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Interview mit

Trudie Solarz

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FK	Florentin Kurz
TS	Trudie Solarz

Teil 1

ES: This is an *Austrian Heritage Collection* interview with Trudie Solarz, conducted by Emma Schrott and Florentin Kurz on 2nd August, 2018 in Levittown, Pennsylvania. Mrs. Solarz, could you please tell us your life story.

TS: Alright. I was born in Graz on 4th July, 1931, and shortly thereafter my parents and I moved to Hermagor, *Kärnten*. And my father had a couple of small department stores. He was a very well-respected businessman. We were the only Jews in town, but that did not matter. Everybody got along, religion never came up. I had a wonderful life. My mother had a nursemaid for me and a maid for herself, a cook in the kitchen…lived a very nice life. All that changed on 9th November, 1938, when there was a knock at the door in the evening and this policeman was standing at the door with his hat in his hand, and said to my father, "Mr. Braun, I am here to arrest you." My father said, "What for? I have not done anything." And the policeman said, "You are right, but all Jewish men have to be jailed today." And he said, "Do not worry, just gather your pajamas, what you want to take, a pillow, and you will be back tomorrow." My mother, at the time, was in Vienna, shopping for the store. And my grandmother, who was staying with me, got in touch with her right away. He did come back the next day, but not to stay. He was told to pack a few things, a list of things that he was given, and that he was being sent to a concentration camp. He did not even know what the word meant, at the time. And again, he packed a suitcase with the list of clothes that he was allowed to take, which was very minimal…for him to take. My mother, in the meantime, got in touch with the Jewish committee, the *Kultusgemeinde*, *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* in Klagenfurt, because she had heard that if you have enough to turn over to the Nazis, you can buy the people out of the concentration camp. She sold all our belongings. I still have the list that she made of things that she sold, whether it was a sofa or a piano, or pillows…whatever she could, to get money together, and bought my father out. At that time, Hitler was not necessarily interested in killing the Jews, but he wanted to get rid of them. So a few were able to buy a person out of the concentration camp. He was in Dachau, at the time. Then, you could get out, but you had to leave the country almost immediately. Every day…he was staying in Vienna at the time. All Jews had to move to Vienna, and he had to sign in that he was still there.

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And this one day, he was told he was going to be interviewed and to wait for the person to come. But he could not just sit down and wait for two hours, he had to stand with his nose against the wall for two hours, waiting. The officer that came was Adolf Eichmann, who was well-known as one of the most notorious of the Nazis. And he said to my father, "You were bought out of the camp, and you understand that you must leave right away?" And my father said, "How can I leave? You took all my money. I have no money left, I have no place to go. How can I leave the country right away?" And Adolf Eichmann said to him, "If that is the case, back to the concentration camp!" And from what I was told, it was a German officer taking him back to a holding place, and he said, "I know a rabbi who gets papers for the Jewish men, the Jewish people. I will get

in touch with him and see what he can do." And therefore, when I speak to the children in schools, I always tell them never to judge a whole group of people, because there are good and bad in every group.

My father was able to get papers to leave. Only two countries took Jews, as far as I know. One was China, and one was England. We could not get into the United States, because there was a quota. My father decided he wanted to go to England, with a men's transport, and he went to a place called Kitchener Camp, which was a holding camp for foreigners, waiting on the quota to go to the country of their choice. My mother and I had to wait to get our papers, and it took from November…my dad left in March. In fact, I think it was 14th March, which was his birthday. And we had to wait for our papers. In the meantime, my mother and I went to Hungary, where she was from, to say goodbye to her family. While we were there, my uncle took the teddy bear that I was carrying, which he gave me when I was two, and…my uncle asked me for it and he said, "I will bring it right back." The teddy bear had straw inside, and he opened up the seam, took out some of the straw and hid a little bit of money in there. I say a little bit, because we were, at that time…I think, equivalent to 100 dollars, you could take with. That was it…which was not any kind of money that you could get along with. We then left Hungary. We finally had gotten our papers, and we left on 28th August, 193[9], and we took the plane. It was a [Douglas] DC-3, which meant it was a small airplane that held 21 passengers. And we were lucky to be two of the 21. The plane landed in one of the Dutch countries…I do not remember which country…and my mother was called into the office. And she was very panicky that they were sending us back. And the man who had asked to come into the office said, "Do not worry, we are holding the plane, you will be on that plane." What happened was, there was an English gentleman, a diplomat, that needed to get to London, and they knew that war was imminent. And since I was the only child on the plane, they wondered if my mother would mind taking me on her lap, so this gentleman could have my seat.

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My mother, of course, was thrilled and said, she would be glad to take me on her lap. And luckily, not only were we not being sent back, but they paid her for my seat in English pounds, which was more then she paid in Austria for her seat and mine. So we had a little bit more money. We arrived in London on 28th August, 193[9], Thursday evening, and were met by one of my mother's friends, who took us to a room that she had rented for us, in a basement room – the cheapest that she could find. Three days later, 1st September, 193[9], war broke out. So, we arrived on probably the last…or one of the last airplanes that arrived, from Europe, from Austria to England. Now that war had broken out, all children had to be evacuated to the country, because it was dangerous in London. Because, when we walked the streets, we had to carry a gas mask with us at all times. An ugly-looking thing, I remember…scary-looking. When the sirens blew, we never knew if it was a practice drill or if it was real. My mother, through the Jewish committee, met a couple…he was one of the managers of *Lloyd's of London*…who had a farm. He and his wife lived in London, but they had a farm in Hertfordshire that was run by his maiden aunt…no, his maiden sister, and married sister with three boys, whose husband was in the army. And for some reason, this couple wanted to help the Jewish

people. And they wanted to take in a little girl, because there were three boys on the farm. So I was chosen. Of course, at eight years old, I thought my mother was giving me away, because I did not really understand what was happening. I remember, when she took me to this couple's apartment in London, that I went and hid under the bed when it was time for my mother to leave, because I could not say goodbye to her. And I remember, when she finally left, coming out from under the bed, going to the window, watching her walk to the corner, shaking her head, starting to turn around to come back, as if to say, "I cannot leave her", and then realizing she has to leave me, and she finally left.

The farm that I was on was very primitive. We had a pump for water. There was an outhouse that we had to use, there was no running water in the house. I could not speak English and the people living there could not speak German. All I did was cry all day, and the women there felt sorry for me, so they decided to get another girl, who was from Germany and who was twelve years old. I was eight and very small, she was twelve and very tall. She was jealous, because the boys all liked me, because I had been there already, so somehow she got the boys to turn against me, made me steal raisins out of the pantry…I was not allowed to tell or she would really hurt me, she said. We played in the field with the cows. I had a new little spring coat that my mother had sent me, and she made the boys push me into the cow manure to ruin my coat. So I had to endure all these nasty things, until my mother came to visit and I finally broke down and told her what was happening. The women spoke to her and things got better.

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I was on that farm for ten months, and on 4th July, [1940], my birthday, I was allowed to go back to my parents, because their quota had come up to go to America. And that was the happiest birthday I ever had. The only thing I do not remember, is going to school in London, which my mother said I did. And that was July, and in August, at the end of August, we were supposed to come to America. Two days before, my father received a phone call, stating that there was a ship leaving 24 hours earlier, which was a Kindertransport…200 children on a ship. If our papers were in order, we could get on, because my parents were accompanying a child. And my father said, "Yes, our papers are all in order, and we can leave." So, this was wartime, very dangerous, and we were on a save voyage with two planes flying ahead and a convoy of ships all around us. We had a save voyage, and when we were here, we found out later on, that the ship we were supposed to have been on was torpedoed and nobody was saved. So we were very lucky. When we arrived in New York, HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]…well, at that time, I do not know if it was HIAS…anyway, we were given a room to stay in and stayed there for three months. And my mother really could not take the rushing around in New York. We had lived in a small town and she really hated it there. So the only other place…we only knew one family in America, and they lived in Philadelphia. So my parents asked, "Can we be moved to Philadelphia?" Wanting to stay on the East Coast, they really wanted to send us to the West Coast, but my parents felt that staying on the East Coast would be better, because after the war, whatever family members could, would come and they would land on the East Coast. Little did they know that there were no survivors that would be coming. We lived in Philadelphia in a hotel, one room. My

mother had one burner to cook. She would make one dish and set it aside and use the pot to make another dish. And that is how we lived for a few months, until HIAS, the organization, got us an apartment, a third-floor apartment, 33 steps up, and we lived there.

I never heard my parents complaining. They went to work in factories. My mother would become a hand sewer, my father was a sewer on the shoulder of tuxedos. We lived with secondhand furniture. Our life was completely different, and at their age of 40 and 36, life began all over again. It was nothing like in Europe where we lived with crystal chandeliers and a grand piano and all the luxuries. But I never heard my parents complain. They set a very good example for me.

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I guess God rewarded them, because they lived a long life. My mother was two weeks shy of 102, my father was almost 106. I speak at schools throughout the year. I have been asked to speak, and I do that, gladly, because the children of today have to know that it is not a story in a book. This really happened, and I try to teach them to cherish what they have and appreciate it, because you can lose, whatever you have, over night. I have received thank-you notes from the children for coming to speak to them. And some of them have told me how much they have learned to appreciate life. And I live a good life now, and I have my family. I was an only child, and I had two children and a stepson, and now have my seventh great-grandchild coming soon. So I am very grateful.

ES: Thank you very much! We would have a few follow-up questions for you now. I would go back to the beginning of your life in Austria. You mentioned you were born in Graz, then you moved to *Kärnten*. Do you know why your parents…why did they decide to move to Hermagor?

TS: Because my father's cousin had some of these small department stores…I do not just want to say department stores, because it was not like we have here, the big department stores. And he wanted to open some more. He was a family member, and he had, I guess, checked into where more stores would be good for them, and so he found out about *Kärnten*, and told my father, "This is a good place. They do not have a store like this." And that is why they moved there.

ES: Your grandparents, did you know them personally?

TS: I knew my father's mother. My grandfather died before I was born, in his early fifties. And I knew my mother's parents very well. That grandfather died shortly after we left. He probably had pneumonia, because I remember them writing that he had a bad cold, and sent a picture where he was laying on high pillows. So, I assume he had pneumonia and died a natural death.

ES: You mentioned that your father worked in these small department stores. How about your mother, what did she do?

TS: She helped out at times.

ES: You also described your apartment briefly. Could you tell me a bit more about your recollections of your neighborhood, your house?

TS: It was on…I guess it was a large apartment. I do not remember…I have a picture of it, with the steps outside, three steps going up and then going inside. I remember some of it…it was, as I said, on the main street. It was a large apartment, and it had all the furniture and things that people of a better class had. They were not wealthy, they were just living a good life.

ES: And then you went to school for a year, is that right?

TS: Yes, I went to school for a very short time, because once Hitler came in, Jewish children were not allowed to go to school. And I remember, the children who were my friends, all of a sudden started throwing stones at me and calling me a Jew. Now, where did they learn that from? Their parents. Only one girl, her name was Erika, remained my friend.

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And that is why, when I was in England…I forgot to say…they brought me a little pocket dictionary, German-English dictionary, that I should look up the words so I could speak. It was very difficult, because I did not even know how to look up the German word to get to the English word. So, it was really not very useful for me. I learned English more by just talking and listening. But our life changed completely on 9th November, 1938.

ES: Your other family members, where did they live mainly? Did they live in Graz or Vienna?

TS: I had…my mother's sister and her family…I do not remember where they lived in Austria. But he, my aunt's husband, my uncle, did not want to leave. He said, "No, we will be alright, nothing is going to happen to us. I was in the German army before, and why should anything happen to us? I am a good German…Austrian, whatever." And they were killed. Now, the children…they had a boy and a girl. The children were in Auschwitz, and my cousin, the male cousin, got killed…died, because he had dysentery and he had to go out and work at night in the wintertime in just pajamas. It was very cold. And my girl cousin was a…I guess a late teenager. She was in Auschwitz. Three times she was at the gas chamber door, ready to be pushed in, and three times she was lucky enough to be pulled out for hard labor. And my parents did bring her over a few years after the war. She lived with us for a while and then she moved to…another state, I forgot where. My mother's family…my grandmother was killed in the oven. We got notice of that. And my mother's brother survived, and for some reason or the other…the Russians came in then, and for some reason or the other, he was running and they thought he was running away or doing something wrong, and they shot and killed him. So he survived Hitler, and then was shot and killed by a Russian soldier. My uncle, my father's brother, instead of going to England went to China, and it took him eleven years until he got the

quota to come to the United States. My mother's brother's son and his mother came to the United States and then got an offer of marriage from an old friend in Australia. So they live in Australia. And that is my whole family.

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ES: Are you in touch with any of these people up to this day?

TS: With Australia, yes, with the children of my cousin. They have been here, I have been there. Yes. Otherwise, I am alone. So thank goodness, I have my children and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

ES: In Austria, what was your religious life like?

TS: I remember…well, being told, I remember, that my mother took me to Klagenfurt every Thursday for religious school, because where we lived, there was no synagogue, there was no teaching…Jewish teachings. Although, actually, I had very little Jewish background. When I came here, of course, my parents wanted me to go to Sunday school, and I went a couple of times and did not like it and did not want to go. So I have very little religious background, and I am not that religious today, but I live by the golden rule, which is: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And I think if you live a good life, I think that is important. I do go to synagogue for the high holidays, but that is as far as it goes. And I do contribute to the synagogue.

ES: How about your children or grandchildren, how did you raise them?

TS: They were bar and bat mitzvah'ed, my grandchildren went to Sunday school, they went to Hebrew school…yes, I did give them a Jewish background.

ES: You already spoke about Hermagor, and how you were the only Jews in town, and that it was no issue up until November, 1938.

TS: No, none whatsoever. My father was a very well-respected businessman. He was very honest in his pricing, and treated everybody well, had a good business. He had a good income.

ES: Is there any other incident you remember about this day, the night of the pogrom--

TS: --the Anschluss--

ES: --in November. Yes, the Anschluss was in March, but 9th November was the so-called Kristallnacht.

TS: Well, I just…I guess I did not understand it. I was just seven or eight. I understood more than I should have. When my father was ready to leave with a men's transport – and I knew he was leaving –, I ran away from home, and I do remember hiding under a small bridge that was over a creek…and hiding under the bridge and hearing my mother and father calling my name as they crossed the bridge. But I knew I could not

say goodbye to him, that I may never see him again. It did have an effect on me, yes. So I did know that it was not good. And I remember, my father sent a postcard home from the concentration camp and my mother hiding it on top of a credenza. And I remember getting a chair and climbing on it to get the postcard, because I wanted to know what was going on. So I did know that these were dangerous times.

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ES: You just mentioned the so-called Anschluss. Do you remember anything about that time period too? That was in March before.

TS: No, nothing special.

ES: Okay, nothing changed there. How long was your father in Dachau?

TS: He was only in…let us see, November…a few months. Probably--

ES: --up until March, until he went to England?

TS: Well, he lived in Vienna for a short time. He was in for maybe three months and then lived in Vienna until he could leave.

ES: And he was able to get out, because of your mother paying?

TS: Yes, and I have a receipt for the money that the…*Israelitische*…I cannot say it in German.

ES: *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Klagenfurt*.

TS: Yes, for the money, 2,000 Reichsmark. These are very valuable papers that I have, because it proofs everything that happened. And too many people, even today, do not believe it. And I want the children to know that it is not a story in a book, that it really happened. And when we came to America and my mother became an hand sewer in a factory, and worked with a lot of Jewish people, she was telling them what we went through. And they said, "Oh, come on! What kind of stories are you telling us?" They did not believe her. And they spoke Yiddish, because…Polish-Russian Jews spoke Yiddish, whereas German and Austrian Jews spoke a refined German. They ostracized my mother, because she did not speak Yiddish. She could understand…I can understand Yiddish, but I cannot speak it. Yiddish is very much like…it is a guttural German. So she made herself learn to speak Yiddish, so she would be one of them, not being an outcast again. It was not easy, but I never heard them complain. They were wonderful.

ES: You told me about the incident with Adolf Eichmann and your father. Where did that happen, and at what point?

TS: In Vienna.

ES: When he was in Vienna. And that was after being in Dachau, or before?

TS: After.

ES: After, so before going to--

TS: --he was in charge of getting rid of the Jews.

ES: Yes. And then your father left for England, before you, and was at Kitchener Camp. Then, you and your mother came afterwards to London. Then you were sent to Hertfordshire, I think. You were there for a year.

TS: Ten months, even.

ES: Ten months. And meanwhile, your mother and your father, they both stayed in London?

TS: No, my father was in Kitchener Camp, and my mother stayed in London and became a companion to a wealthy older woman.

ES: But they were able to be in touch?

TS: Yes, probably…sure.

ES: How long do you think it took you to be able to understand English?

TS: I guess I learned pretty quickly, within…when you are going through it, it seems like forever. But I guess I learned a little bit every day. I do not know when I started speaking, really. I do remember crying all day long, and being frustrated that I could not tell them what I wanted.

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ES: Through a Jewish organization, you were able to receive visas to go to the US?

TS: Well, we just applied. I do not know if it was through a Jewish organization or just the process of getting the papers.

ES: Yes, and that took about a year?

TS: Yes, it took exactly a year.

ES: You were mentioning that you knew one family in Philadelphia. Who was this family?

TS: Friends of my parents from Austria.

ES: So they had also escaped Austria?

TS: I really do not know. They were living…I guess they came earlier. They were already situated. I do not know if they escaped or if they just heard, what was going to be happening, and left.

ES: And then you boarded a ship. Where in England? To New York?

TS: To New York.

ES: You know where you left?

TS: In London…whatever the port…there is only one port there. I do not remember the name. I do not know.

ES: Then you and your parents settled in Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia.

TS: Yes. When I first got here, I was one grade behind in school, because of my…I guess, they just put me one grade behind, because I was a foreigner with an accent. But when we moved to Philadelphia, they tested me and they put me in the right grade, which was the fourth grade. I was okay. So I was in with my age group. When I left Austria and went to England, I was the refugee from Austria, with an Austrian accent. When I came here, to America, I was the foreigner from England…and now I learnt English with a British accent. So I never really felt that I belonged, when I was around that age. It was not easy. They always made fun of me. But whatever happens to you as a child, makes you stronger as an adult. It has to.

ES: How did you mainly spend your time in England, at the farm? Did you have to help them with the household?

TS: No. I do not remember doing any chores. Maybe we went to collect eggs, or helped like that, but…no, they did not use us…helping them. And when I was here…I remember, when I was twelve, summer was coming, and I would not go to camp. I was very shy. I was a very shy child. And I would not go to camp, so my mother, through a friend, learned about this older couple, living in Richboro – which is about 25 minutes from here, Bucks County –, who were willing to take two girls for the summer, to get them out of the city, into the country. So my girlfriend and I went there for the summer. Again, it was a farm, but we would pick blueberries, we would get the eggs from the chickens, from the chicken coop, just having fun. So, I spent my summer on this farm. So that was a happy time. And now, I have grandchildren living in Richboro, so that brings back memories. But it is completely different. [Lacht.]

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ES: How did you like school here? You were mentioning people…your schoolmates…did you easily find friends or was it hard at the beginning?

TS: It was very hard, because they were making fun of the way I spoke. And my mother still dressed me European with thick brown stockings and high brown shoes. I looked like a refugee. I did make a couple of

friends, but it was hard. It was very hard, because you just do not feel like you belong. You are always different.

ES: Did you go to junior high or middle school right away?

TS: No, I was in fourth grade…I was ten years old. I was a year later. Then I went on, of course, finished school. It was not easy.

ES: Was your high school time similar to the years before or did that somehow change?

TS: No. By that time, I was acclimated. I was fine. I was always a good student. My father was very strict about that. If – God forbid – I got a C, which is…"why did you not get a B?" If I got a B, "why did you not get an A?" He was European strict. So I was a good student.

ES: Did you and your parents keep speaking German at home?

TS: My parents always spoke German to me, because they wanted me to remember the language. It is always good to know a second language. I answered them in English, because I did not want to speak German. They were upset, because I did not want to teach my children German. I did not want them to have an accent, because I had a little cousin who was taught by his mother, raised for a while by his grandmother, who only spoke German, and when he went to school, he had a German accent. And I thought that was terrible, and I would not have my children have a German accent going to school. But even today, I understand everything. I can speak German like a foreigner, but some words I do not remember. I can read German, so it is still in me. But I do not get much chance to speak it.

ES: Do you have any recollections about the end of war in 1945?

TS: I remember everybody being happy. [Lacht.] We felt safe. I never felt not safe. Coming here was such a wonderful, wonderful feeling. I mean, you finally felt totally safe, which I cannot say about today. Walking the streets in the cities, I do not feel safe. Back then, it was a wonderful feeling. You felt safe, you felt secure, you felt like nothing could happen to you – especially after what we went through. We knew there was no Hitler here, and it was a wonderful feeling. Today, with all the murders and drugs, I do not feel the same way. No. I am really glad I am the age that I am, and I feel sorry for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, because I do not think it is a nice world anymore. There is too much going wrong, too much fear.

ES: So you feel like criminality got more than in the past decades?

TS: Oh yes, definitively…since drugs came about. Yes, definitively. Thank goodness, none of my grandchildren were into drugs.

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ES: After having escaped Austria, did you ever encounter any kind of antisemitism again, in England or the United States?

TS: No, I do not think so. I am sure there was a lot going on here too, but I never felt it.

ES: How did your life continue after having graduated from high school in Philadelphia?

TS: I became an executive secretary, which meant that I usually worked for the owner or the boss of the company – which I always loved. My father had a typewriter that he used for, I guess, bills and everything for business, and he brought that over here. I was told by my parents, when I was an adult, that I always liked to go over to the typewriter to…well, at that time it was play, but to use the typewriter. And I always enjoyed being executive secretary. I always worked part-time, for various reasons. The typewriter…when I graduated high school, my graduation present was a savings bond, and my father had taken his typewriter and Americanized it. It was made in America with German letters on it and he had the letters Americanized, so I learned to type on that typewriter. And now my daughter has it on display at her house, because it is an old typewriter. But I always liked secretarial work. And I was, as I said, part-time, most of the time…with temporary jobs. Then when my parents got old, I only worked three days a week, because I wanted to spend two days with them. But they lived a long time. Now I just enjoy my family.

ES: How did your parents' professional life continue? I think you said they were hand sewers.

TS: Sewers, yes. It was called hand sewer, because they did not…well, they did use a machine, but a lot of it was done by hand. It was quite a change of life for them, from successful businesspeople with anything and everything that they wanted to a low-class, low-paying job. But I never felt that I was missing out on anything. I was always satisfied. Thank goodness!

ES: When did you leave Philadelphia and move here?

TS: My son was born in Philadelphia in 1956, and we moved here in 1958 to Levittown, and it was a wonderful place to live. My husband, at the time, was in the army and had come out and opened up a business, which took away all of our money. He invested all of our money into that. We had very little left. And in order to move into Levittown, you really only needed a 100 dollars down to buy a house. The house had a washing machine, a dryer…it had all the appliances, and it was all just put down a 100 dollars and pay the mortgage. So we could afford that and have lived here ever since. I lived in another house than this house. I remarried, and…it is a wonderful place to raise children. Yes, for a 100 dollars…you cannot do that today. [Lacht.]

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ES: How many children do you have?

TS: Two and a stepson.

ES: You did not teach them German, but was your Austrian background talked about a lot?

TS: My children never asked questions. They really never…my one grandson, he asked a lot of questions. He wrote a paper about me in school, but the others did not. I guess they heard some things, but they never were curious enough to sit down and ask me questions. And I did not think it was necessary to really bring it up and tell them about it. If they ask questions, then it is okay, but if…I do not know. Some of them heard me in school. But…no.

ES: You were saying that you went back to Austria for the first time in 2010, I think.

TS: Or 2009, I do not remember which year. My husband had asked me if I want to take a side trip to go to Hermagor, and I said no. I really did not care. My parents went back once, and they said that…Hermagor was a small town with one main street. I remember the street. The train station was down the street, and they got off the train, walked up the street, and when they saw an older person, they asked, "Do you remember the Brauns?" Nobody would admit to it. And they felt so uncomfortable, they could not wait to leave. They went back to the train station and sat there for however long to wait for the train to get out of there. They felt very uncomfortable there. Now I am thinking that I should have gone back, just to walk the streets there. But I did not.

ES: So you went to Vienna, I suppose?

TS: Well, it was Vienna, Budapest and Prague. It was a trip through three different countries. I did not remember anything about Vienna, because we did not live there long.

ES: And you went with your husband?

TS: Yes.

ES: Why did you not got with your parents, when they visited?

TS: I do not know. I guess they did not invite me. I do not know. [Lacht.] I do not remember. I do not know when they went. They went quite a while ago. But I do not have any yearning to be there. I have my pictures, which remind me of the place where I lived. And I remember…some vague memories. And pictures really remind of things that happened to you as a child that you normally would not remember. But because of the pictures, you do remember them. So, remember that when you have children.

1/01:00:23

This shows that I had a teddy bear when I was very young. [Zeigt auf ein Foto.]

ES: That is that one?

TS: Yes, here I am four years old. I have been skiing when I was five or six. I went skiing. I lived around the Alps, the mountains there. I had a good life.

ES: How do you feel about Austria today? Or how did you feel when you went back for the first time?

TS: I do not know. How do I feel? I am sure there are still a lot of people that are against Jewish people, unfortunately. I do not trust any of it. If I meet a German person, or Austrian, whatever…I have a very good friend, who is from Germany, and she was married to a Jewish man. She knows a lot about Judaism, and she is a very good friend of mine. And she lived near…it might have been…one of the camps, I do not know. And she says, they did not know what was going on. It is hard for me to believe it, but that is what she says. She absolutely swears that they did not know about it. Of course, she is my age, so maybe she did not know about it, but I mean…I totally trust her. As I said, I love this woman. I do not care if she is Jewish or not Jewish. I do not judge my friends by what they are. She says they did not know about it. I forgot which camp it was. So maybe she just did not, as a child.

ES: I was going to say, she must have been a child too.

TS: They knew there was a camp there. But they thought it was people going to work in a camp. That was her explanation. I am sure she is not lying.

ES: That is also maybe what her parents told her. Maybe her parents did not want to believe or admit it.

TS: Right, exactly. Anything else?

ES: Yes, about Austria. Do you receive a pension from the Austrian state?

TS: Yes, but it is very little. [Beide lachen.] I used it to pay for my grandchildren's books in college. I never spent it for myself. I paid for all their schoolbooks. The six of them that went to college. But again, I could not live on this money. My parents got a nice amount. They did, but I do not get much. A couple 100 dollars…maybe three months…it was nothing. And that was for loss of schooling. I was not working.

ES: How do you feel about how Austria dealt with its Nazi past, what they did after the war?

TS: From what I have gathered, from what I have been told, the Austrian gentiles were worse than the German gentiles, as far as antisemitism goes. How do I feel about it? How would you feel about it? I never wanted to go back. I do not trust any of them.

ES: I understand that.

TS: You do not know who is against you. They may smile at your face and stab you in the back, as the saying goes. I never thought that this would happen in the first place. But I understand…I do understand, like the officer that came to arrest my father in the Kristallnacht…I do remember him standing there with his hat in his hand, he could not look at my father, he felt so badly. And he did say…he told him that he did not want to be the one to come and arrest my father, and he was told, "Look, if you do not go, someone else will, and you will lose your job." So, I am sure that a lot of perpetrators were afraid for their lives, that they not necessarily wanted to harm the Jews, or kill the Jews, but they did do what they were supposed to, so they

would not be the ones that suffered. And for the young boys that were in Hitler's army…to them, it was a big thrill, I am sure, to say, "Oh, we are doing this and that." And they grew up with this feeling. So, yes, you have to think of it that way too.

1/01:07:13

If I meet a German person…I mean, in my lifetime I met German men that are my age or even a little younger, and I look and say, "Were you a Nazi back then?" You cannot help it. You cannot help to think that way. There was one Nazi…this man who was a Nazi. And I think he was in his 80s or early 90s, that was finally caught and sent back and lost his citizenship here, or whatever. They are still living. And yes, they say they had to do it. I do not know. I would rather not think about all that, because there is no answer. There is no answer what made them do it.

ES: Did you ever follow the political situation in Austria?

TS: No. I do not follow the American politics either. [Lacht.] They are awful these days.

ES: Yes. [Beide lachen.]

TS: They are awful. I think what is happening here is awful. But I cannot say that on… [Lacht.]

ES: Did you ever visit Israel?

TS: Yes, twice.

ES: Just out of interest?

TS: Yes. I just wanted to see the country. I was there twice. It is a wonderful country. What they have accomplished is absolutely wonderful. Everybody should see it. It does not matter what religion you are. It is just a phenomenal country. I say what they have accomplished there is unimaginable…very interesting.

1/01:10:00

ES: When did you start talking to children in schools?

TS: It all started with Steven Spielberg's *Shoah Foundation* [USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education]. I saw an article in *The Exponent*, which is a Jewish-based newspaper every week, that they were looking for people to be interviewed or to do interviewing. So I got in touch with them, and said, "I am willing to be interviewed or do interviewing." So my husband and I took a course on interviewing survivors. And we did that, and I also was interviewed. They came here with a professional

videographer, and I told my story. So I did interview survivors, and then I got a request: Would I speak in schools? And of course, I said I would. And I have spoken in many, many schools, and in college, to a lot of people. And whenever I spoke, the children sat perfectly still, quiet, polite, interested. This one time, I was asked to speak in Trenton, and it was an all-black school. And I thought, "Are they going to be really interested in the story about a little Jewish white girl?" But of course, I went, and the children sat all around. There was not one child that did not behave or made any noise or any disruptions. They were all very attentive, and they were, I guess, between ten and twelve or fourteen. And this one twelve year old black girl wrote to me a thank-you note…they all wrote little thank-you notes…and she wrote, "Whenever I ask my parents for something, and they said no, I would be so upset with them. But after hearing your story, I realize how unimportant things are. And I also understand now what happened to my people." Because of course, they were treated terribly…African-Americans were treated terribly back then, before my time. That was the greatest gift I ever got. That if I got through to one child to appreciate what she has, that was a gift. It was really a gift. And I am glad I am doing it, because as I said, if they read it in a book, it is a story, and it is not real. I mean, how many novels do you read, and it is a good story, but it is not true? They have to hear it from people that went through it, to understand what happened. So that it should never happen again. And they have to be taught that. They have to be taught what has happened in the past, because only in that way can they learn the future, take care of the future. But I really do not…I am tired of speaking about it, but I never say no if somebody asks me. It is that important.

ES: I find it really interesting that you yourself interviewed other survivors. That is really special.

TS: Yes, and I went through a lot as a child, but it does not compare to what others went through. My cousin, who was ready to go into the gas chamber, and survived and lived on. Those are the people that you have to admire, because the memories must be atrocious. And I do not know how you can live on after you have been tortured. That has to be in you for the rest of your life. But people survived, and they went on. So what we went through…it was terrible losing your life, your livelihood…a change of life…but you could go on. But people that suffered in concentration camps and survived and then went on…I admire that.

1/01:16:00

ES: You mainly interviewed people like that?

TS: I do not even remember who I interviewed. Steven Spielberg started the…do you know the story of how he started?

ES: I know that I have heard it before, but I cannot recall it right now.

TS: From what I heard, he went to a funeral at a Jewish cemetery. It might have been his mother's funeral. And he saw all the tombstones of the people that were dead and thought about what happened in the Holocaust. He decided that he has to do something about it. I think it was his mother's funeral. And he then

decided to do something. He sure has done something. For the longest time I would not go to the Holocaust Museum [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum] in Washington. I said, “I do not have to see it. I know everything.” And then there was a weekend, where it was only open to survivors or to army people, that…oh God, I cannot think of the word…that went there when the war was coming to an end to rescue them. We had a friend that went to Dachau. He was one of the people that saved them afterwards. And that was a horrendous job, to see all these skeletons coming towards you. So, the museum was only open for these people. And Eli Wiesel was going to speak there, so I told my husband, “Okay, if I ever go, this is the time I will go.” And it was quite something to see. Have you seen it?

ES: I was there last month, actually.

TS: Good. Make sure you see it. If you are working on this, you have to see it.

ES: There is also another participant of our program, who works in the museum, so there are different places around the world where people from our program work. In the US we work in New York and in the Holocaust Museum in [Washington] D.C.

TS: Good. I also went to Yad Vashem in Israel. Have you heard about it?

ES: Yes. One person also works there, from the program.

TS: And I said, “I am not going in.” I really did not want to go in, and I told my husband, “You go in with everybody, and I will wait here for you.” And I am talking to the receptionist there, for half an hour already, and I said, “How long do they stay in there?” – “Oh, about twenty minutes.” – “I have been standing here for over half an hour.” – “Oh, they do not come out this door, they go out the back door.” So I was waiting for them in front, but I did not go in. But it is supposed be also something to see.

1/01:19:48

ES: Is there anything else you would like to say about the photographs on tape? [Alle betrachten Fotos.]

TS: I have pictures of the airplane that we were on, I have pictures of the receipt that my mother got from the things that she sold, I have the receipt from the money that was paid to get my father out. Here is an original card from Dachau. They were only allowed to write ten lines, and of course, it said nothing but, “I am fine, working.” If it had said, “I am suffering”, or, “they are beating me”, or whatever, then it would not have gone through. Here is what they used to do. They used to send mail coming from…this is from Hungary to us here, and they had opened it up to censor it. This is what I looked like when I came here…with a Tirolean little skirt with suspenders, with the flower…what is the flower?

ES: Edelweiss?

TS: Edelweiss. My mother and I leaving Vienna. This is how you corresponded. You had to go through the *Red Cross* in order to write letters. You could not write directly. This, I always tell my children, is my proudest moment, when I became a citizen of the United States. I was seventeen. My parents went to night school to learn English and American history. I learned it in school, of course. This is an identification card that Jews had to…you have seen it, with the big red "J". So, you have seen all this stuff, right?

ES: I mean, when it comes to the documents, I have seen similar documents, for sure, because that is our work.

TS: Everybody has that.

ES: Not everybody, but--

TS: --no? This is a current picture. A friend of mine went to Dachau on a trip, a sightseeing trip, and this is what he brought back for me. And these were the ovens. Now, not too long ago…when I say not too long ago, it must have been fifteen years ago…we were talking about it, and the ovens, and how people were killed, and I said, "My mother found out that her mother was put in the oven." And he said, "Yes, when she was dead." He was a very educated man, and he said, "Yes, when they died, they put them in the oven." I said, "No, she was alive when they were put in the oven." Did you know that?

ES: Who told you that? I also--

TS: --my mother's cousin wrote to my mother how her mother died. They put people in these ovens alive, to be burned to death.

ES: That is new to me. I know mainly about the majority of people first being killed in the chambers, of course, and then being burned in the crematorium.

TS: Well, this is what her cousin wrote. I do not know. But these are pictures that were taken at the camp…what it looks like today. Now, this is Kitchener Camp, where my father was. No, wait a minute, this was Dachau. And he was in hut 16. And they just have the number there now…and all cleaned up, of course. So, I have those pictures. Yes, a lifetime of happenings.

ES: And this?

TS: This is what they looked like when they…Dad was 104, and Mom was 100.

ES: Wow!

TS: This was on my father's 104th birthday. They were wonderful. They were wonderful people, really. He was 104 in this picture. And she was a strong woman. She was the strong one. They were really great. And that is my story.

1/01:25:36

ES: Is there anything you would like to add?

TS: I am glad you young people are working on this, that this history goes on, and especially that you are doing it not being Jewish, that you young people will learn what happened in the past. You have to learn what people can do to people, and it is important to carry this message on to your friends. It is very important. I do not care what religion you are, you have to respect people, and you have to make sure that it does not happen again, to any religion, because humanity is here to stay and people only live a certain length of time. And you – meaning people – have to respect each other. That is what it is all about. That is what life is all about. You have your differences, you do not have to agree, but you have to respect. That is what it is all about.

ES: Thank you. Thank you very much for your openness and your participation.

[Ende des Interviews.]

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