

Marianne Dennis Testimony Transcript

I don't have too many memories before the war - I was really too young, but I do remember I went to school. We had a close family life. I remember visiting several relatives who lived in Berlin. I was born and raised in Berlin. My father was totally blind, a most remarkable man. And I remember, of course, going with him and it wasn't that I was leading him, he was leading me. And we had several relatives. My father studied music. We had many times, concerts at home where for an evening guests were invited and different artists. And we lived outside, a little bit outside from - in the middle of Berlin. It was called Niederschönhausen. It was like a suburb. I went to Jewish school.

I remember when really the bad times started in 1938 when there was the *Kristallnacht*, Crystal Night, where the synagogues were burned, Jewish stores were robbed, and windows broke. I remember when I came from school and we lived in an apartment and they had painted a big Star of David on our door. All during, after that and, that's when times really became bad and we had to wear a Star of David on our clothes, all our clothes. We also were not allowed to use public transportation. We had to walk to school. There were many, many times when we came out of school and the Hitler Youth groups were outside throwing stones, beating us up, taking us to houses with cellars and kept us in cellars. And that was in '41.

Starting in '41 there was almost every day of fear. By then we had to move from where we lived closer to the city. We were thrown out of our apartment, and put into a rear, to a rear apartment. Also I believe it was in '39, '40, my father had to go and turn in all electrical appliances. You weren't allowed to have a radio, a iron. You weren't allowed to have animals. I remember, we had a bird and we had to get rid of the bird and a dog. You weren't allowed to have anything. I was 11 years old when there was a law that all Jewish institutions and schools had to be dissolved, and we were not allowed to go to school, actually to go to school anymore. My parents or anybody else was also not allowed to tutor us or give any private lessons. I remember the last day when we received our last paper, report card and paper that all the schools are going to be closed - the Jewish schools. I have the paper from school, my last paper and where on the bottom it says "she's leaving school because of the orders dissolving the Jewish school system." [Marianne shows the document.]

Here's a Star of David which we had to wear on the left side of the chest, and it had to be sewn tightly all around. [Marianne shows a Star of David badge.] And, therefore, we were mocked that we were Jewish and were exposed to all kinds of violence because of that. This is a picture of when I was a little girl - my parents, my sister, and I. I have a picture of the house where we lived in. This was when I was young - a little girl. And we lived right on the top floor here - this is an apartment where we then got thrown out. I believe it was in 1940. I really don't remember.

There was also an incident in 1939. I got sick with diphtheria and I had to go to a hospital. Already then the hatred against the Jewish people was there - the treatment, everything. And I know that my parents were called, my mother was called to come and pick me up. For their standards I was healed, but I wasn't 'cause I was left with some kind of weak heart and should have had more care, but because I was Jewish, they would not keep me any longer. And the paper which dismissed me from the hospital - there is a part here where they said Jew and underlined it. So that was the reason they dismissed me.

Both my parents were working then and my sister and I, we were left alone and took care of the housework and apartment. And already in '41 and '42 you could see all over the city where they picked up families and took them to a concentration camp. 'Cause we didn't realize, I didn't realize what was happening, I mean that they were picked up. And my parents told us if somebody comes to the door not to open and to be very, very quiet, if they weren't home.

Also, we had the hard times of all the bombings we had in Berlin. We were not allowed to go to any shelter or basements and we had to stay in the apartments. With my father, being blind, his hearing was absolutely excellent and we would either sit on the floor or on the couch when the warnings came and when the bombings came, and he could tell exactly where the bombs are going to hit. The bombs would come flying, whistling slow, and he would say you don't have to be afraid, it's not going to hit us. And so we had that on top of everything else.

We had, I had a lot of Jewish friends - school, classmates. And I have a little booklet, I guess you call it an autograph booklet, with poems which my classmates signed in, and as far as I know... [Marianne cries] I'm sorry. ...that none of them survived, nor did my teachers. This is not a very good picture, but those fair classmates of mine, we belonged to also youth group, and they were all killed. And those were the mothers of them. And I'm in the picture too. We searched after the war and didn't, weren't able to find anybody.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in the apartment that you just spoke about?

I don't remember, but I would say three years, three and a half years. My father worked for the Jewish Community Center then. He was a secretary to a lawyer. And I don't exactly know, but it was 1940, 1941 that the Germans, the Nazis, took over a lot of the building and also told the workers what to do. And at that time they sent out orders with dates and times when different Jewish families get picked up. And so I remember my father had to do those things. Many times he just trashed them and also warned a lot of families when they were going to be picked up. I remember going with my father in the neighborhood or a little bit further, like ten blocks away, many days too for him and for me and my sister to go and warn those people where he knew they were going to pick them up.

The other memories I have is when we went visiting to different relatives and friends and came to their apartment and they been picked up. After people were picked up they sealed the apartments, the doors, with tape and I don't remember what it said on there and you knew that

the people were gone – relatives and friends. This is, I called them Aunt and Uncle – their name was Kate and Kurt Eisenstadt and they had the little baby – that was about, I really don't know, '40, '41 when they had the baby and in 1942 on the child's first birthday, they wrote a poem for the child, and I remember being there at the birthday party and they also perished and even with the baby and they were all killed in a concentration camp.

Needless to say, I didn't have no childhood. I remember many times my mother almost could not take the running and the hiding. And my father always said, "No matter what, we're going to stick together, and we're going to survive." And there were times that my mother said, "Well, let's turn ourselves in." And my father said, "No way. Absolutely not."

Interviewer: What type of work did your mother have to do as forced labor?

She had to, when we had the bombing and different buildings were, of course, destroyed, she had to go and clean up the bricks so that the bricks could be used again and do very hard labor. Many times had to jump from way up high to down below and had to do this hard work. And my father, I don't remember exactly when they also closed up the Jewish Community Center. And he had to do forced labor and he had to, was put into a factory where they made bombs. Although, I also have to say, the owner of the factory was a wonderful man. He kept many Jewish people in hiding and helped them with food and clothing.

Interviewer: When was it that you had to go into hiding?

It was about, as far as I remember, it was about '43. It wasn't something which – how can I say - really happened from one day to the next. My parents, we had some non-Jewish friends and they would say, "well, you're going for a week or two weeks over there," and my sister someplace else. So, I really, and I remember, also, I don't know what the name they used for assumed name, and I know we were out in the streets a lot of times. And I know food was very scarce. I remember myself going from one garbage can to another to try to find potato peels, so my mother could cook them and we could have something to eat. It was just... It's really hard to explain. We just did what our parents told us. That we just have to hide and not be found. It was just here and there and everywhere that we went.

Interviewer: Were you always separated from your parents, or were you...?

Not always. Not always. Because, well, I don't know. In '42, even in 1942 they still, I mean, they knew people - different Jewish families who were in Berlin and still almost every week, maybe every couple days that big trucks went around to pick up. Of course, there were a lot of German people who, who... what is it... denounce them. Who told them, informed them, you know, where there still were Jewish people.

Interviewer: Where exactly were you hiding? Was it in an apartment building?

In an apartment, yes. In cellars. Just wandering in the streets, walking in the streets in different neighborhoods. I remember, also one time, my mother was still working the forced labor and we were with our father, and not far from, at that time where we lived in apartment, they had picked up several Jewish families and I seen her come running and looking in the, looking up in the truck to see whether we were up there, and was pushed back and luckily we weren't. Other German people they were just out in the street and just smiling, laughing, and just didn't do anything.

Of course, so [unclear] my happiest time was when we got liberated in 1945. We were liberated by the Russians who came in Berlin. I remember my father had and you weren't allowed to listen to the radio, leave alone to the – he had a radio and he listened to the, I guess it was the BBC, the overseas, at night. And he also by friends got informed what went on. And I really don't remember, other than that the Russians were coming closer and closer and when they did march into Berlin we were in a place in a cellar. It was not a bunker or official place for hiding. And, needless to say, we were hungry. And I remember somebody saying something that out in that field was a, like a storage bunker where there was food. And my sister and I took off to go to find where the food was. And there was bombing during that time, and in the last few days, the airplanes even swooped down and shot at people. They came down and then back up. And I was running with my sister, to find this place to get some food, and plane came and besides the bombs, and swooped down. I guess they seen people running and shot at them. And a grenade went right between my sister's leg and cut her leg open. And of course, we could not go to get to a doctor. I mean if anybody had known we were Jewish, they would have, they would have come and shot us, I'm sure. So my mother tried the best she could to take care of that. And it was a very scary experience.

I mean, I remember when the Russians marched in and when they overtook all the streets and everything and we were very lucky that there were Jewish officers there and we told them that we were Jewish and in hiding. And we had food. They brought us food. They brought us clothing. We told them, people we knew that were Nazis and they went and arrested them. And we had gotten wonderful care from them. And lived in an apartment in the eastern – we were in the eastern sector of Berlin. Later on they divided Berlin French, British, American and Russian and we still were on the Russian part. Although food was still scarce, we never get enough to eat.

And I remember I, at the time where we stayed that was not very far from a, from a railroad who had, where trains came in - not passenger train. And I went to work there. They were looking for people to work to sort out potatoes and I was only 14 years old then and you had to carry hundred-pound bags of potatoes and fill them with the good potatoes and then you were allowed to take the half rotten ones home and that's how... One time, I remember, I mean, one part of it, where we went to get food – or where I worked for the food. Later on when the Americans joined, started coming in and they sent care packages to different families. And the

Jewish Community people came in and opened up the Jewish Community Center where we got food then and clothing.

Interviewer: What did your parents do after the liberation?

Well, my parents were really not too able to do anything because health problems. I don't exactly remember what year it was because I wasn't... '46 or '47, my father organized to be a chairman of Jewish blind people and to help them and also those who came back from the concentration camp. And my mother worked with my father. Actual work they didn't do – that's what they did volunteer. They organized it and they had different families until they immigrated, whoever wanted to could put themselves on a list to immigrate to America. And my parents did and so did other families. I started working in '46, '47. There was a Jewish orphan's home and a Jewish old age home. There were two buildings. And I always wanted to become a infant's nurse, children's nurse, and I started working in the orphan's home. [Marianne shows a photo.] That was one of my little ones – this one. I worked... And this one - this baby - I was very fond of. I always loved children. I took her home on weekends and my parents loved her. And there were several children which were anywhere from a few months old to the age of 18 in the home. That was in 1948. While I was working at the children's home, a British organization, the United Jewish Relief Organization, helped a lot of children's homes and sent food, and donations and I met a English-British officer then who worked for the organization. And it wasn't long after that I fell in love, and we got married in Berlin.

I left in 1950. My first son was born in Berlin. I left when he was three months old - we left. His duties were finished with the organization and we left to go to England. And I lived almost two years in England. In the meantime, my parents came to America.

Source: Marianne Dennis video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/dennismarianne/>