

Louisa: Today is July 1st, 1991. This is Louisa Weinrib talking with Hanna Berger in her home.

Hanna, we're talking with you today because we learned that you are a children (sic) people who fled Europe before it was too late. Let's start off...please tell me first of all, your date of birth and where you were born.

Hanna: I was born in Selma, here, in 1942. February the 19th, 1942.

Louisa: Tell me about your family, your family of origin. You had a mother and a father...did you, here?

Hanna: Yes.

Louisa: And any brothers and sisters?

Hanna: No. I was an only child. My mother had a stillborn child a year before I was born. I was the only live child.

Louisa: Describe Selma when you grew up, and the nature and size of the Jewish community in Selma.

Hanna: Okay. I grew up downtown in Selma, within walking distance of downtown, and from a child's point of view, it was a comfortable size town. You could get where you needed to go. We did not have a car, and I pretty much walked where I needed to go, or got a ride.

The synagogue, temple, was downtown, within walking distance of where I lived, and at the time that I was growing up, there were maybe five Sunday School classes with anywhere from four to seven students in a class. This dwindled slowly as I got older. The congregation itself probably had about a hundred families at that time. I really don't know, but about a hundred. The High Holy Days the temple was fairly full at the time. It has gradually dwindled at this point. It's a very small congregation. But it was a pretty active congregation as I was growing up.

Louisa: Tell me, what did your parents do...occupation. Did both of your parents work?

Hanna: My father was a tailor. His father was a tailor. All of the men in his family were tailors. And he came to Selma as a tailor, which I'll explain in a moment. My mother did not work on a regular basis. She helped him out sometimes.

And later a sister of hers who came to Selma, after the War, helped him out, too. And he had some other people who worked for him. But my mom did not work full time. My parents had come to New York where there was more family, and were having a hard time finding work in 1938. A Jewish rabbi had died in Selma, and the congregation here was willing to sponsor another....oh, Jewish tailor...I'm sorry...had died in Selma, and the congregation was willing to sponsor another tailor. Some businessmen were in New York and checked with an organization with which my father had registered, and they wanted a tailor, and he wanted a job. And he came to Selma.

Louisa: Was the implication that this would be the tailor that the Jewish families would patronize?

Hanna: I don't think necessarily. It was that it was a time when there were people in the country who needed a place to go, and they were willing to help him for the first year. After that he would be on his own. His work was primarily with businesses, not with families in town. But they would give him a start, to help settle a refugee family. My mother tells me that she did not want to come. She did not want to leave family and people she knew, "landsmann", in New York, but he wanted to know that he had a job. So they came.

Louisa: What was your parents' education level?

Hanna: My mother went through the seventh grade; my father through the eighth. They grew up in small villages in Germany, and the eighth grade was the end of school. To go to a high school ("hoch schule")...I forgot what the German term was...you had to go to a city, so they didn't.

My mom was the oldest girl in a family of eight, so she had to stop at seventh grade to help take care of everybody. My dad went to some sort of year of business school after he finished his eighth grade. That really wasn't part of the public school system.

Louisa: What language did you speak in your home?

Hanna: English with a German accent. (Laughs) I'm told that I had a German accent until I went to school a little bit.

Louisa: Did your parents make an aggressive effort to learn English?

Hanna: They had been here four years when I was born. Yeah...I mean, my father was out working every day, so he's certain to communicate. He had to. There were

not too many people in Selma who spoke German. My mom did too, but it was slower and her accent was stronger, because she was not in the business world and did not have to do it as much. But, sure, they did speak Eng...they spoke German at home some. And they were willing and wanted to teach me German, but I really didn't much want to at the time. We did for a while, when I was a child on Sunday mornings, speak German at the breakfast table, but there are only so many phrases and they get boring after a while. So I didn't really learn German, although I understand it pretty well, and if I were immersed in it, it wouldn't take long.

Louisa: As far as you can remember, what was the relationship in Selma when you grew up between Jews and non-Jews?

Hanna: I did not know of any problems. That does not mean there weren't any, but I did not feel prejudice, or any particular hesitancy about being Jewish, or I just didn't know if there was a problem. I once, when I went out with a friend...went out in the country to spend the weekend with her grandparents, and was going to church with them, she had an uncle who asked me what religion I was, and I said, "Jewish", and he said, "No you're not." "Yes I am." I must have been in the fifth grade, maybe. And he continued to tell me I wasn't, that maybe my parents were, but that I wasn't. Finally I said, "Okay". I thought why argue with this man. (Laughs) Later I found out they were in the Klan. (Both laugh) But, uh, anyway, that his father was! But there was nothing really unpleasant about that; I just thought it was strange. But I really did not have any unpleasant experiences growing up related to being Jewish.

Louisa: Was the Klan active in this area at the time, I mean, at age ten were you aware of that being an active threat?

Hanna: I didn't find out about that until years later. I didn't know that then. Years later I found out that that family had been involved. There was a Klan in rural area. I don't know how much...how active it was in town, although I'm sure there were people who were involved or had family members involved.

Louisa: What did you and your family enjoy doing for recreation when you were growing up? Did your parents take off time from work and getting settled to have fun?

Hanna: Very little. We went to a movie sometimes. At the time there was a movie theatre downtown that we could walk to, and we would go to movies. When I was up through junior high or high school, I probably didn't want to go with my parents, (laughs) but that has nothing to do with anything! When I was very little, I

remember going out for ice cream with them, or just going window shopping, or something like that. Going with my mother to see friends of hers. My father took out very little time for recreation. I remember once in a while on Sunday afternoon going out somewhere with my mother or...

Louisa: Picnics?

Hanna: Rare...once in a while...rarely. I remember a few picnics when I was a child. Again, they didn't have a car, and so that limited...you know, we were dependent on other people. There wasn't a lot of recreation.

Louisa: Did you ever go back to New York to visit?

Hanna: I went to New York, not back to New York. I was born here.

Louisa: I mean, did your family go back to New York?

Hanna: No. They never went.

Louisa: They never went back.

Hanna: They never went back. I have been to New York to visit, but they never went back. They really, I think, that my father's perception was, although we never talked about this, that he could not afford to. I mean, that he really had to work hard just to make ends meet. Ummm...I think they could have afforded it. And I think they probably should have done more for themselves and for recreation, but they didn't. My mother (sigh), I didn't talk about this until I was an adult, but talking with her over the years...it would have been upsetting for her to go back. She really did not want to leave there...

Louisa: New York.

Hanna: Yeah. And although a few people from New York have come here to visit, I think just the emotion of knowing that she was separated from the people with whom she had any connections, would have been very hard on her. And she said she would not have gone back to Germany for a million dollars, although other people in the family have gone back.

Louisa: Tell me now about your family's ordeal during the Hitler years before World War II. Tell me where they lived. What sort of town it was. What they were doing. How old they were, and so forth.

Hanna: Okay. I have to go back a little bit. My mother and father grew up in

villages within walking distance of each other. An hour or something like that. And so, the families knew each other, in addition to my mother and father eventually getting married. My mother was from a family of eight children; she had one older brother, and she was the oldest girl. One of her sisters was married and had a child. Nobody else of the children, although they were adults, were married at that point. Her parents were still alive.

Louisa: What town?

Hanna: Niederzissen.

Louisa: Okay.

Hanna: My father was from a smaller village, called Burgbrohl, and he was from a family with four children. All of them were adults, although the youngest brother was still quite young. He had two brothers and one sister, and his father and step-mother were living. His mother had died, I think, when he was about eleven. My parents had been friends growing up; had known each other, but really had not been romantically involved.

Louisa: What years were they born? My mother in 1902; my father in 1904. Mom was older. My dad had been, as a young man, involved in various youth organizations in his town and in other places where he went to work, and so forth, some sports organizations, and so forth. And, as Jews were no longer allowed to participate these, then Jewish youth organizations developed that had not existed before. I think he was president of the one in his area. My mom was secretary. That's how they really got together. They went together for a number of years. They got married in December of 1937, December the 26th. My father had a cousin, I think it was a second cousin, who was in New York, who was going to send him affidavits to come to the United States.

Louisa: Uh, tell me, first, when are you aware <sup>of</sup> when they started first to worry about Hitler? That they were working into leaving? What sorts of problems did they have, or witness in, around them?

Hanna: I'm not so much aware of my parents. I'm aware of some other members of the family more, but if it's okay, let me set this up with what happened, then I can go back.

Louisa: Sure. Okay.

Hanna: I really don't know what all had happened at that point. I know there were organizations you could not be members of. (a few words here are inaudible ) My father was planning just to come on to the United States, and then send for my mother as soon as possible. A week before he was to leave, this cousin sent an affidavit to my mother. Dad was to leave the next Monday. Mom got on the affidavit the Monday before, and went from her town...well, they were living with his parents. They were living in Burgbrohl at this point, had been married six months at the time, approximately. Went to, I think, Dusseldorf, where the consulate was, got a visa...did not know whether she would get one or not. This was a Friday...and left Monday to go to the United States. Like that! She did not have time to be scared! I think she took the train from Dusseldorf back to where ever, and then walked 45 minutes home, and stopped to tell people good-bye along the way.

Louisa: Did she take any possessions with her?

Hanna: Her in-laws were packing while she was getting her visa. They brought some things. Yes. I don't know...not major possessions. They brought their clothes and I think they had about two hundred dollars, or something like that. Some possessions, but nothing really big. They stayed in New York with relatives for six months basically, until they came to Selma.

But they were in Burgbrohl, she said that her...one of her brothers and I think one of her sisters who were at home, were not working somewhere else, and her parents came to tell her good-bye. And they went, took a train to another town where one of the other sisters was working and told her good-bye, then went to Hamburg where there was an uncle, and he put them on a boat. And when they got to New York, and got off the boat, she heard this voice of her cousin, second cousin or third cousin, yelling, "Frieda"...my mother's name is Frieda. And this is someone I know, who met them. Is very strange. It just happened so fast.

Louisa: She was 36 at that time, and your father was 32.

Hanna: 34.

Louisa: 34.

Hanna: There's two years difference.

Louisa: Okay. And they had no children at that point.

Hanna: No, they had been married six months. They left in April. They got married

in December and left in April. And then were in Selma by the next September.

Louisa: That's travelling!

Hanna: That's trav....(laughs) It was never typical first year marriage!

Louisa: So, how much family did they leave behind?

Hanna: They were the first out of their families. From both families. Okay. From my mom's family: a brother who was married. Oh yeah, I forgot; one brother was married...left not much later, within, maybe, the next six months, and went to Colombia, and he is still living. He is the only other living immediate family member.

Louisa: In Colombia still?

Hanna: He's in Cali. They were in an old town called Palmira, which is near Cali. His wife had a sister who was already there, and was working with a Jewish organization called ORT that somehow got them there. Now, the sister, meanwhile, lived in the United States, but they are still there. So, they've been there.

My mother's youngest sister, who got married within the next year, and her husband, an unmarried brother of my mother, and another unmarried youngest brother, and my aunts - well my uncle had three brothers, all of whom got out and went to China, to Shanghai, which was an open port at that time. You didn't have to have much paperwork. You could just go. There weren't very many big places in the world where you didn't have to have affidavits. And so they went to Shanghai where ended up staying eight years. That was not in the plan. I want to get back to them.

My mother had one sister who was married and had a child, and I have some pictures I can show you of these, who did not get out. She had another sister who was unmarried who did not get out. The oldest brother did not get out.

Louisa: Were these people...did these people try to get out, but couldn't.

Hanna: Yes. In different ways. When the ones were going to Shanghai were doing whatever they were doing, my parents had left by then, so all this is second hand, her oldest brother didn't want to go that far. It was just too far to go to Shanghai, so he went to Belgium, and I don't think he ever got out of Belgium. I think when the Nazis came, they got him there. One sister, Lena, fled to Holland, and got a job in Holland as a housekeeper, and thought she was safe there, and then the Nazis came to Holland and got her. The sister who was married with a child, she and her husband and another cousin of my mother's and her three children, were ostensibly to be sent to White Russia to Minsk to do labor, and

the train came back empty and they never got there. They were killed on the way. Mother's parents were taken from the town, and they were sent to Theresienstadt and my mom's dad got sick and died, and then mother ended up in Auschwitz, and the rest of them in Auschwitz. The youngest brother, Sally, which was like a girl's name Sally, was in a concentration camp just a very short time and got out. I don't really know...I don't think my mom knows how. It's early, the early days. My aunt and uncle who went to China somehow got him out.

Louisa: All of these people were rounded up, after the date in '38 when your folks left?

Hanna: Oh, yeah. Yeah. None of this had started.

Louisa: None of it had.

Hanna: No. And it hadn't started when the people went China. It hadn't started when the people went to South America. I don't think it had started when they went to China. This was all...in fact, the people who went to China went a year after.

Louisa: So, it's between '38 and '39. Summer of '39 sometime.

Hanna: Okay. That's my mom's side of the family. My dad's side of the family: his sister England as a housekeeper after Kristallnacht. She was working, I've forgotten in what town, but realized when that happened, that it was time to get out. She had a cousin in England, and so she went as a housekeeper. Ended up later marrying the man whose house she was keeping. His wife had run off with someone else! So it was one of those fairy tale stories. And he painted those pictures, her husband did. They're not living any more now, but that's old age.

My dad's two brothers, both of whom were younger than he, went to Belgium, were there for three years and went to France, and when the Nazis went into France they were taken. And I don't know that anybody knows where they were taken. And dad's father and mother - step-mother - were among the first taken in their town. That's the immediate family.

So, in both cases, about half the family got out.

Louisa: How did the surviving family go about reestablishing contact, locating each other in the corners of the Earth?

Hanna: The immediate family? Well...



Louisa: The brothers and sisters who went to Columbia, to Shanghai, to New York.

Hanna: I don't know that they lost contact, really. My parents were trying... well, they sent affidavits to get their whomever-they-could out, but the government regulations kept changing in Germany. By the time they would send something, then that would not be...you know, it would not work anymore. They lost contact with the family that went to concentration camps, but those who got out - I don't think...I really don't know - but I don't think they lost contact. China may have been hard for a while, but I know that there were letters back and forth. My aunt in England...really my father was planning to bring her to the States, and then at one point she wrote it turned out I'm getting married. So she never came to the States to live. The people in China certainly were not planning to stay that long, but then China and Japan and the whole thing got involved, and it had to be over. And at that point my parents sent for a married aunt and her husband and one of the unmarried brothers, unmarried sister. And one of the unmarried brothers came and lived in Selma. The youngest unmarried brother went to South America to live with the couple there, and then the aunt's husband's brothers went to New York and Chicago to look for (inaudible). But I don't know that contact was ever really broken from one to the other.

Louisa: What about seeing each other?

Hanna: Okay. The family from South America came here off and on a number of times til they got too old.

Louisa: To Selma?

Hanna: Yes. The youngest brother died quite some years ago. It must probably be about fifteen years ago. The brother who is still living, he almost can't see and he can't walk, and his wife is relatively more healthy. I think for a time years ago they thought they might move to the States, but they never did and they just got too old. They lived in Palmira. They retired. They moved to Cali, because there was more of a Jewish community there. Even before Columbia got, the situation got as bad as it is, I think they kept thinking, you know, there might be a revolution, or there might be something that they might want to move. But they didn't. My family never went there, but they came here. The sister in England, daddy's sister in England and her husband, came to Selma in 1961 to visit. Then I went to visit them in '68, and then I went to visit my aunt in '81 (fumbles for date) or right after her husband died. Then she died a couple of summers ago.

As an interesting aside...when they came in '61, we went to Montgomery to the train depot to get them, and my father and his sister were talking to each other. Suddenly they both stopped and <sup>they</sup> realized they were speaking English to each other. British and Alabamian - but English!

Louisa: Isn't that funny!

Hanna: They spoke in German to each other the last time. They had written in English over the years, but...

Louisa: When you met all of these relatives for the first time, what thoughts did you have? I mean, did you feel that this was instant family with whom you felt rapport, or were they sort of a curiosity, or were you observing your parents?

Hanna: All of the above.

Louisa: All of that.

Hanna: The aunt in England I felt close to. We had written since I was a little child. I really just felt <sup>immediately</sup> close to her, and her husband was fascinating. He was just a fascinating guy, and he was a good bit older than she, and was very British, and an interesting character.

The South American relatives I've never felt quite as close to. That just may be personality. I don't know. Maybe that they didn't speak English, or barely any. And I don't speak Spanish, and so...and very little German, so the communication was harder. I think, my mom's youngest brother, I probably would ...we only met once...I think I would have probably felt very close to him just in terms of personality, but we didn't get much of a chance. Now, we still correspond. My mom's brother doesn't write anymore because he can't see, but his wife writes, and she writes in German, and I do the best I can reading it and then take it to momma and she translates it, and she writes back in German, and I write back in English. We do...but I've never felt real close to them.

Louisa: How about cousins? Your generation?

Hanna: Okay. I don't have any first cousins. I have some second cousins. I don't have much family now. The first time I went to New York, after my freshman year in college, and I went with a list of names of people I'd heard of my whole life, and I think I met about 26 relatives while I was there, and talked with

about 4 or 5 more, and I guess that I was the curiosity. I was the southern cousin, or the southern whatever, because every body else was still pretty much around New York or New Jersey or Chicago or that area. I have a second cousin who's my age, who grew up in New York and has lived in California in and around San Francisco; right now is back in New York sort of part time. We correspond. We saw each other briefly when I was, when we were in college, and then as adults started corresponding, and I've gone out to visit her a couple of times. We're pretty close, for people who haven't seen each other very often.

And I have another, I guess, third cousin with whom I correspond, and another third cousin with whom I correspond. And there are a few people left in my mother's generation with whom I'm in contact, and I feel pretty close. But it is a closeness, I suppose that transcends distance. I haven't spent much time with any of these people. It's an emotional closeness, maybe, but not one based on real familiarity.

-----END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A-----

Tape 1, Side B

Louisa: You need to maintain family contact when you have such a limited number of family.

Hanna: Yes. And I think I felt that much more than the family of my age who were in contact. I mean, they took it for granted, and did not feel the need, I think, to maintain it as much as I, although we do now, but for a while, I think, growing up they didn't feel the need to do that.

Louisa: When your parents came to this country, did they make an effort to maintain their German culture or did they try hard to assimilate as quickly as possible?

Hanna: Probably neither. Somewhere in between. I don't think they tried to maintain German culture; neither did they try to deny that they were who they were, and I think they assimilated to the extent that here they were, and there were very few refugees around here and they had to get on the best they could, but they were different.

Louisa: You are talking about in Selma?

Hanna: Yes.

Louisa: In New York, before they came to Selma, did they have a pretty fair size community of German Jews where they were?

Hanna: Oh, yes...relatives and family. That's what they were part of in that six months.

Louisa: Did they join any Zionist group, labor group, political group, synagogue group in New York? Do you know?

Hanna: I'm sure they didn't join any political group. I doubt that they joined a synagogue at that point, although they may have gone to one. I don't think they really joined anything, but I don't know that.

Louisa: When did they become citizens, or did they take out citizenship?

Hanna: Sure. Ummm...I'm trying to think...I saw my mother's citizenship papers recently. 1945, I think was when they got their final papers. I think it was '45.

Louisa: And voted regularly?

Hanna: My father, yes. My mother, no. My mother rarely.

Louisa: Was she just apolitical, or...didn't drive to the polls?

Hanna: Didn't walk to the polls. I don't know. She just, wasn't something she did. I think she did a few times in later years more than in early years. My father did, so far as I know, always.

Louisa: Can you describe anyother way their getting settled in Selma? You already told me how they happened to come here. Are there any stories that you've heard or that you remember about them <sup>getting</sup> acclimated in such a different atmosphere than

they were used to, except for the fact that it's a small town.

Hanna: It's a good bit larger than either of the towns they came from, although my father had worked in Frankfort and Cologne, and some other places. As far as the Jewish community is concerned, they became active. They went to services right away, and became part of the congregation. One family, in particular, befriended them, and my mother tells the story of this friend of hers, who is still her best friend who didn't speak German, although her grandparents, I guess, came from Germany. Her husband's family came from Poland, I guess. But, who kind of took momma under her wing. They went out and ate a lot of chocolate ice cream. (laughs) And spoke loudly to her, thinking that that would help her understand! (Both laugh) You know, the way we see it in movies with Indians!

My father just had to go to work right away. At first he had just a very small tailor shop, just a long room that was on Water Avenue a couple of doors down...well, an empty space where that park is when you came across the bridge (Edmond Pettus) there was a building - there was no bridge there then...and they built the bridge within the first couple of years or so, two or three years that he was here. So, it was his bridge, and it was my bridge, and it was "our" bridge long before it was a famous bridge!

Louisa: (Laughing) How did you get across the river before...?

Hanna: There was a bridge somewhere else.

Louisa: Oh!

Hanna: Down the road a little bit. Another bridge. But, I do remember stories about him talking about, I guess it was before I was born, <sup>that they actually built it,</sup> about him going out and watching it...supervising. But that was just a very small shop, and he moved later, a couple of times, to different locations. I don't think he had much time or took much time, other than going to services and getting involved with B'nai B'rith. He didn't take part in civic clubs or activities or anything like that. I think he eventually got to know a good many people through work and individuals brought him work to do, plus he did a lot of alterations for businesses in town.

Louisa: Did he ever get a car?

Hanna: No. Never owned a car.

Louisa: Did your parents ever experience anything uncomfortable because of being immigrants here?

Hanna: Yes. They were very lonely, in many ways. They did not talk about that when I was a child, but as an adult I talked with my mom. I never really talked with my dad about it. He died in 1971, and I was not living in Selma then. I really didn't have many adult conversations with him. But I've talked with my mom since then, and, yeah, they were quite lonely, and felt quite isolated from family and other immigrants and people with the same experience, because there were just not many such people in...there were a few other people in Selma at the time. So I think, although they were struggling very hard just to make do and learn, and deal with the fact that their parents were dead, and we were finding out about that, sort of in 1942 and '43. Yeah, they felt different.

I don't think they had many actively bad experiences, that they felt people intentionally tried to...

Louisa: Mock them, or be anti-Semitic...

Hanna: No, but they felt different, as I'm sure do Vietnamese immigrants and any others.

Louisa: Did you feel isolated as a child?

Hanna: No. You know, I don't know if I was just naive, or very sheltered. Looking back, there are things that I think about. Ways that I think my life was probably different than some other kids, and some experiences I didn't have. But I think I went blithely through as a child (laughs). I just don't think I knew the things...that everyone didn't live just the way I did.

Louisa: Well, you, uh, I guess your emotions were sheltered by a loving family.

Hanna: Yes. There are different levels to that, and that's true on one level. And on another level, on looking back, on some of what was in the Helen Epstein book ("Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors", G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979) was certainly true of me. It was a family with lots of silences. And again, I didn't know any different. But it was a family with (inaudible) restrained and not said, and quiet.

Louisa: What sorts of things - taboo subjects, you mean?

Hanna: Emotions. I mean, just emotion. I'm sure some emotions were expressed, but on the whole, it was a very restrained family emotionally. I don't think I was consciously aware of that then, it's just the way it was, and what I grew up in.

But looking back, and seeing things in myself...I think it was, there were just, I think it would have just been too painful to be very emotional, but then you can't restrain some emotions and not others.

Louisa: I was about to ask you which emotions: anger?

Hanna: Sure.

Louisa: Love?

Hanna: Open expression. I mean, love was there, I mean, I don't have any doubt...

Louisa: Caring?

Hanna: I don't have any doubt of that. Open expression, verbalization of it was probably not.

Louisa: Did you feel hovered over at all? (Tape turned off briefly)

Hanna: Are we "on" or "off"?

Louisa: No, we are running now. Did you feel protected from outside forces, or danger or restricted in..."don't do that, you might get hurt" kind of thing? Or "don't spend the night, you might get lonesome" or that sort of thing?

Hanna: I don't think I was aware of that. Looking back, yeah, to some degree. Again, I don't think I was aware of much of any of it then, it's almost more in retrospect.

Louisa: Do you think your parents talked between themselves about emotional issues when you were out of earshot? Or do you think they bottled it up even just within themselves?

Hanna: I think to a large degree they bottled it up within themselves, but I'm sure not completely. And to some degree, that's just their personalities. Probably if they had never been through this, they were both quiet, reserved people. Yes, they did bottle up a lot.

Louisa: How old were you when you first learned of your parents' story? Did it come in bits and pieces, or did you piece it together yourself before they actually told you? How did you come to learn about their background?

Hanna: I don't remember a time when I didn't basically know it. I mean, I don't know how old I was. I was a young child when I knew generally. The details,

the details, insofar as they came at all, came gradually. They certainly didn't express bitterness when I was a small child. They didn't express anger about what had happened. What they did tell me then, they just told me. I guess, as I got to junior high and high school and asked questions, then they answered the questions. But, other than that, they really didn't talk, except when I asked questions.

Louisa: Do you think they had a sense of acceptance about what happened, because surely they would still feel a keen loss of their brothers and sisters and parents?

Hanna: No, I don't think they had a sense of acceptance. They didn't express the bitterness to me. I didn't say it wasn't there. No, I don't think...

Louisa: Well, you can't just tell about how this one disappeared, and grandma disappeared without bitterness. I mean, it can't be just matter of fact.

Hanna: Well, they didn't tell details, they just said generally "everybody got killed". It was really not until I was a good bit older that I asked for details. I'm sure there were moments when there was acceptance, or resignation maybe more than acceptance, and very much bitterness. My mother, in talking about religion and belief and so forth, has said that she has had screaming fights with God. I certainly never heard the screaming fights that she did! Some years ago, I guess when she was in her seventies...I was back in Selma, but she was still well enough to be out on her own...and we were walking around town and someone saw her and told me later that she looked so serene, and I told her that, and she said, "Well, I guess I am. I never got any questions answered, and I never won any battles, so I quit fighting and I quit asking questions, so when I feel well, I'm serene." But then, she has also had chronic clinical depression since I was about eleven, every now and then, and more as she got older. And I think a lot of it is related to this, although there is a genetic tendency.

Louisa: How else do you think your parents handled rage, other than silently screaming with God?

Hanna: I think my father just worked. I mean, he just went to work. And he worked and worked and worked from about 7 or 7:30 in the morning, and he came home about 5:30, 6. And that's what he did. On the weekends he did something like paperwork and stuff at home. Business related. That's it. He was a very... well, he wasn't quiet around the house all the time. He talked about stuff, but



but he never talked about feelings or beliefs, or anything like that. But then, my mother says he was like that as a young man, too, so she didn't think it was just related to this. But, I don't know basically what he believed about much of anything other than specific things that I asked, or the way that he lived his life. I think he just worked. He was basically a healthy person. He had a heart attack at sixty-six and died. So, I'm really...my own feeling is that is what he did.

My mom has had various illnesses, since growing up has not been that healthy a person, but she has survived a long time, so I can't judge how much is what, but I do think a lot of it is internalized (inaudible).

Louisa: Did you create extended family for yourself when you grew up? Have imaginary grandparents? Fantasize what it would be like to do things with them? That sort of thing?

Hanna: No. I didn't have, create grandparents. Again, it's more as an adult that I have realized the loss or lack of things that I didn't have. I don't know if I just, you know, lived in my little constricted world as a child, and didn't miss what I didn't have. I mean, I had imaginary playmates, and all sorts of fantasy stuff, but I don't really think I created family that wasn't there. In fact, I never thought about that until you just brought that up! (Laughs)

Louisa: Did you ever feel that you were somehow different from your friends in Selma? Aside from not having a car? Did you feel that in some way...did you identify with your friends or feel that somehow they were different?

Hanna: I don't think I thought about it much growing up. In retrospect, I think I was different. I think my experience was different, and I think I saw things somewhat differently. Certainly, as I grew up in the...'50s I graduated from high school in '59 when the whole racial issue came to the front...I didn't understand why people were so rabidly segregationist. I certainly wasn't out working for any causes; I hadn't thought about that much either growing up, but I didn't understand why people hated, and I'm sure that was from my parents coming from a different world. I don't know that had I grown up with a southern background, we probably would have been like anybody else. I certainly think it influenced me there, not that I said much about it at the time, the mid- to late 50s.

Louisa: What about in Sunday School? Do you feel that you regarded yourself as a Jew similar to your classmates? How many of them came from immigrant parents?

Hanna: None of them.

Louisa: None of them. Did you feel that you had Jewish identity in common with them or was stuff that you learned in Sunday School somehow...was it relevant or irrelevant for your family life? Or something in between?

Hanna: (Laughs) That could be a whole year's question!

Louisa: That's okay. Just describe how you feel.

Hanna: I have to think about it for a minute.

Louisa: Do you want me to turn off the tape?

Hanna: Oh, no no no. This congregation is very Reform. Classical... '40s Reform. My parents had grown up in much more traditional families. They weren't Orthodox, just small village European Jews. And so, while they didn't keep Kosher in Selma...that would have been about impossible...they didn't do things they had done in Germany. They still probably kept more traditions than most of the families did here. Not with a Christmas tree. Most of the Jewish kids in town had Christmas trees; not all of them, but most.

I'm not exactly sure at the time what that did to my feelings about Sunday School, except that maybe I thought my parents were a little more Jewish than some other parents. I knew that they kept traditions a little bit more. I don't think I thought about it a lot. I was aware of that. The Sunday School stories, the Bible stories, the holidays, the celebrations, I suppose were relevant, insofar as <sup>those things are</sup> relevant to daily life - we didn't read the Bible a lot at home or anything like that - so I learned those stories at Sunday School.

I saw our family traditions as different. The other part of that, the Jewish education, I had from Sunday School and Temple, and I had never been to a Conservative or more traditional Sunday School or Temple or synagogue. I'm not sure where I'm going with that now.

Louisa: Do you think that your parents' faith was affected by the Holocaust?

Hanna: Oh, I'm sure it did.

Louisa: The feeling of the relationship of God to His children?

Hanna: Well, my dad told me once, I was not living here, I was home visiting, and I don't know where the conversation started, but anyway, from the age of seventeen he really never believed a lot of the stuff. Now, I'm not sure what

all he didn't believe. But in a lot of the traditions, he had just done them. I've talked with my mother about this recently. I think it gave him a sense of stability. He went to temple regularly. <sup>He was involved with B'nai B'rith.</sup> He was part of whatever went on there. But I don't know how deeply his belief was. It was not something he ever talked about. I don't know if he believed in God. Maybe he didn't. I don't know.

My mom is <sup>basically</sup> ~~much more~~ more traditional, very much less sophisticated intellectually about religion...I guess is the only way I could put it, and took much more seriously things like the fact that my dad (inaudible) , you know things like that, at first. I guess she got used to it. Well, yes...she told me she had screaming fights with God. She does, to my knowledge, believe in something. I don't know exactly how she sees it. I don't know. But, it has been important to her. Sure, it had to. How could it not?

Louisa: When you sent away to college, was that your first big time away from family?

Hanna: For a long period of time, yes.

Louisa: Was it difficult leaving the family?

Hanna: <sup>I loved it. I loved it,</sup> ~~I was not homesick.~~ I was at Montevallo. I came home once a month or so. It was not...no...I loved it.

Louisa: Was it difficult for your parents to give you up?

Hanna: I don't know. If so, they didn't let me know. Again, it was not as though I had gone off to the other side of the country or something! They didn't make me feel that it was difficult. They were good about it, if it was indeed difficult. And I'm sure parts of it probably were difficult. But, you know what most college students do, I tried to tell them what the world is about! No, I really loved it, and I think that was the point at which I started realizing the things that I had missed, in terms even...

Louisa: For example.

Hanna: Yes, I'm trying to get to it. Turn off the tape.

OFF, THEN ON AGAIN

I think I said that basically it had been a silent household, and feelings were not discussed, and ideas were not discussed. Pass the bread was discussed. (Louisa sighs) So college was a time when there was just a lot of discussion.

Everything. And I was growing and thinking, and realized that I was thinking for the first time. So, it was an invigorating time, aside from friendships and social life that is available. It was a time for, I thought, emotional and intellectual growth and that made it up.

Louisa: (Smiling) That's what college is supposed to be!

Hanna: Yeah, it did! It worked for me!

Louisa: Well, somehow, you must have...what keyed you into go into counselling as a career?

Hanna: Well, I didn't at first. I taught English and French.

Louisa: Oh, okay.

Hanna: I think from two directions. I was teaching...I worked in Columbus, Georgia first, and then in Tuscaloosa. And I was teaching English, and we went to an elective system, and I started teaching creative writing among some other things. They found out I was having group therapy in class, whether that was my intention or not, it's what creative writing turned into! and I started taking some counselling courses just to learn to deal with kids and make sure I didn't do harm. And I really had no intention of becoming a school counsellor, but I took some more courses and took some more courses, and meanwhile moved to Selma. My mother had had a heart attack and a couple of other major illnesses, and I ended up staying here, but wanted to finish the program. Still didn't really plan to become a school counsellor, but the summer I finished the program at the University, there was an opening here, and I was sort of bored with what I was teaching in Selma. It was a traditional English class, and I had gotten used to doing some other things, so I took it.

So that was one level. Another level...I think I became interested in psychology to figure myself out. I guess a lot of people who go into counselling or psychology-related areas do it for that reason, and I think I wanted to be around people who were doing that kind of personal search and analysis, because it was not done in my family. I mean we would not try to figure out anything about yourself. So it was a way of looking...it was an entree for looking at myself, although I did not go into the job because of that, but taking courses and and being interested in it.

Louisa: What I think I heard you say was that you earlier were not aware of the denial of emotions in your family, and this opened the way for you to get in touch with them. And that was sort of a conscious decision after you got mature. Is that right?

Hanna: Yes. I think I had gotten in touch some, before I started taking counselling courses. I had done reading on my own, and had friends who were involved in psychology before I thought about it in terms of taking college courses. But, yeah, it was a conscious decision to come at that in some way, and, again, the actual start to take classes was when I was teaching creative writing. Yes. So, you're right.

Louisa: I forgot whether you said have you ever been to Israel?

Hanna: No.

Louisa: In that book, the Epstein book, that was a big point of a lot of people. They wanted to go to get in touch with people like themselves.

Hanna: (Murmured assent.)

Louisa: I meant to ask, when your parents came to America, did they keep their same name as they had in Europe, or did they change their name?

Hanna: Same name.

TAPE OFF, THEN ON AGAIN

Louisa: Over the years, have you had...have you ever had nightmares about the Holocaust where you are in it?

Hanna: No. In a way...I haven't had nightmares about the Holocaust...

Louisa: Or reliving your family's experience?

Hanna: No. But I've had some individual nightmares about anti-Semitic type of things that I have not experienced. I don't think it was really...

Louisa: In another setting, or in the immediate setting?

Hanna: Strange setting. (Sighs) One was on a boat with Idi Amin, and I don't know if I can remember all the details. Strange settings. I don't think it has happened often, but I have had something like that.

This may not fit in right here, it's about my mother, rather than myself.

Louisa: Go ahead.

Hanna: Had a very...just horrible experience about (inaudible) years ago.

---- END OF TAPE 1 ----

Tape 2, Side A

Louisa: Okay. When we changed the tape you were going to start to say something about your mother.

Hanna: She was having mental difficulties and heart problems and some chemical imbalances, potassium was low, and she was given medication and it just all went together, and she just nearly went berserk for a few days til they got the chemicals back in line. Psychotic episode for a few days. It was chemically caused. But during that couple of days - it was either on Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur, I forget which - she thought, she was in the hospital, and she thought she was in Germany. And she thought the doctors were the Nazis.

Louisa: How old was she?

Hanna: Eighty...well, she's eight-nine now...in her early eighties. Early in her eighties. And she really thought that the doctors were out to kill her. It was horrible. They called me to the hospital when it happened. She was in the hospital and they had given her this medication, and she went berserk. And she was speaking German, and you know (laughs) there are not a lot of doctors in Selma who speak German. My mother is basically a rather quiet, meek person, and she was not being quiet or meek. She thought she was on a boat. She thought the doctors were Nazis. She was obviously frightened to death. But she also fought. At one point she thought somebody was going to hurt her and she fought, physically fought. So I had to admire that in her, but that survival mechanism

that was there. Later she was really embarrassed, when she was okay and found out had kicked an orderly, and had kicked the doctor, and kicked somebody.

Louisa: And you realized what was happening at the time, or did you?

Hanna: Yes, I did. I came in and she was kind of cowering in the hall, and this doctor who had been her doctor for many years, was trying to talk to her. And she talked to me about him, about that she just didn't think that he would do this to her, and what was in it. It took me a minute, but yeah... There were other things going on, too. She really was...her chemicals were completely out of balance. It took a couple of days to get straightened out, but, that's where she was, so all of that is still there. You know, buried.

Louisa: It's difficult to see a parent in a role that that you're not used to, especially one out of control.

Hanna: Yeah, it really was horrible. She thought I was her sister, the one who died on the train. And she says that I remind her of this sister anyway, not in looks, but in personality. She had told me that before, and that's what she thought, and that's what she called me. And the only thing really at that point.. I mean I did it and didn't know if I was doing the right thing or not, and then talked to a psychologist about it...is to try to be as reality based as possible. This is not where you are; this is where you are; this is what is going on. That sort of thing. It was awful.

Louisa : I just remembered something I forgot to ask you before. When you reached the age that your parents were when they upped and left Germany, and uprooted themselves and came, did you have any thoughts about that? Did it sort of give you pause? Or did you identify with them especially at that age?

Hanna: I'm thinking - was I in Tuscaloosa or back here? I don't think I did. I don't think so.

Louisa: That wasn't part of your awareness.

Hanna: I don't think so. I couldn't tell you for sure, but I don't think so.

Louisa: What is your <sup>personal</sup> sense of Jewish identity?

Hanna: Different on different days! (Louisa gasps) Emotionally it's very much part of who I am, what I am. Theologically, I don't know. I take from different

religions, and learn from different ones, and feel different on different days. I suppose I don't see myself as very traditionally Jewish in beliefs. But I am (unintelligible) . I can't imagine myself ever becoming something else. That's just part of who and what I am.

I guess I also understand my father's situation, because I go to services, here when they have them, which is seldom. We have a student rabbi. It's out of a sense of loyalty to the little dwindling community there is, and a sense of wanting to be part of something.

I would like to be in a place where there really was an active Jewish community. There is struggling with its identity, because I guess I see that as a continuing thing. Serious about it. Questioning. Trying to figure itself out, constantly.

Louisa: Do you feel comfortable telling people that you are Jewish?

Hanna: Yeah. I don't know that that's...

Louisa: Not an issue?

Hanna: No. The only time that was an issue, and it wasn't an issue, was, I guess, one of the few times that I've ever been in a situation where there was anti-Semitism. And it was a situation that wasn't very serious. I had gone to visit somebody in another town, and the neighbors came over and they had been drinking, and one of the guys started making some comments about a Barbra Streisand album, and then turned around and said, "There's nobody Jewish here is there?" "Yeah, I am." And he was not drunk enough not to be embarrassed. (Laughs) Then he kind of tried to get out of it...tried to wiggle out of it. It didn't get better, it just was a bad situation, and I didn't enjoy that a bit. Other than that, no. I think it's no big problem.

Louisa: Have you ever felt the need for counselling to work through any feelings about the Holocaust or your family's experience?

Hanna: Yeah, I have felt the need, and I haven't found the right person. I still would like to do that, but the person matters. When I first saw Helen Epstein on TV, before I read her book, and I was in Tuscaloosa. It was a Sunday morning TV program, and then I read the book. And at the time I read the book, I almost wrote her, but I didn't, but I thought I need to be in one of these groups (group therapy with other children of survivors). I didn't do it; I let



go by. With various types of workshops that I've gone to, both things related to counselling, week-long programs, I have done work myself on some of that with whoever was in charge of it, but I've never been in any long-term counselling. Yeah...I still think I should.

Louisa: Are you interested in going to Germany?

Hanna: I would like to see it. Not just absolutely pulled, and I haven't gone. But I'd like to see where my parents grew up.

Louisa: You would have no hesitancy to go back to their hometown?

Hanna: Yeah. No, I have no idea how I would react emotionally. It might be awful, but that wouldn't keep me from going. It might determine where I stay, or what I do. I have someone who is a friend here in Selma, we grew up together, she is a few years younger, who lives in Germany after college to work, and then got married there and has her family there, and is basically German now, except that she still comes home to visit, and so she has invited me to come and stay with them. Her husband is German. I know that if I went, I might could spend some time with them, but I also would need to be somewhere, where if I were going to get really upset, I wouldn't have to deal with her husband.

So, yes, there are all sorts of things that I don't know about what my reaction would be.

I remember a second cousin who is my age, who was in Germany with an uncle of hers, a man on business, on a business trip, sitting in a castle across the river from where her parents grew up, saying it was quite an experience.

Louisa: I can imagine. When you think back over the War years, and your family's experience, who are your heros? Who do you think of as your personal heros?

Hanna: I don't know. (Coughs) I never had any personal heros. I think that anybody who survived and went on with their life, is a hero of sorts. And I do remember my mother telling me once, about their conscious decision to have children or a child and get on with their lives, that it was something that she and my father didn't know if they could do it, if they could pull themselves together and start a life here, but they decided that they would, and that was a choice for life. So to that extent I think anybody who survived it, and went ahead and lived, had heroism thrust upon them. It was not a choice! But as far as individuals, that's not.....

Louisa: Doesn't have to be individuals, I just wondered if you had thought about who you admired the most in this whole scene, whether it's famous names or common people or family or foot soldiers or whatever.

Hanna: Certainly, I admire the people who hid Jews out and risked their own lives. Christians or whatever they were, who risked their lives to do that. I don't think I would have had the courage to do it; I'm sure I wouldn't. I'll have to think about it. Go on to something else, and I'll be thinking.

Louisa: If you had it in your power to create a memorial to victims of the Holocaust, what do you think would be a fitting memorial?

Hanna: I guess I have to think about that, too. What comes to mind is not really a memorial for those who died, but some sort of place where those who survived can some way could live in actual peace.

Louisa: Anywhere in particular? I mean, are you thinking about Israel or are you thinking about anywhere in particular?

Hanna: No.

Louisa: Or a state of mind?

Hanna: A state of mind.

Louisa: Have you in the past told anybody else the stories you've just told me?

Hanna: Yeah. Bits and pieces. Maybe not sitting as long at one time. But, yeah, bits and pieces.

Louisa: People who knew your family?

Hanna: Some. Most of them are just friends of mine. Just telling them about me.

Louisa: Do you have anything else you want to say, because basically I'm finished with prepared questions, and I realize that there may be things that I have not thought of to ask you, if you'd like to just elaborate on anything, please...

TURNED OFF TAPE, THEN ON AGAIN

Hanna: My mother told me some years ago that she dreamed that she was cooking potatoes for her parents. She was really upset about the dream, and I asked her why. She said because she did know from letters that before they were taken to

camps, that they were eating out of garbage cans, and that was what she would have liked to have done for them.

Louisa: That's something. It's almost like non-existence.

Hanna: To think sometimes the relatively little things like that have more of an impact (rest of the sentence is inaudible).

TAPE TURNED OFF, THEN ON

Hanna: In a conversation with a friend a few years ago, I don't know how we came to this or what we were talking about, but one of the things I said was that although, this was not from my own experience, it was from my family's experience, I did know that the world was not a safe place. And I knew that it got levelled. You could be going along living your life, and everything could be pulled out from under you. And she said that was so totally different from her experience, because her family had all of the normal family tragedies, of course been in her family deaths, whatever might happen. Her family had lived in Alabama generations and generations, and life had gone on and the world was a place that nurtured that. And although I see myself as somebody who basically trusts individuals, and I see myself as getting along with people easily, I still do have at an existential level a real knowledge that it is not a safe place.

Louisa: That you might be living on the edge again.

Hanna: Yes. That's there, that underlies anything else that I might do.

Louisa: I certainly have had that feeling from nothing external, just the nature, I suppose, of being Jewish. You know it could happen. In an unlikely place.

Hanna: Yes. Which does let me probably overreact to reading or hearing of really overt anti-Semitism in this country, and the rest of the world, too, of course. Even though my own...I have never had any really, really bad experience, but when I read about it or hear about it...I fear. Probably more than is necessary at a personal level.

Louisa: Do you react at a personal level to racial slurs or injustice against other people?

Hanna: Yeah, I do, although probably not as much as I did years ago, and I

don't like to saw that, but...yeah, I do.

Louisa: What other stories...

Hanna: Not right now, turn it off.

TAPE TURNED OFF, THEN ON

Hanna: Viktor Frankl, who developed "Logo" therapy while he was in a concentration camp, are you familiar with that?

Louisa: No.

Hanna: He's a psychologist who, I think, was trained under Freud, or with, I don't know. No, he wouldn't have...he's younger than that...anyway, he was a psychotherapist and was in a concentration camp with <sup>his</sup> family...he got out...the rest of his family did not get out, and he developed this approach to therapy to creating meaning for life, not looking for it somewhere else, but creating it with your life, from his experiences in the concentration camp. And I think that anyone who can survive, and come out and contribute something to the world based on his experience is quite unusual, and another...

Louisa: Did he have a professional career in America?

Hanna: I'm not sure he lived in America. He wrote the book, "Man's Search for Meaning", which is probably his most famous book, but there are other books, too. I don't think he actually lived in America. I think he lived in Europe.

And there was another person who was trained as a psychoanalyst who was Italian, Roberto Ascoli who was in prison in solitary confinement. He was not in a concentration camp. He was Jewish, and he was arrested by the fascists in Italy more for his political actions than for being Jewish, and developed, also, a whole approach to psychology while he was in solitary confinement by doing meditations every day, and thinking, and it was a very positive approach with man's spiritual nature, and so forth.

Yeah, people who could be in that sort of situation and come out of it that way and contribute...

Louisa: Very admirable. I'm glad you told me about them.

TAPE TURNED OFF, THEN ON AGAIN

Hanna: I was talking with my mom about the extent to which she and my father talked to people about what was going on when they were here in the late '30s, early '40s. And she said they did talk to people and tell them what they knew, but people got tired of hearing about it after a while, so they quit talking about it.

Louisa: Did they have the sense that people wanted to avoid the tragedy, or just that "woe is me" gets tired?

Hanna: Probably both.

Louisa: If we have no more to tell, (I'll) just say thank you very much, Hanna, for letting me come and talk with you today, and I'll be getting back in touch. And if you have any more to add to the tape, you get back in touch.

Hanna: Thank you for doing this.

END OF INTERVIEW