Hanna was already 13.

ME: She was 12.

RF: So she was in school?

ME: She was in school, in the public school. We had a play group for her, a Montesori player group, and she was the only Jewish girl there in a group of 12 kids. Then, after Hitler came to power, a Jewish school had to be started. She had, then, one of my cousins as a teacher. She suffered, but I believe that she will be interviewed herself, so I better leave it up to her, to see what she wants to say.

RF: Could you describe some of the incidents of anti-Semitism, once Hitler came to power. The incidents which happened in the community. You said that your non-Jewish avoided you.

ME: Yes our non-Jewish friends avoided us but the old friends, especially, stuck to us through everything. I told you one little incident; the father of my brother's best friend was the head of our passport office. I received my passport very easily and without any trouble. I also got my US visa finally and we worked closely with the Swiss consul in Mannheim. He offered to give me a visa to stay in Bern, Switzerland for a week. Then I came to the Karlsruhe passport office and told the man that he should send my passport, which already had the US visa on it, to Mannheim to get my Swiss visa. He looked at me and said: "Doctor, why don't you take it. That is much easier than mailing it." People who were with me were simply flabbergasted that I got a passport with visa and that it wasn't mailed. That was the way people trusted me.

RF: But these were your friends.
ME: He wasn't a friend, he was an acquaintance.
RF: Do you recall anything in the newspapers of that time?
ME: In the Frankfurter Zeitung (that was and still is not only the leading regional paper but also a recognized first class paper of the order of the St Louis Dispatch), which I read regularly. I could not find much except for what the press office of the Reich put in it. Otherwise it was absolutely neutral.
RF: What about your daughter's friends? Did she also loose friends from the public school?
ME: Yes, because the parents did not want them to be associated with Jews any longer.
RF: So the community in general answered in support of the anti-Semitism.
ME: No! Most people didn't. They were afraid. A few hot heads, responded very actively but most of the people, especially the older people in town, of our age, were very understanding and very helpful. A typical thing was what happened after the Kristallnacht when our men were picked up; we had two ladies living downstairs in our house and, on the morning of Nov 11, 1938, one of them came upstairs and told my husband: "Leave immediately, the GESTAPO (Geheime Staats Polizei or Secret-National Police, this was the organization which carried out the anti-Jewish and other NAZI laws) has been here to pick you up. We said that you had a headache and that you couldn't come downstairs. Go over to your in-laws so that they don't find you when they come back". They didn't come back at all. These were two women who had joined the Women Hitlerite Organization. They had joined because they felt they had to but they were still the same people as before. My daughter went over to Germany with her family last year, to visit the places which she remembered. One of these women was still alive and she provided lodgings for the family for a few days.
RF: When did you feel that anti-Semitism became more prevalent? Or when people became more public with it?
ME: After the 1936 Olympics. That is when the new "Jewish laws" (the so called Nuremberg Laws) were promulgated.
RF: What was the reaction to the new "Jewish Laws"?
ME: Big excitement for the big hate against the Jews. However they had to do it; they had to obey the laws; individuals couldn't do anything but that.
RF: What about the Jews in your community?
ME: We all did not realize how bad it was, until after 36 that is. By that time the US quota system was in effect (actually the "National quotas" for would be immigrants to the US was the result of the laws of 1921, revised in 1927) and were enforced. As I said in my letter to the Yellow Springs News, "if the immigration laws had been applied with a little more consideration, millions of people could have been saved."
RF: However the US was not the only place where people could go.
ME: Yes, but where should they go? England couldn't take them. Italy was involved in the war itself. France took in a lot of people, until it was overrun by Hitler. Our Jewish people from Baden were all, or at least mostly, taken to the camps in Gurs in southern France. We had the possibility, originating from New York, to get a few people out - when we could make the deposit.
RF: What was that camp?
ME: It was G-u-r-s (spelled by ME.). It was in southern France, but it was in the unoccupied portion of France (i.e. the portion of France which between the defeat and surrender of France in Jun 1940 and the Allied landings in Algeria and Morocco in 1943 was governed from Vichy with the permission of the Germans. Gurs had been set up as an internment camp for Germans by France prior to the French defeat.)
RF: What was its purpose?
ME: It's purpose was to get the Jews concentrated so that they could be taken to the East (actually Gurs was close enough to Marseilles, where the US and other consulates were, and the Jews were given day long permits to go to Marseille in order to secure passage out of Europe if they, individually, could). The people from Gurs, the ones who could not get out anymore were taken to Auschwitz or to other camps.
RF: Tell me what you were doing. Were you working at the time the NAZI's came to power?
ME: I was working for the Jewish community. Right after I got my degree, I immediately started working as Executive Secretary for the so called "Oberrat" which was the head organization for the Jewish Community. I was there until Hanna was born. Afterwards started again in that job. Later I was asked to take over the department of the HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). This was led by the "Reichs Vertretung von Juden in Berlin" (The National Representation of Jews located in Berlin). I worked in close contact with the HIAS in the US, and its branch in Berlin.
RF: Your major responsibilities were?
ME: First it was to take care of all the Jews in (the German State of) Baden including to get the money from the State, which was collected with the German income tax. I had to distribute the money to the different communities. I also was to supervise Jewish life and Jewish education for all the people, including the young people. Then I worked for the emigration. I was terribly moved the other day, when in the time spot of Channel 7, the boat St. Louis which was taken back from Cuba was mentioned. Fifty people who had been in my charge were on it. All these people were killed after returning to Europe.
RF: Could you tell me how the NAZI's coming to power affected your everyday life? Shopping, for example?
ME: Not at all until the war started. When the rationing came we got one egg a week per person, one eight ounce glass of milk per child per week.
RF: Was it any different for Jews and non-Jews?
ME: It was the same for everyone. However there also was a black market where you could get stuff, and we could do it also. I never forgot that, after our evacuation to Mannheim, there was an old fish store where my in-laws had made their purchases. One day the owner of that store called me in and asked "Would you like a fish?" I said: "Sure, we could use it!" He gave me a fish but he had no paper to wrap it in, so I had to carry it home by its tail. It was in winter. It was a pretty cold experience.
RF: What happened to your family after the occupation (he probably means the start of the war).

ME: My husband's parents who were very well known in Berlin, my father-in-law was one of the best lawyers in Mannheim, both committed suicide on Oct 1, 1933, since they wanted their money to go to their sons so that they could emigrate. My parents both died in 1939 in Oct. and Nov., before I left. My brother was already in the US. My husband's only brother was in England and his three children were in Holland; his wife was still in Germany. She was taken to Gurs (the camp in southern France where Jews from Baden were transported to after France was overrun in May-Jun 1940 and from where it was possible to emigrate), however we got her out. When I arrived in the US, I was greeted by my husband, my brother and sister-in-law with three children. I brought the fourth child, my daughter, with me. After not knowing what money meant I was lucky enough to get a job as a housekeeper in a rooming house where we got free lodging and $5.00 pocket money a week. That was the money with which I fed the family. It was pretty hard to do.

RF: Can you tell me a little bit more about your experiences when you first came to this country? I am interested in the kind of changes.

ME: I didn't know one word of English; that was the hardest.

RF: How did you learn English?

ME: I picked it up. I never had any lesson, however the children who spoke only English taught me very rapidly.

RF: What about your husband and your brother-in-law?

ME: My husband had started to learn the optician's trade in Scotland. Both brothers spoke English very well after living for one year, my husband's brother in London and my husband in Glasgow. My husband got, by chance, a job as optician's apprentice in Newark, NJ, and then a job in a shop in New York where he became a union member. My brother-in-law and his family settled, after my sister-in-law had come to the US, in Columbus (probably Ohio) and he got a job as an accountant.

RF: Is that how you came to come to Yellow Springs? (Yellow Springs is about 18 miles east of Dayton, Ohio)

ME: No! We lived in New York for 13 years. Hanna met her husband there. He was a conscientious objector. He was a boy from Indiana, a beautiful person, I always say that he is the best part of our family. They were close friends of Ralph and Lila Templing who had the School of Living in Safran and were brought here, to Yellow Springs, by Arthur Morgan. Hanna and Dick wanted to go to them for the summer, helping them with the school which they started here. They got stuck here because Lucy Morgan saw Dick painting her barn and liked them so much that she recommended him to Ernest Morgan. My son-in-law is still at the Book Plate company. Now he is in charge of all the machines. (Here ME does not talk distinctly enough for the transcriber to be certain of understanding the tape correctly. The transcription is the best try). He has been there now for 32 years (The official name of the firm is the Antioch Book Plate Co.)

RF: When you first came to the US did you have any Jewish friends or associates?

ME: We had a few. My uncle, my father's brother, was here. He was very helpful. We also had a few doctor friends who studied for their language exams and State Boards. They helped us immensely. I went to the Temple in New York once, on Yom Kippur 1940, because I wanted to say Kaddish (Jewish prayer for the remembrance of the dead) for my parents. The man in charge didn't let me in, because I didn't have a ticket and I was so fed up that we joined the Community Church in New York where Dr. Turney Tons (again the name is only an approximation) was an old friend of the family. He was very very helpful.

RF: Could you tell me something about the Community Church. What is it.

ME: The Community Church is the oldest Unitarian Church in New York. It is absolutely liberal and absolutely taking in anybody who wants to recognize Jesus Christ as the last of the big prophets and not as the Savior. We said that this is absolutely what we could join. My husband never had been Jewish. He grew up in Ethical Culture.

RF: But his family was Jewish by religion?

ME: They never acted Jewish in any way because they were absolutely liberal and absolutely removed from any religion in this way.

RF: So they identified basically with the Gentile world.

ME: No, they didn't identify with any religion.

RF: Had that been a long established tradition in the family?

ME: Yes, it had been a pretty long established tradition because my mother-in-law's brother was infected at the time of the circumcision. Therefore the family didn't want it any more. He died shortly afterwards. So the boys (my husband and his brother) grew up absolutely free and without any traditional religion.

RF: I am going back now. When you were married, were you married in a Jewish ceremony?

ME: We had big troubles to get married, because no Rabbi would have married us. However my uncle who was very, very well trained in Judaism - he was the brother of my mother - gave us the most beautiful marriage ceremony. It was founded on the Jewish rituals. In Germany you don't need any religious ceremony since you have to go to the city offices anyway and get your certificate of marriage. You don't need any rabbi or minister, or anything, if you don't want one.

RF: After you were married and you had a child did you continue to practice?

ME: I went to synagogue regularly and my husband stayed home! That is until Hitler came to power then he felt that he should show where he belongs and joined the Jewish religion.

RF: You joined the Unitarian Church and then you came here. To what extent have you continued. I know that you are identified as Jewish; but did you continue?

ME: We are members of the Society of Friends, of the Quakers; particularly since our son-in-law is Gentile. For that reason it was only the natural thing to do. We were very welcomed there even although they knew exactly where we stand.

RF: Let me ask you then: you both, you and Paul, were well educated in Germany, before you left to come to the US, did you find that your education was, at all, helpful? I know that it obviously did not help you get a job as a housemaid. But was it helpful later on?

ME: It was helpful in coming to Yellow Springs.

RF: It was?

ME: Yes! I was here, helping our children move to their own house when the Felz Institute was looking for a librarian. I went to Dr Sontag and I don't know what impressed him but he hired me at once. I worked there for several months. We didn't click too well. So Sontag said, after Labor

Day, very nicely: "I think that you should take a part time job. This is too much for you to have a full time job and family at home. Why don't you look for part time work and I will look for another librarian." So I said: "Why don't you take Paul who is home." A half an hour later my husband was my successor and I got part time work with Arthur Morgan and I worked there (at Antioch College in Yellow Springs of which Arthur Morgan was President).

RF: What did Paul do prior to that?

ME: He was looking for a job here.

RF: He was not working?

ME: He had moved here because I had the job. We lived here, in this little apartment behind Hanna's and we were very glad when he got the job and I could retire.

RF: How would you compare your life initially, when you first came here, besides the money, to what it was in Europe. Can you describe some experiences which you had which were either very different or similar to those which you had in Europe?

ME: I was treated very nicely everywhere. I must say that I am always glad to be here and about the fact that I became a citizen.

RF: How long have you been a citizen?

ME: Since the first possibility I had. That was in 1945. We got our first papers (that is the declaration of the intention to become a citizen of the US.) immediately, and applied for citizenship as soon as we could.

RF: How did you find life different here, though?

ME: First of all you are not spoiled with a maid in the house. You do everything yourself. That is the first thing which is different. The second thing is that it does not make so much of a difference whether you have money or not. There are a lot of possibilities in this country and lots of things which you can do without much money, particularly at the time when we lived in NYC.

RF: What sort of things?

ME: Concerts! I remember two concerts by Toscanini which we attended with free tickets. Also we went to plays. Some people sent us tickets, or asked you to come with them to a performance. I must say that we were treated very very nicely.

RF: Did your daughter go to school in the US?

ME: Hanna went to high school in New York and then to Hunter College (one of the colleges of New York which were free, or nearly so for residents of NYC with proper high school credentials. Hunter was, at that time, set aside for women.) She graduated from there shortly after she was married. She is teaching here now at the Antioch School of Physical Education. She majored in Physical Education. She is also a teacher for home bound children in Xenia, Ohio (that is 11 miles south of Yellow Springs).

RF: You and Paul have lived here for how long?

ME: Since 1953.

RF: That is 25 years. Do you and Paul speak English at home?

ME: Yes, at least mostly. Except when we get angry. Then we yell at each other in German.

RF: Have you introduced German to your grandchildren? I know Hanna speaks German.

ME: Hanna speaks German very well, but she never uses it. The grandchildren learned a little bit. I have been working for UNICEF (United Nation International Children Educational Foundation) for the last 19 years. They have a very nice game, which I gave to the grandchildren, called Lingo. In this game all the things are printed in different languages - it is a game similar to bingo. Through it the children learn as they play. Hanna wrote under the official languages everything in German. So they know a little bit. The two youngest ones who were with Hanna and Dick in Germany last summer speak a little bit now.

RF: Hanna went back to Germany?

ME: Hanna and Dick went there last year with their two youngest children because our one grandson is married in Denmark. They went first through Germany and Switzerland before going up to visit with Tommy.

RF: Have you ever been back to Germany?

ME: No! And I wouldn't go.

RF: You wouldn't go?

ME: If anybody asked me there is the past and here is the present and the future. I wouldn't like to live through the past again!

RF: Do you ever think about your life in Germany?

ME: Yes, in nightmares. When I dream about my time at the HIAS office.

RF: I don't want to ask you anything which would upset you but perhaps you can tell me a little bit about your experiences in that office.

ME: It was pretty hard, because you tried to get people out of Germany and tried to help them and you didn't have enough possibilities. We saw about 10 or 15 clients a day, all in the same misery. You had a pretty hard time.

RF: When was it no longer possible for people to leave Germany?

ME: After the war had started in 1939. I still had 25 people in Berlin in June 1939 to get them to Australia. The visas didn't come in time. I never knew what happened to 20 of them. Five of them, I know what happened, since I met them in New York, by chance.

RF: Would you say that the only reason why you stayed as long as you did, in Germany, was because of your work?

ME: No! It was because I didn't get my US visa in time. We had to register to get a number to go to the US consulate. My number was not called until Feb. 1940. I was very, very lucky. I got on the last boat out of Italy, before Italy entered the war.

RF: You went from Germany to Italy?

ME: I got, through my work, acquainted with the Swiss consulate. They gave me the visa for Switzerland, otherwise I would have had to go over the Brenner Pass, directly to Italy. In this way I was able to stay a few days in Switzerland. The consul was very nice. He said: "You deserve a rest before you start life in the US." So we could go through Switzerland before we caught the last boat, which left Genoa, Italy before Italy entered the war. The US did not allow any of their ships to go to any country at war, (with the Allies), therefore the next ship didn't go.

RF: Did your work for HIAS, no matter how difficult it may have been, with problems of trying to get visas and such for your clients, change. Would you describe your life to be the

same or different, as time progressed in Germany?

ME: The first thing after the Kristallnacht is that I had to give up my car. I lost my driver's license. Every Jew had to give up his driver's license. That was a big handicap because I went to the GESTAPO nearly every day, for one reason or another. Then we were asked to move out of our apartments if they were not in Jewish houses. Then we were no longer allowed maids under the age of 45, if they were not Jewish. That was another handicap. Then the rationing was pretty bad. It became worse and worse all the time. It was typical, for example that after the war started we were not allowed to buy clothing anymore. It was still the custom that if one of your relatives died you went into mourning, into black clothes. I could not even get a black dress, or a black coat anymore, when my parents died.

RF: Were there any requirements placed upon Jews in public?

ME: We were not allowed to attend any concerts or theatres, or lectures. The other thing which was very hard, it didn't affect me, because I left in time, but the Jews had to wear yellow bands.

RF: When was that?

ME: After the Kristallnacht, in 1938. We also had to use surnames, that is our own names and then, if you were a lady then "Sarah", or if you were a man then "Abraham". We were not allowed to sign anything without our second name. I always remember, when I got my US visa I started to write: "Dr Margarete" and wanted to continue with "Sarah" but the girl pushed me and said: "You are in a free country. You don't write Sarah here!"

RF: That is a marvelous way to end this first interview.

RF: We went through the questionnaire rather quickly last time and what I would like to do now is to pick up on certain questions - certain areas of the questionnaire and begin to pursue those. One area of great interest is your work with HIAS. You mentioned that you had worked for the organization after 1933. Is that correct?

ME: Yes!

RF: When did you first become affiliated with them?

ME: That was in 1934 when the man who was head of the HIAS in Baden (the German state in which both Karlsruhe and Mannheim are located) left to return to the US. He had not given us the information which was necessary to register in Stuttgart (48.46N,9.11E) at the consulate so that we got very high numbers to emigrate to the US. These were numbers on the quota to emigrate to the US, at that did, in Germany, was because of your work?

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ME: I got, through my work, acquainted with the Swiss consulate. They gave me the visa for Switzerland, otherwise I would have had to go over the Brenner Pass, directly to Italy. In this way I was able to stay a few days in Switzerland. The consul was very nice. He said: "You deserve a rest before you start life in the US." So we could go through Switzerland before we caught the last boat, which left Genoa, Italy before Italy entered the war. The US did not allow any of their ships to go to any country at war, (with the Allies), therefore the next ship didn't go.

RF: Did your work for HIAS, no matter how difficult it may have been, with problems of trying to get visas and such for your clients, change. Would you describe your life to be the same or different, as time progressed in Germany?

ME: The first thing after the Kristallnacht is that I had to give up my car. I lost my driver's license. Every Jew had to give up his driver's license. That was a big handicap because I went to the GESTAPO nearly every day, for one reason or another. Then we were asked to move out of our apartments if they were not in Jewish houses. Then we were no longer allowed maids under the age of 45, if they were not Jewish. That was another handicap. Then the rationing was pretty bad. It became worse and worse all the time. It was typical, for example that after the war started we were not allowed to buy clothing anymore. It was still the custom that if one of your relatives died you went into mourning, into black clothes. I could not even get a black dress, or a black coat anymore, when my parents died.

RF: Were there any requirements placed upon Jews in public?

ME: We were not allowed to attend any concerts or theatres, or lectures. The other thing which was very hard, it didn't affect me, because I left in time, but the Jews had to wear yellow bands. RF: When was that?

ME: After the Kristallnacht, in 1938. We also had to use surnames, that is our own names and then, if you were a lady then "Sarah", or if you were a man then "Abraham". We were not allowed to sign anything without our second name. I always remember, when I got my US visa I started to write: "Dr Margarete" and wanted to continue with "Sarah" but the girl pushed me and said: "You are in a free country. You don't write Sarah here!"

RF: That is a marvelous way to end this first interview.

RF: We went through the questionnaire rather quickly last time and what I would like to do now is to pick up on certain questions - certain areas of the questionnaire and begin to pursue those. One area of great interest is your work with HIAS. You mentioned that you had worked for the organization after 1933. Is that correct?

ME: Yes!

RF: When did you first become affiliated with them?

ME: That was in 1934 when the man who was head of the HIAS in Baden (the German state in which both Karlsruhe and Mannheim are located) left to return to the US. He had not given us the information which was necessary to register in Stuttgart (48.46N,9.11E) at the consulate so that we got very high numbers to emigrate to the US. These were numbers on the quota to emigrate to the US, at that

time. I remember that my family had the number 1050 (later the number 1850 was mentioned). That meant, at that time, a wait of at least four or five years. The man who made this mistake then left and, left the whole mess for all of us to get resolved, went to the US. I met him one time in NYC again where he was one of the most hated men you can imagine. If he had worked really the right way we all could have come out much earlier.

RF: So you actually registered for emigration?

ME: No, I had not registered because I didn't know about it. Iregistered finally when I was at the office and learned about it.

RF: Now, how did you become professionally affiliated with HIAS?

ME: I worked for the "Oberrat der Israeliten in Baden" (the superior council of the Jews in Baden) before I got married and then, after my marriage, until Hanna was born.

RF: Would you tell me what that is in English?

ME: That is the highest office for the Jews in the State of Baden. It had been established in 1812. When I finished my studies in Heidelberg they were looking for a male lawyer to take the position, and when they couldn't find one they took me as a volunteer. After four weeks they asked if I would stay. So, by that time, they knew me pretty well and knew that I could work, and could do the work that was needed.

RF: And what was that job?

ME: The job was to be Executive Director for the entire State of Baden, for the Jewish Communities.

RF: What sort of work did you do, in relation to the Jewish Communities?

ME: First or all I had to see that every community got their teacher and got their cantor, if they wanted one, their rabbi if they wanted one. Secondly I had to see that the taxes which were taken by the state for the three state religions were used the right way (in Germany individuals did not - and probably still don't - pay for their churches and religious officials etc by donations, as is done in the US, but paid an assessed tax which the state then prorated to the various religious needs as per a specific formula to the "three state religions" i.e. Protestant, Catholic and Jewish). Thirdly I had to get out a monthly newsletter to let all the people know what was going on. That was in the year 1921 and everything was very settled and very quiet.

RF: You worked there until when?

ME: Until after I was pregnant with Hanna, which was in 1926. The beginning of 26.

RF: Then, after the birth of Hanna?

ME: I didn't work then. Paul was settled as an attorney at law. I came from a pretty, not wealthy, but well settled family, so I didn't need to work, until Hitler came to power.

RF: When Hitler came to power you went back to work?

ME: Yes, because Paul lost his profession as a lawyer. He served in WWI, but not long enough, to meet the criteria for remaining a lawyer, as per the newly promulgated laws. So I decided, when BIAS offered me the job that I would take it. That job was to guide the HIAS department of Baden.

RF: Would you tell me a little about HIAS and tell me the kind of work which you did?

ME: I tried to get as many Jewish people as possible out of Germany. I remember that one of the big things was legislation for the SS St Louis which set out for Cuba (loaded with refugees trying to escape NAZI Germany but were refused landing privileges by various countries in the Americas the refugees were repatriated to Europe and many finished in extermination camps) and could not land there and was sent back. The people came partly to England and to France. Then we tried to get people out to Australia. We tried to get as many as possible to Palestine, which was at this time still an English protectorate. Palestine was very exclusive about admitting immigrants. If people didn't have money they just didn't want them to come. I had between 25000 and 30000 Jewish people still in Baden whom I had to try to get out.

RF: What were the dates of your work with HIAS?

ME: I can look it up exactly, if you wish but approximately from 1934 or beginning of 1935 until I emigrated to the US in February of 1940. I left my position on Dec. 1, ‘39.

RF: Tell me: in your position there, what sorts of relationships did you have with the German authorities?

ME: Surprisingly, very good ones, because in our State of Baden most of the population was Catholic, and was not very much in favor of Hitler. Therefore, whenever I came to one of the offices or to one of the different places I was truly treated with very much respect and very well. I was not put into any concentration camp.

RF: Were any of your colleagues from the office?

ME: Not in our office in Karlsruhe but from the offices in Munich and in Stuttgart.

RF: Where the offices closed?

ME: The offices were then run by subordinates who didn't know a thing.

RF: You say that the US had quotas. You mentioned the SS St Louis. What sorts of procedures did a person have to go through who wished to leave Germany at that time?

ME: They first had to try to find a place to go to. They had to have an affidavit from US citizens or from citizens in Australia, or New Zealand. Then, secondly, they had to have the money for the transportation to the country. Finally they had to have a declaration of "clean health", in the way of money and payment of taxes and duties, on things to be taken out, which they had to pay.

RF: You say that you dealt with 20,000 to 30,000 people in that period?

ME: Yes!

RF: I would think that it would have gotten somewhat difficult - more and more difficult, during the period.

ME: It was unbelievably difficult, especially after the Kristallnacht, in 1938. Especially since we all felt that we have to get our men out first. Fast and as many as possible. We searched for relatives in England, or France, or Spain, or Italy, who could take our men in. That was the most important and acute thing then, because if we were able to get them out of concentration camps, or had been forgotten (i.e. they had escaped being arrested). We didn't want them to stay in Germany. We didn't know when something similar to Kristallnacht would happen again, with all the men being taken away.

RF: When did Paul leave Germany?

ME: He left Germany on May 12, 1939, just before the war started. We had a cousin in England, a cousin of my mother's, who had studied with the help of my grandparents and was a very well settled

engineer in Birmingham. (52.30N, 1.50W). I had written to him immediately after the Kristallnacht. He had vouched that Paul could stay with him and that he would give him enough money to live there, until he could emigrate to the US.

RF: You were not alone that long.

ME: I was alone for one year and one day. But it was the most terrible time because in the meantime the war started and we couldn't even write to each other. We had to write to people in Switzerland or Holland. They sent the letters on. If we mentioned any proper name, or any city, or any town, it was cut out of the letter by the censor.

RF: After the war broke out, in 1939, clearly it must have been more difficult for Jews to leave Germany.

ME: It was nearly impossible.

RF: And yet, you were able to get out!

ME: It was almost impossible, except if you could get the transportation from Genoa to the US. France had entered the war so no American ships could go there or to England. It was only Spain or Genoa, in Italy. (It is felt that the reference to Spain includes Lisbon, Portugal.)

RF: But Germany was still allowing Jews to leave.

ME: Yes, if you paid your duty. That meant: if you leave all the money you have. As a small example, when I finally got my declaration of "clean health" and could leave I finally had 5 DMarks in my pocketbook when I came to the Swiss border. The man at the border said "Sorry Madame, the 5 DMarks either have to be brought back to the German side" - we were already on the Swiss side "or you have to leave it here or you have to give it to the dependent people." I said: "Here, taken it! I don't need it."

RF: Who were you met by?

ME: We had friends who had offered already in 1938, after the Kristallnacht, to take Hanna, our daughter. She was with them for three weeks but then she was so terribly homesick that she came back to Germany. They offered that, anytime we could come we could stay with them. HOwever I didn't leave Germany until one week before the ship left. My husband had stayed with them for one week before he went to Scotland. The few little possessions in jewelry or antiques, which I had, had all gone to these friends in Switzerland, when Hanna went there. We, this lady and I, were sitting on the German side of the railroad station in Bale (44.17N, 7.40E) and I had my ring and bracelet and lorgnette with me. She suddenly said "Oh, Hanna, give me the menu!" Then she took my lorgnette, which she never could use and said" "Oh I will have some coffee" and put it in her pocketbook. Then she said: "Oh, give me your ring!" In this way the few things which I still have came out of Germany.

RF: How long were you in Switzerland?

ME: A week.

RF: And then you went to Genoa?

ME: Yes, and from Genoa with the last US steamer to NY, because, while we were on the steamer Italy entered the war, and there was no possibility anymore to get a US boat in Italy.

RF: Let's go back again to your work with HIAS. I am most interested in the kind of procedures which were followed. the bureaucratic procedures.

ME: These procedures operated so that we got our instructions from Berlin, from the headquarters there. We were asked, for example, if Australia opened its doors up and they would take Jewish refugees, to select twenty people who had enough money to pay for their transportation to Australia and had a little money to stop there. So I selected 20 people from the entire state and wrote to them that there is a possibility; if you have around 30000 DMarks please let me know immediately and we will try to get the visa. Then I gathered 12 people, out of the 20 selected, and took them to Berlin to meet the Australian consul there. They were all approved. In the meantime the war got worse and they couldn't go anymore. However the German Reich, which had taken all their money, except for the money for transportation kept the money. (Australia declared war on Germany when England did.)

RF: What happened to these people after they were no longer allowed to leave?

ME: They stayed in Germany and then they were taken to Gurs, in France. Finally, if they had any relatives in the US, who could pay the deposit of $1000.00, they were allowed to leave for the US.

RF: So, at the end, after 39, the US became the only place one could go to from Germany?

ME: The US was the only possibility! However, the one thing which I always felt was very important, were the Roosevelt refugees. Roosevelt feared the terrible fate of all these people and allowed a certain number to come to upstate New York. I don't know if you knew about that?

RF: I know a bit about it, but please tell me more.

ME: Roosevelt offered to take 500 people, especially from amongst the people in France and Italy. People who were either sick or old or had relatives in the US. He allowed them to come to a fort (ME can not think of the name) near Oswego. (43.27N, 76.31W), New York. There was a camp there, obviously not the type of camps in Europe. The people who arrived there, if they had any friends or relatives, who could give them money for them to live on for one year, in the US, could come out of the camp. However what does 500 mean from the millions who were taken to gas chambers.

RF: Why were they not allowed to go to Australia?

ME: Because there was no possibility of transportation anymore, because of the war. You never knew if a boat would arrive. Most of the boats were sunk.

RF: Life must have been very difficult at this time, for these people who remained.

ME: It was impossible.

RF: How did you live?

ME: I was no longer there! I, thank's God, was able to leave.

RF: No, how did you as a person live, before you left, in 1940 - and also the people you were working with.

ME: We had one egg a week, per person. Children under ten got one eight ounce cup of milk twice a week. Meat was impossible. Bread was like stone. I remember one little thing we did: we were evacuated, because our home in Karlsruhe, was in the Siegfried Line (the German defensive line which was set up as a counterbalance to the French Maginot Line). So we had to leave in the beginning of the war. I took my entire office to Mannheim. In Mannheim, where Paul had grown up, and where our family was very well known we had a fish store. One day I passed and the owner

called me: "Doctor, would you like a fish?" That was in the winter 39 so I said: "Sure! If you have one". She said: "Yes, I got some on the black market!" So I got one fish which I had to carry home by its tail because they had no paper to wrap it up. We were not allowed to go out after 8:00 pm, because of a curfew which lasted until 8:00 am. If you wanted to go out you had to go to the police and get a special permit. I got such permits because of my work. I must say that it was miserable that winter because there was not one light on the entire street.

RF: You were working and you were allowed to continue to work, due to the nature of your work; but what about these people, for example the people who were unable to get transportation to Australia, and who later went to camp Gurs in France? What happened to them during the interim period? How did they live? How did they eat? Where did they live?

ME: They got part of their money back when they couldn't leave.

RF: Part of their transportation money?

ME: No. Part of the money they had to give to the Reich. Their duties and taxes and such.

RF: I thought that you said that the Reich confiscated it.

ME: Yes, confiscated everything; but when you couldn't leave you got some money back.

RF: I see, what about their homes?

ME: Except for the places in the Siegfried Line, they were all put into one apartment house, in one part of the city. You had to pay exorbitant duties to get an apartment, or to stay in one.

RF: Did your society, HIAS, support these people in any way?

ME: We tried to, as much as possible. We helped them as much as we could, sure! However everything was pretty limited.

RF: I understand that but, it seems to me, that these were people who had no jobs - no work - because they had given up their work to emigrate.

ME: They couldn't work. You know that a Jewish doctor was not allowed to be a doctor anymore, he became a "Jewish Healer". A lawyer became a "Jewish Representative". I was glad that I left before we had to wear the stars on our arms.

RF: When was the star introduced in Germany?

ME: In the fall of 1940. They made everything possible to degrade the Jews as much as they could.

RF: Can you recall any incidents, in your work, where the German authorities attempted to demean you?

ME: No! Not personally! I must say that this is one thing which I always appreciated. I think that because of the status my and my husband's family had in Baden, our entire family, I was never treated badly.

RF: And your co-workers?

ME: There were a few who were taken for several days to the jail or to a camp, but mostly they came back.

RF: At the period, or time, when one is living under great anxiety, how do you feel that your daughter fared under that pressure?

ME: Very badly. I told you that they removed the entire studies of the children. Hanna did not bring any of her memorabilia with her, only two small pieces of marble of our synagogue. She was there when it was destroyed. However I believe that you may speak to Hanna, yourself, she offered to be interviewed for the Holocaust History project.

RF: When was the synagogue destroyed?

ME: On Nov 10, 1938. It was the Kristallnacht!

RF: After that, after Kristallnacht, to what extent did Jews congregate? for prayer or whatever?

ME: In one of the houses, or one of the apartments. We also had so-called "Cultural Assembly" where we had lectures, or plays, or concerts. However that was very hard to arrange, particularly after the war started, since as I told you, the cities were absolutely black at night. I will never forget when, before Christmas 39, I had to take a trip to lake Constance (47.35N, 9.25E) for one of my interviews. At Konstanz, the city on the lake, the German and Swiss cities are built together, so that they have no border. When I got there the lights were on brightly through the entire city. Everything was like peacetime since they knew that if one of the air raids, would occur the planes could not distinguish between the Swiss and German soil. So they left everything alone. It was just overwhelming.

Interviewee: Dr. Margaret Ebert = ME Interviewer:

Barbara Turoff = BT

BT: This is Barbara Turoff. It is Sunday, Aug 19, 1979 and we are sitting in the sitting room of Dr. Margaret Ebert's home for the first of a series of interviews with Mrs. Ebert. (It appears that BT is not familiar with the previous interviews) Mrs. Ebert, why don't we start by identifying yourself, telling us how old you are, what you are doing and whatever you wish to say. Then we will return to the way you were when Hitler came to power. Then, if we feel comfortable enough we can start really.

ME: First of all, I am not Dr. Margaret Ebert. I am Mrs. Paul Ebert. I left the Doctor title in Europe. I use it only on my checks. Second of all, Bob Friedman did already a lot of interviewing of myself. Maybe you could get the tape, that would save you time and it would make it easier for me.

BT: OK!

ME: You asked about my age; I am 81 and I gave up my work for UNICEF last year since I felt that younger people should take over. I am now a housewife and I try to help wherever I can in the community. We are very lucky that my husband and I are together after 55 years of married life. Before that we studied together in Heidelberg for five years. So we are truly an old couple. We live here in Yellow Springs because we followed our daughter who got married in New York to a beautiful hoosier from Indiana. They moved here because Dick found work here, at the Book Plate Company where he is now the chief of the entire machine department. He is in charge of all the machines there and very happy with his work. Our daughter got a degree from Hunter College, and got a teacher's license in Ohio. She is now teaching at the Antioch School and in the Xenia school system. We have six grandchildren, one of whom is married and has a little baby who is now a few months old. However this grandson is in Denmark. All the others, live in the US. What else do you want to know?

BT: I think that you have done a remarkable job of telling us where you are now. I guess that the question which will come up is how you reestablished yourself and did such a remarkable transference when you came to this country. Maybe we should just leave that. If going back is not too difficult for you could you please identify yourself in 1933.

ME: It is not difficult at all. When I came from my courses at the University of Heidelberg in 1921 I got the offer of a job immediately with the Oberraht der Israeliten. This means with the highest organization of Jews in the State of Baden. They had been looking for a male lawyer, however since they couldn't find one, they took a female economist. I worked there until I got married, that was in 1925. I had a very interesting and a very good job and I was very happy in it, because I really build it up as well as build it out. It had been neglected for many years and I had the possibility to really reorganize it. It was very funny. I met one of my father's friends one day, on the street, after I had been at my job for about six months. We had a little newspaper which I edited, in connection with my job. When he met me he said: "I don't know the Dr. Ebert who works in your office, really seems to know his things. I never met him!" I laughed and said: "He is standing in front of you!" He said" "What? You?" I said: "Yes! I am the Dr. Ebert." So, I guess, I really did something for our community. I was charged with the welfare of about 50,000 Jews. One thing which was beautiful was that we were absolutely equal to the other religions. The money for the upkeep of our organization was collected with the state income tax (the same way as for the upkeep of churches and synagogues and their staffing). Ten percent of the tax receipt went to the different religions. The Jewish income was treated exactly as any other. There was no discrimination, in any way.

BT: If I can interrupt you now. I guess the question which so many people would ask is: "Officially German Jews were given equality with other Germans with the Weimar Republic?"

ME: No! That equality existed since 1850.

BT: But that was only in parts of Germany.

ME: No!

BT: But wasn't the official ...

ME: No, that was in most of the states (Germany was a conglomeration of relatively independent Principalities, Dukedoms, Kingdoms, Free Cities etc. until after WWI and that conglomeration persisted, administratively pretty much until WWII) In January, 1870 or 1871, when the "unification came" it was for all states. It was one Reich!

BT: My recollection is that it was taken back in certain areas.

ME: No!

BT: Under the Weimar Constitution, it seems that it was made throughout Germany. Am I right?

ME: No! You are not. It was already since the Unification of 1870/71, that all states looked not on any religion. People were Germans by nationality and Jews by religion. We were equal to all the other religions.

BT: OK! Let me ask you this. I had not intended to go into this this deeply right now but , since we are here let us deal with questions which trouble me - and I believe would trouble a lot of people. Did you feel any change after WWI? Did Jews feel different, as a result of the Weimar Republic?

ME: No!

BT: It was a continuous line (before and after the end of WWI). You did not feel suddenly accepted?

ME: No! No! It was absolutely the same.

BT: What about all the anti-Semitism? OK. Let me ask this other question which, again, troubles me, so that I can try to understand. You went to the University?

ME: Yes!

BT: For so long it seemed to me there were dominant strains of anti-Semitism in terms of writing.

ME: No! Absolutely not. I can tell you one thing. My great grand uncle got his medical degree in Heidelberg in the 1840's. He was a doctor in Karlsruhe. There was no discrimination in any way. My grandfather who was a very, not orthodox but religious Jew was

President of the city council in Karlsruhe, at the turn of the century.
BT: Now where did you grow up?
ME: I grew up in Karlsruhe, in Baden, on the Rhine river, in the southern part of Germany. I have in my files - I didn't bring much with me - but I have a letter where my great grandfather got his citizenship in 1813.
BT: I am not that sophisticated as to what was happening in different parts of Germany, in relationship to Jews, but would you say that that particular area was different from most parts of Germany?
ME: No! No.
BT: Would you say, are you aware, that in this country that there are places which; are more comfortable to live in for certain groups than other groups? Would you say that you were in a "preferable" place to live?
ME: No, it was everywhere the same.
BT: You wouldn't feel uncomfortable, let us say, moving to another part of the country because you were Jewish.
ME: Absolutely not. Absolutely not.
BT: For example Blacks, for a long time, wouldn't move to the South or so. But you don't feel that, as a Jew ...
ME: No! Absolutely not.
BT: You did not feel that way?
ME: No. It was simply a religious question, not a question of citizenship. We were absolutely equal!
BT: Maybe that is legally. How did one feel personally?
ME: Absolutely equal.
BT: But, one was not that conscious of watching out for certain things?
ME: No. Not until Hitler came to power. Our father was a very good Jew; he was President of the Chamber of Commerce of Baden. He was on the Board of the Reich's Bahn (the German Railroad, which was a corporation administered by the Reich, i.e. by Germany) and on the Board of the German Radio, not just for the State of Baden.
BT: OK, if one could put you into a category, what kind of religious practices did you follow? Would you say the Liberal Jewish tradition?
ME: Absolutely Liberal (the question indicates somewhat of a lack of knowledge of the questioner who seems to expect divisions of Jews in Germany to be patterned after divisions of Jews in the US, which was not the case).
BT: Liberal Jews! Was that the dominant group?
ME: In Karlsruhe, we had a Jewish Community. We had two synagogues. We had a Liberal and an Orthodox one (actually that was graduated per practice not philosophy). The Orthodox numbered 500 and the Liberal numbered 5000 members.
BT: Did you relate to the Orthodox?
ME: Absolutely.
BT: You didn't feel that they were beneath you, or someone not to be associated with.
ME: No, not at all. We were Germans. It shows you by the fact that my father was lieutenant and my uncle was also a lieutenant in the Germany army. They were promoted because they had done their duty as Germans.
BT: OK! When you were in the University, there were so many leading philosophers who were anti-Semitic in terms of their writings. ME: Not in the South.
BT: I mean in the reading in the universities how did the professors deal with it (presumably meaning anti-Semitism)?
ME: Absolutely we were equal to anybody else.
BT: OK but, when you were studying let us say you took philosophy courses ...
ME: Yes, I took philosophy courses.
BT: Well could you read? Let me say, could you remember the German philosophers?
ME: Oh, sure! We read them all. We read the anti-Semitic ones, with the others.
BT: OK, how did your professors deal with that aspect?
ME: They looked at it as something funny. They didn't take that seriously.
BT: How many Jewish professors were there. I don't mean numberwise, but would you say that their number was sizeable? Were they influential?
ME: Influential and sizeable and absolutely not looked at as Jews. They were looked at as scientists.
BT: Were you consciously aware of anti-Semitic professors?
ME: No! No. Absolutely not.
BT: Because when Hitler came to power, the universities seemed to be sources of anti-Semitism already.
ME: No. They were not so. It was the lowest grade of people who were for Hitler first. Afterwards they had all to follow the line.
BT: OK! Again I can only go by what I read, and what I learned from what I read was that because of the unemployment situation, a lot of the younger students at the universities were very attracted to Hitler because they had no jobs, or for whatever reason. And that the university was a source (of anti-Semitism).
ME: The question in Germany was not the unemployment at all.
BT: Of course you wouldn't know about this post WWI feeling. When did you graduate from the university?
ME: In 1921.
BT: In 1921. OK, that would have been different then.
ME: Later on my father was on the Board of Trustees for the Karlsruhe Technical Institute, that was in the late twenties, and it lasted until Hitler came to power. Then one of the other trustees came and said: "Mr. Elsace I am afraid that you have to resign. We are not allowed to have Jews on our Board of Trustees anymore."
BT: That was when, in 1933?
ME: Yes, in 1933 or 34.
BT: What about the period - as I do my readings - more and more articles said that it didn't happen overnight in 1933.
ME: It came since 1923. Then there was the hyperinflation in Germany. However it was only a very small proportion, especially in Baden. There they were pretty good.
BT: How were things in the twenties? Was there a dominant strain of anti-Semitism?
ME: No!

BT: From what I read there were two kinds of people. On the one hand there were the liberals, the Social Democrats you may call them politically; and on the other hand there were the ...
ME: You must have read only a very small part of the literature.
BT: I am sure that I have.
ME: That is so because I lived in it and we never felt anti-Semitism. I can give you a small example: in 1932, the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Karlsruhe died. The Director came and asked my father to take over. In Jan 1933, he asked again: "Mr. Elsace, wouldn't you run for the Presidency?" Father, very reluctantly agreed. On the first of February he came and said "Mr Elsace, I am sorry that I have to tell you that we have to ask you to resign, only because you are Jewish." That is a small example. We were not looked at as Jews, we were looked at as citizens of the country.
BT: OK. This is difficult to answer, but we all, wherever we are deal within our own circle. For example in Yellow Springs there is a certain point of view and we tend to think that that is the point of view of the world; however when we step outside of Yellow Springs we discover that we really are a minority. Do you think that possibly your feelings, the fact that you didn't feel anti-Semitism, may be because you were surrounded by your own class of people?
ME: No.
ET: That you were really very isolated? That you didn't feel (what went on)?
ME: Absolutely not. We were not isolated. A little example: the first of January - New Years Day was always the big celebration in the capital of Baden. My parents had seats for the celebration at the first table. As always we had tickets for that table also and we didn't want to go so we gave them to Paul's brother. We said: "Oh, we can go next year!" That was simply natural: we were Germans, we were not Jewish. We were well situated and pretty well kept German people. That changed the moment Hitler came to power. I never felt any anti-Semitism at all, either at the University or in our daily life.
BT: OK, if you can follow these skips and jumps and pursue where we are, were you politically active?
ME: Yes!
BT: In the late 20's did you have any concern about someone like Hitler taking power? That anti-Semitism was on the rise? When did you begin to be concerned about anti-Semitism?
ME: After Hitler came to power.
BT: Not before?
ME: No. The trouble in Germany was that there were lots of splinter parties. The Liberals were splintered into lots of parties. There was not one Democratic and one Republican party. Hitler never would have come to power if they could have joined hands. They didn't though; and that was really the one thing which brought Hitler to power. He had part of the young folks behind him, particularly the disillusioned who didn't get jobs or who couldn't find work, or didn't want to find work.
BT: OK! When the election of 1932 took place, were you concerned at that time; were you working with some groups to make sure that Hitler would be defeated or weren't you that concerned?
ME: That was their concern, not ours. We always felt that it is ridiculous, or silly, to think that they can come to power. If Hitler wouldn't have had the big help from people outside of Germany he never could have reached it.
BT: OK! What were you doing in the 20's?
ME: I was working until I got married. When I got married I resigned after Hanna was on her way and I was a housewife. However I did lots of volunteer work. It was typical that either mother and I or father were serving on several boards. We were simply not asked: "Are you Jewish or Catholic or Protestant?" We were citizens and we did our share.
BT: If I may ask again, if you can bear with me, for digressing here, I am just curious about the 20's, I know that there was an active feminist movement.
ME: Yes.
BT: Could you just tell me a little about it. I am not certain that we can make it a Jewish issue, or maybe relate it possibly with the Jewish women being more active in it?
ME: No! All were active in it and I remember the first election after the Weimar Constitution. I then was secretary to Marianne Weber, the wife of Max Weber, the famous economist. She was the first woman in our state parliament. I was her Secretary and there was no question of whether I was Jewish or what else. I was a worker and I helped. There was no Jewish or non-Jewish work to be done; it was political work. Marianne Weber was a member of the equivalent of the League of Women Voters since 1900. We all worked toward getting equality. One of my aunts studied in Berlin in 1869 and 70, both as a woman and as a Jew. There just was no difference.
BT: What is interesting is that when Hitler assumed power the entire feminist movement collapsed together with the other liberal trends.
ME: No!
BT: You are saying "No!" But how were the women so eager to embrace Hitler? knowing that Hitler's position was such.
ME: They did not embrace him, they simply followed. Germans are people who follow a leader. If it is a leader on the right or on the left, the German people just followed.
BT: I see. So you were doing volunteer work in the 20's. You say that the election in 32 was not treated differently than any other election.
ME: Elections were not like here every four years. Elections came every time when the leading parties collapsed (that is standard for the "Parliamentary System" except that the interval between elections may not exceed a given number of years). We had an election in 1931. After that time, in our State, Hitler had a very small minority. Don't forget that Germany was divided into States, which had made a "Union" in 1871 and each state had its own elections, besides the elections to the Reichstag (the All-German Parliament). The elections to the Reichstag were not due until 1934.
BT: Let me ask you something else: in the 20's, or even going back before then, what were your feelings, your family's feelings about the Zionist movement? How did you feel toward Zionism? Did you have friends who were Zionists?
ME: Yes, we had friends who were Zionists. But we all did not take Zionism very seriously. I can

give you a little example. My father had a big export business and in 1925 we had one branch in Palestine in either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. We also had one branch in London, one in Buenos Aires and one in Rio de Janeiro. My parents went to Palestine in the fall of 25 and were treated royally there and had big result. I never forget when mother came home, how she laughed and said that she went to the "Mourning Wall" (today this is called the "Wailing Wall") on the day before Yom Kippur (the annual fast day for the Day of Atonement in the Jewish faith) and the guard came and said: "Madam, you have to leave, this place is only for Jews!" Mother said: "But I am Jewish!" The guard said: "You are German, yes, but Jewish of religion, so you can stay." Mother looked absolutely "un-Jewish". We always laughed about this.

BT: Did you have friends who were Zionists at home?

ME: No.

BT: Did you argue a great deal about Zionism?

ME: No. We ignored it. We felt that if there would be a Jewish state in Palestine which had been promised already I think in 1922 (the "Balfour Declaration " which advocated a Jewish State in Palestine was actually issued in 1917 in London) but it started as a British Mandate (by the treaty dismembering Turkey at the end of WWI). We were glad that people could go there but we never looked at it as a home state.

BT: Could you see any parallel for example between blacks in this country - it is a little modified today - that there are certain groups who say that they want to have their own state in Africa. That people want to go back to Africa.

ME: No.

BT: But most Blacks laugh at that.

ME: No.

BT: Would you say that the Jewish experience was not the same.

ME: We were Germans. Both families were Germans. My father's family got the house in Ludwigsburg in 1706 (it was identified as 1708 earlier) and my mother's family got the house in Karlsruhe in 1711
(again there's a slip of one year). Paul's family went back to 1648 in the same house in Bingen am Rhein (47.58N, 7.54E). What else had we been except Germans?

BT: OK, rather than go back to your experiences which Bob Friedman recorded, let us deal with your daughter now, with the kind of education she had. How old was she in the 20's?

ME: She was 13, when we came to the US.

BT: So let's see, when was she born?

ME: In 1926.

BT: She was born in 1926, so, in those few years did she enroll in a Jewish school? In a German school?

ME: She was in a German Kindergarten and in a German school until 1934. BT: What was her Jewish education?

ME: None.

BT: No Jewish education. As a liberal Jew what did that mean? ME: It was up to us what we did with her.

BT: What did you do with her?

ME: She went with us to the synagogue, and she learned a little Hebrew. She used prayers and everything, but that was only a little sideline to her German education.

BT: And socially, I mean where you lived, what was the street like, in the idea as to who was living next door. Was it a Jewish family? ME: No!

BT: OK! Where did you live exactly?

ME: In Hirschstrasse No 39 in Karlsruhe. We never had any Jewish neighbours nor any question about it.

BT: Did you own your own home?

ME: Yes.

BT: Could you describe the street, let's say. What did it look like?

ME: It was a very bourgeois street. Across the street from us lived an old family. The father of the family was a doctor. He died. The mother was living with her daughter who was a classmate of my mother's. It was typical that I had Hanna at home and she was overdue by four weeks when she was born. The old lady came three days after Hanna was born and said "I know that you had your baby, because you didn't put your beds out on the sixth". We always took all the things off the bed and put them into the window to air out.

BT: Now this woman was not Jewish?

ME: Naturally not. There were no Jewish neighbours.

BT: OK. How many houses were on the street? I want to get a picture, let us recreate the atmosphere.

ME: It was a street like Xenia Avenue (one of the major streets in Yellow Springs).

BT: So that is a long street. Quite a few houses and you were the only Jews on this street, as far as you knew.

ME: Nobody knew what we were. We just lived there.

BT: There might have been other Jews, but you didn't know?

ME: No.

BT: There were not? How did you know then? You knew later on, of course.

ME: Later on, but not then.

BT: But not then and you didn't think much about it? That is amazing.

ME: It may be typical that we didn't. We rented the apartment from a doctor's family who had moved away, and after I saw the book of Karlsruhe last January I wrote to the photographer who had taken all the photographs of Hanna and us. That is wedding pictures, everything. I wrote to him and told him that I saw this book at a family here in town, he comes from Karlsruhe too. I wrote to him that we came out of Germany but that we didn't bring any pictures or anything with us, we only got ourselves out and I asked him if he had, by any chance the negatives. Two weeks later came lovely letter from his wife saying how glad they are that we are alive, that they have all the negatives and that they would print them for us. She put it in the Karlsruhe paper. I received letters. You can't imagine how many letters I got from old friends, all of them non-Jewish. One of these friends goes back to 1904. This friend writes now regularly and I do the

same. It didn't make any difference whether you were Jewish or not.

BT: OK, you lived on this street, I am just trying to recreate your life, what it was like, and you had your volunteer activities. Your close associates, your close friends?

ME: Were not Jewish.

BT: Your close friends were not Jewish. Were you close friends with your neighbours? or were they just neighbours?

ME: We were in very good terms with all of them.

BT: You had dinner parties at which your next door neighbours were guests? Were there people your age who had young children?

ME: Yes, until Hitler came to power, that didn't make any difference.

BT: Was there any discussion, politically oriented discussions, during those years Hitler was on the rise, before 1932?

ME: When Hitler became active part of them no longer wanted to be friends with us. In particular not if they had any business with the government.

BT: Now when was that?

ME: After 1933.

BT: But, before then did you ever discuss politics at dinner parties?

ME: We never discussed politics.

BT: Is that typical that you did not discuss politics?

ME: We had our political views and we talked about them.

BT: You mean at the dinner table?

ME: ... but we never talked about Hitler, because we never thought that he would come to power.

BT: It is Oct. 8, 1979 and I am concluding my interview with Mrs. Margaret Ebert. Today is Oct. 8, 1979 and once again we are in the home of Mr & Mrs Paul Ebert. This afternoon I, Barbara Turoff, am concluding interviews which were begun some six months ago by Bob Friedman. First, Mrs Ebert, let me thank you for your patience. It has been a long, drawn out process.

ME: It was not your fault.

BT: Well, we appreciate the cooperation. I let you listen to the interviews which you had with Bob Friedman. I just wondered if you wish to add anything.

ME: I listened to them and they can just stand as they are.

BT: OK, let me then see where we go with what I had. I listened to the interview which I had with you and we had to stop in the middle (of an idea). We were just talking about politics before Hitler took power. You made the comment that, with friends, politics wasn't discussed.

ME: It was not discussed after Hitler came to power. Before Hitler came to power the political discussions were very interesting. We had, I think, 12 parties in Germany, or maybe there were 13, splinter parties. We had the proportional voting system so that each party, or splinter party, got representation according to their percentage in the vote. We belonged to the Democratic party, which had three or four representatives in the Reichstag. We tried very hard to get more, but there were so many splinter parties that we had to have an accord to work together. The Bourgois parties worked together, mostly with the Social Democrats. The one big party, especially in southern Germany, was the Centrum, which was a Catholic party. In southern Germany, part of Baden and all of Bavaria were mostly Catholic. You know that there was a big Centrum party and we all joined it with our parties to get our representatives together. You know that in Germany there was a rule that "Is ragio is religion, which means that whoever reigns had a right to force every one of his subjects to adopt his religion. Because of that, the southern part i.e. part of Baden and Bavaria were Catholic. Wurtenberg which is located in between was all Protestant. So the Jews, in all these countries, especially in Baden got the voting right in 1810. That was very early (it was the influence of the French Revolution which controlled the Rhine valley). I have in my possession, a document - one of the few things, which I have - that my great grandfather became a citizen, in 1824 or 25. That was a big thing and later on, when it wasn't necessary any more to have the religion of the reigning sovereign (Germany until the Weimar Constitution was adopted, had a number of hereditary kings, princes etc each having his sovereignty) they still stuck to it.

BT: Throughout the interviews that I was listening to, that is Bob Friedman's and mine your allegiance, your thoughts, of yourself, were German.

ME: Yes! Absolutely.

BT: And your Jewishness was ...

ME: Religion.

BT: Your religion, yet you were not really religious.

ME: I was not Orthodox within my religion, however we were liberal. In Karlsruhe, where I grew up, there were two (Jewish) communities: one were the Orthodox. The liberals were 5000. The Orthodox stuck to all the religious regulations and all the dietary regulations. The liberals kept what they wanted to keep but it wasn't very much. We did not keep a kosher household. We went to the synagogue on the High Holy days. I didn't go (to synagogue) every Saturday, neither did my parents.

BT: Let me ask you this: after Hitler came to power and after the Nuremberg Laws etc. obviously you couldn't think of yourself as being a German first, or a German at all.

ME: It is very hard to change.

BT: I was going to say: Did you then think of yourself first and foremost as a Jew? Did you not think of yourself did you feel "identiless"?

ME: No, no. We felt that this madman will loose his power sometime and we will be back as Germans. We were really blind in this respect.

BT: When did it change? Did it change when you came to the US, or before that as a gradual process?

ME: No, it changed when we became stateless. Our statehood was taken from us.

BT: What did you feel then? Did you feel mostly Jewish?

ME: Lost. Absolutely lost.

BT: Jewish by religion, but still not as a strong identity.

ME: No! Absolutely not. However I was glad when we got our US

citizenship. We applied for that as soon as possible. We could apply for citizenship after five years and we got it after five and-a-half years.

BT: While you were still in Germany and you were rooted from what was going on in Germany, the German Culture, you might say, there was a Jewish Culture - there was some theatre and such. Did you suddenly become very interested in Jewishness?

ME: Yes, we became very interested in Jewish plays, in Jewish concerts, Jewish writers, Jewish conductors, Jewish Composers. That was because we felt that we at least have some cultural ground.

BT: Did it take the place of, or did you still feel very lost?

ME: Yes!

BT: It did not supplant the German identity?

ME: No, it couldn't, because you can't loose the identity you grow up with, and in which your family lived for hundreds of years. Don't forget that our families lived in the same houses for such a long time, so that we simply didn't feel that we could loose everything. We were blind in every respect.

BT: Let us jump in time for a moment! As of today do you feel that you are an American first or Jewish. Do you still feel that loss? Have you been able to work it out.

ME: No! Absolutely! I am an American and I am happy and glad when I hear good German music, or when I can go to one of the plays in English - but plays of German origin. I feel absolutely as an American citizen.

BT: Your grandchildren, they are Americans, they were born in this country, what is their association with Jewishness. Are they Americans first?

ME: None whatsoever. We joined the Quakers, the Friends, when we arrived in Yellow Springs. Our grandchildren belong to the Quaker Meetings here.

BT: Do you feel that what happened in Germany, has a real possibility of happening here?

ME: I doubt it, because you always have to think that America is a conglomeration of so many nations and creeds and races. I don't think that anybody can come to power like Hitler. And another thing: the Americans are much more independent. The Germans always needed either a sovereign or leader - a Fuhrer. I always felt that they are, in this respect like animals who need their leading animal. In the US, that is impossible. There are much to many different cultures and creeds.

BT: I am certain that you have thought about this: what could you learn from what happened? How things might have been different.

ME: In Germany?

BT: Yes. As a result of what happened, are you concerned that your grand children are primarily American and that their Jewishness is subordinate.

ME: Don't forget that our son-in-law is Gentile.

BT: However in Germany, again, people whose families were half and half counted as Jews?

ME: But the ones who were not Jewish, that is not more than 1/8 Jewish were considered Gentiles. If someone had only a great grandmother or great grandfather who were Jewish, they were considered as Germans.

BT: Speaking about your son-in-law, something which you had said earlier - and I did not want to interrupt you at the time - you mentioned that he was a pacifist. Was that at all upsetting.

ME: No! In the contrary. I feel, the more I think about it, the better it is to be a pacifist.

BT: But at the time he was a pacifist, that was during WWII.

ME: It was very courageous to show where he stands. He did not avoid the civil service (she means nonmilitary equivalent duty to military service) he was as a conscientious objector a firefighter in Oregon and then guinea pig for malaria research in New York. He gave his time and activity to the state. He just didn't take up arms.

BT: At that time, however, if the majority of people had taken that position that would have been quite a different set of circumstances, in terms with dealing with the NAZI's.

ME: Maybe, it would have kept the US out of the war.

BT: But that would not have solved the NAZI problem in Europe.

ME: Yes. I feel that France, England, Turkey, Italy, they all were against Hitler.

BT: But were they strong enough!

ME: Yes. I feel that they would have been strong enough.

BT: You feel that they could have defeated the NAZI without the US.

ME: Yes! Yes. I mean that the US entered the war pretty late.

BT: But very crucially.

ME: At a crucial time, but I feel that it was good to have the US in. I am not a separatist like many people are, but I felt that as long as the US only sent money and men they don't know what war means. I am glad that they don't know.

BT: In line with your support of pacifism at this point, Israel takes a different kind of position. How do you feel about Israel, what is your attitude towards Israel - of their militant position?

ME: I think that it is admirable what Israel does. It is beautiful how they keep their own and how they keep their strength. But, maybe, if they wouldn't be so very militaristic, maybe they could have peace in the Middle East.

BT: Specifically, are you referring to the Palestinian issue, to Lebanon, what do your views include?

ME: I felt very very happy when Sadat went to Israel and they tried to get peace at least with one country. I feel now that all should try to get peace there, and not be Zionists in the sense that we want only Israel to have the power.

BT: In view of all Jewish past experience, you still feel that the Jews should be much more compromising?

ME: I feel that - that they should.

BT: If they are compromising they might loose the little they have to bargain with.

ME: No, I don't think so. If they would compromise in the real sense of the word. I feel that the more they work for peace, and the more they help Sadat and the other countries who are

inclined toward them, the more they will have.

BT: If we can go back a minute to what happened in Germany. At first as accommodation was tried with Hitler and it didn't work. That was Munich. We got the feeling, if we work this out maybe we will get by.

ME: Hitler was a madman. He was absolutely sick, and if anybody else would have had the courage to stand up against him, it would have been different.

BT: But you say that the Arab-Israeli situation is very different kind of situation.

ME: Yes. Absolutely different from what it was with Germany.

BT: This interview is kind of jumping back and forth, but I did not want to interrupt where we were going. Going back once more to your experience of assisting people to get out of Germany. When people still had a chance to select to go where they wanted to go, where did most people want to go? Or could one make an assumption.

ME: Oh, please! Turn this off. We didn't have a choice! Because the US had the quota system. People in Australia started to look how far it could go when it was too late. Where should they have gone? (Visas to countries like Cuba, Panama, China - with entrance specified as Shanghai written in Chinese, "jokingly" translated to read "this visa is not to be used for entrance!" were available to be purchased with no certainty of admission to these countries, if one ever actually got there - see the story of the SS St. Louis)

BT: What about Palestine? Do you know much about that?

ME: Palestine also had a very strong quota system (the number of people over 18 being admitted was controlled by the British in line with agreements with the Arabs specifically after the massacre of Jews culminating in 1936). It was a particularly strong system in terms of money. Nobody could go there without money (excepting only young children). The German Jews didn't have money any more at all (after the confiscatory tax levied after the assassination of Embassy Counselor Von Radt and the Kristallnacht of 1938).

BT: If I were to ask you, if it can be asked: what stands out in your mind about your experience in assisting people at the time?

ME: The feeling of helplessness. I felt really terribly frustrated because, wherever you turned, you got a "No!". As I said in the beginning: "If the US would not have had the quota system (the quota by nationality of the birthplace were set up by the Immigration Laws of 1921, revised 1927) it could have saved millions of lives. Because if people had had the possibility to come to other countries all would have taken the possibility.

BT: Do you remember any special bargaining to get anywhere?

ME: There was no bargaining.

BT: I mean in terms of any sort of deals which you could have made? I mean we are always seeking ways in which you could have done this.

ME: We looked everywhere. We searched and searched and searched and all the doors were closed. Most of the people had some relatives or friends in the US, so that is where we concentrated. If they could have come they would have loved to leave without anything except maybe their little personal belongings. But, there was a quota number! I can give you an example: we had the number "1850" (there was one number per family; the number was reported as being 1050 earlier) and 300 were allowed into the country yearly. So we had expected to wait for six or seven years. We were lucky that it went faster because many people did not use their numbers (some of the reasons for not using the numbers were death of the applicant or failure to be able to obtain an "adequate" affidavit of support). We just came at the last possible moment.

BT: So, it wasn't primarily that the NAZI didn't let you out for a long time, it was just that there was no place to go.

ME: The NAZI's were glad about the number of Jews who left. They took all the money and the belongings.

BT: Did that stop at any point? such as after 1940? Even after 40 you could have left if there was a place to go?

ME: Yes, sure! My sister-in-law was taken to the concentration camp at Gurs in southern France (after France fell in 1940). People who were there could come out if the US (or any other country) let them in. You had to deposit one thousand dollars to get one person out. However who had one thousand dollars? We were lucky enough, together with my brother-in-law to get that money together. I never forget my ride on the subway in NY with a one thousand dollar bill in my brassiere to make the deposit so that she could come out. There were many people in the same position (of having to bail relatives out) because the US, after 1940 was, in many ways, very cooperative to allow people still to come in. (The quota numbers "opened up" after the Germans did overrun the Low Countries, France, Norway, Denmark because so many applicants could not avail themselves of their numbers - they "disappeared"). We saved the life of my sister-in-law and several cousins who came on the same boat. However this is passed! It doesn't help anymore to talk or think about it.

BT: The tape will be running out soon so let me ask you two final questions. One is that I am sure that, in addition to everybody who will listen to these interviews you, specifically, want your grandchildren to listen. What would you like to tell them? What specifically do you want to leave them with? I know that you said so much but is there some specific wisdom you want to leave them with?

ME: The only thing which I can say is: "Try to be a good citizen, wherever you live. Stick to your principles and reasons for being either a pacifist or a militarist, but stick to it and fight for it."

BT: The last question ties into this is that I have so much admiration for you. You are aged and yet you are young, you have youth. You are a young 80. To what do you attribute that?

ME: That I have been keeping active, and that I do whatever I can to use my old profession to help. I am now pretty much concerned with work in the community and I try to keep active as long as I can.

BT: Did you feel all along that you would get out of Germany?

ME: No!

BT: You didn't? You didn't have the belief that you would get out?

ME: No, it was like a dream that we came out. Paul was in Scotland and we met in NY again, after one year of separation. That was the biggest thing in my life that we came together again. We never expected to be settled somewhere again as we are here in Yellow Springs. I am glad that we moved from NY here and have roots again. Not only roots in going upwards with our grandchildren, but roots in Yellow Springs.

BT: Do you believe that everyone's prime loyalty should be to their country?
ME: Yes! Absolutely!
BT: That is loyalty to their country, before their religion?
ME: Absolutely because religion is something for everyone to pick for themselves and by themselves, however loyalty to the country ought to be something which everyone should show.
BT: So, in spite of your experience you still feel loyalty?
ME: Yes, absolutely! I never looked at Israel as citizenship. I looked at it like religion. I admire everyone who lives in Israel, and keeps it safe. I couldn't do it. I am very glad and happy in the US. I admire my cousins who live in Israel.
ET: Thank you. It has been my experience and I am sure that everyone who listens will really appreciate what you have done for us.
ME: Thank you very much. I did it because I felt that it is my duty to do it and also my pleasure because I feel that it should be preserved is some way.