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Chris Patti: —with survivor Elisabeth Dixon. My name is Chris Patti. We are in Tampa, Florida, in the United States. The language is English, and the videographers are Jane Duncan and Richard Schmidt.

Okay, Ms. Dixon, thank you so much for spending time with us today and for telling us your story, and for driving all this way to the University of South Florida.

Elisabeth N. Dixon: You're welcome. I'm looking forward to this.

CP: Well, I am, too, and we'll start off real basic. Can you give me your name right now?

ED: Elisabeth, spelled with an s, not a z. And I use N. as a middle name; it's the first letter of Nichtenhauser. That's a little bit too long to keep it. And Dixon.

CP: And you had a different name at birth. Can you tell us that name?

ED: Alice Leopoldine Franziska.

CP: Franziska. And Nichtenhauser?

ED: Nichtenhauser.

CP: And that is spelled N-i-c-h-t-e-n-h-a-u-s-e-r?

ED: Yes, it is.

CP: And I think the only other difficult to spell—Leopoldine, is that L-e-o-p-o-l-d-i-n-e?

ED: Yes, sounds good. (laughs)

CP: Okay, okay. And when were you born?

ED: May 21, twenty-eight [1928].

CP: Okay, and that makes you eighty-three today, is that correct?

ED: Yes, it does.

CP: All right. And where were you born?

ED: I was born in Vienna, Austria.

CP: You—when we talked on the phone, you had a really kind of—even though you didn't live in that area for very long, you had a good description of where you were born. Do you remember that at all?

ED: Well, it was the important place in Austria. Everybody wants to be in Vienna. It's a marvelous city. The Donau—Danube—goes through it. From what I was told—because I was just a baby when we left anyway, but we were near the Prater, which was—they had a reason—I can't think of the other word. But it was like a fun park sort of thing; it was quite famous. And it seems the family had—the living quarters looked down onto all that. They had a very lovely time at that time.

CP: And you were born in Vienna, but then you soon moved about twenty miles away?

ED: To Mödling.

CP: To Mödling. And that is M-ö with an umlaut-d-l-i-n-g.

ED: Yes.

CP: How old were you when you moved there?

ED: I would think only a few months, actually. I have no recollection of when we moved. I just know that that's where we went. (laughs)

CP: And how would you describe your hometown, where you grew up?

ED: Well, that was—I think it's—the best thing about it is that it wasn't too far from Vienna. It was maybe a twenty-minute train ride and you're back in the middle of Vienna. The whole town was situated at the foot of the Vienna Woods, and it was a very pretty place. It was not too big and not too small. It was just a regular little town.

CP: Do you remember, you know, the kind of people that were in the town? Was it a mix of all different sorts of people, or was it—?

ED: I think it was a mix. There were shopkeepers, you know, and among them there were Jewish people. I wouldn't know any other people as far as their beliefs or something; that came later. It came out with a bang what they really were. But they all seemed very nice. My father had to rent a smaller place for his business. His business was selling radios at that time, and music players, you know, the old fashioned way. And he was content there. He made friends, and he was very kind to the people. It was not a rich area or anything. It was still hurting from the loss of—what do I call it? I don't know. Well, everybody could make a living, you know, it was that kind of place. There was a railroad station in the bottom corner of Mödling. You know, for me it was just a very little place. That was my world.

CP: When you were really young, did it feel kind of like a safe world? Did you feel like you didn't have anything to worry about?

ED: No, not really, except that my mother and father were divorced, so they were living separately. My mother was living about—I would say about maybe a half hour away from Mödling, and where she lived it was called Brunn am Gebirge. (laughs) That was a much smaller town. And there were times that my mother had fights with my father. I think when I was that little, I was living with my father in Mödling. And he had to have a housekeeper, because you know, he had his business in the same place where we lived. We had a one-bedroom place—I have a painting of that, if you'd like to see it.

CP: You actually brought the painting?

ED: Yes.

CP: Oh, excellent. We'll look at that at the end of the interview. Can you tell me, what was your father's name? It was Alfred?

ED: Alfred.

CP: And your mother's name was Ana?

ED: Ana.

CP: A-n-a, and what was her last name? Wenzlik?

ED: (corrects pronunciation) Wenzlik.

CP: Wenzlik. Is that W-e-n-z-l-i-k?

ED: Let me see it. Where am I looking? Oh, that looks very good. Yes.

CP: Okay, okay. And it seems to me when you told me your story the first time that your story has a lot to do with the difference between your mother and your father, and what happened between them during the kind of history that was going on around you at that time. So can you tell me a little bit more about what was going on in your town, as well as what was going on with your father and mother when you were growing up? You told me that your father's music shop was the only place where people could go to hear music anymore. Can you tell me about that?

ED: That's because it was the Depression, you know, and it wasn't a rich city to begin with. Yeah, my father was a very loving and understanding sort of a man, and he loved music. He played music to the people. They asked him to play; you know, they missed music. The Austrians do love music, generally. That hurts when they can't have it. And so he had arranged to—somebody, one of his pals, put something together that it would—the people could come around and be outside and just listen to the music. It would come through a speaker, I guess, to them.

CP: When did things start to change when you were young? Because you said your father was identified as Jewish; you said according to Hitler, he was Jewish, but he wasn't really a practicing Jew.

ED: No.

CP: So when did he get identified as such, and when did things start to change?

ED: You mean when the people realized he was Jewish?

CP: Yeah, realized he was Jewish, and when the sanctions started coming in to your town, is that right?

ED: Not until the Anschluss. Overnight, all of a sudden, they looked up the Jews, and there were quite a few Jews still in that area. And that's when Hitler talked about, and so on. But I can't tell you too much of the history, because I was just a little kid. I didn't know what was going on.

CP: You mentioned that you—when you were young, you had Christmas in your house.

ED: See, my mother was Aryan. She is—was Aryan. So we had a Christmas tree, you know. But I didn't know that we were "Jews." I wasn't brought up to go to a church or anything. I just was.

CP: Do you remember at all what you were feeling or thinking when things started to change? You said things started to change overnight. What happened to you, and did your father talk to you about any of that? Do you remember any of that?

ED: You know, my young days when I was still able to see my father and my mother, he—oh (laughs). I lost my train of thought.

CP: That's okay.

ED: Tell me again what you want me to do?

CP: What were you feeling as things started to change? It must have been pretty radical for you, because you were growing up and you weren't even really thinking; you didn't know what Jewish was necessarily, and then all of a sudden your father was leaving.

ED: Oh, what I was going to tell you was that I was a child that was seen and not heard. I never recall that either one of them would sit down with me and talk to me about anything. It's not that they didn't love me, I suppose, but it just wasn't done. So I just did what I was told (laughs) and that was it. But if you could have asked my brother, who unfortunately isn't with us anymore, but he knew—he was older than I was, five years older. His name was Hans, and he knew the history and everything. And he wrote a book, too.

CP: He was interviewed, also, by the Shoah Foundation. Is that correct? Your brother?

ED: Yes. I don't know what the place was, but he has been—he was interviewed.

CP: And Hans is short for Hansel, is that right?

ED: No, Johann.

CP: Oh, Johann, okay.

ED: He was Johann Paul, Paul. (laughs) That was his name. But he changed his name when he grew up and so on, because he was a writer and he had a family. Nichtenhauser is a very long name to grow up with. So he changed his name to Hans Knight, K-n-i-g-h-t. So he became Hans Knight. Just because I might mention him sometime later, so that's why I thought I'd tell you.

CP: Thank you. You told me a number of other stories about your childhood and about your father in particular. Do you remember talking about Beggars Monday? Can you tell me about that?

ED: Yeah. Well, there were very, very many poor people. The real poor ones were just beggars. But they only allowed them to come around one day a week, so there wouldn't be beggars all over the place. What it entailed, as far as I could see, they were allowed to go to the stores and just put their hands out for a few pfennigs, for anything. But that was only for one day a week. And so when I was—I don't know if I was not going to school already or something, but I remember one of those Mondays. My father said, "Would you like to do the Beggars Monday?" and I said, "Well, yeah." And so he said, "Well, you know"—I said, "What do I have to do?" and he says, "Nothing. You are giving away. They will tell you what's going to happen." And so I stood in the open doors of his store, and he gave me a little—like a little ashtray or something, with small change in it. He said, "Don't let anybody take more than they should, you know. Make sure that you give it out evenly, so we can give to as many as we can." And that's what I did on Monday, and I stood there and I saw all these people. They'd done that before, you see. And they would come by and take some pennies, you know, and thank you. That was it. And then later on, of course, I realized that we were quite poor ourselves. (laughs) I said, "How much do I have to give it away?" My dad said always, "As long as we have something, you share it." That was him, you know. He was such a good man.

CP: It sounds like he was a caring and a generous man. He cared about his community.

ED: Yes!

CP: And you said that the non-Jews of Mödling turned overnight, all of a sudden, and people that were your father's friends all of a sudden weren't associating with him. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

ED: Well, you see, we never knew till that—I don't know the date that it happened. It just seemed that overnight, there were swastikas all over the place, and people running around and "Heil Hitler," people who you'd never think would ever do anything like that. But there had to have been some subterranean arrangement, you know, because it was just too sudden. You never saw a swastika or anything. But that was the beginning of it. And a lot of people didn't think of my dad as Jewish. He wasn't a practicing Jew, so it never occurred that it would end the way it did.

CP: Once he was labeled a Jew, then he had to move his store, is that correct, and paint a "Jew" on the window? You mentioned that. Is that right?

ED: He had to move. Yeah, he had to—they closed his store, because they stole everything. You couldn't refuse them if they wanted something and they knew that you were Jewish. They just helped themselves to anything. So this Mödling store was emptied, and all of a sudden they labeled him. "Hey, Alfred!" And then, of course, he had to be able to feed still my brother; he was still a boy, a schoolboy. And what's gonna happen to me? They had two children. So it was a terrible time for them. So he tried to open a little store further—still in Mödling, but off the main street. He was on the main street before. And that's where—see, that was—have I mentioned two friends of his, who stuck by him for quite a while? One was the ice cream man that had the ice cream shop.

CP: Is that Toegel ?

ED: Toegel, uh-huh. And the other one had a store where they sell—I can't think what it's called. There were cases like that. Mr. Toegel couldn't figure what was going on. He never thought of Dad being a Jew. I mean, it just never came up. So he was of the opinion that this would be a nice—the things that were going on right then there would simmer down, and life would go on, really, just a little bit different. So he decided to volunteer for one of the Nazi things, you know. I don't know what branch. But he thought that if he showed the rest of the people that you can do that and still live and be a decent person. And he had a red convertible, which was a very unusual thing in those days. So he asked my dad and Hans—I wasn't involved in that. I don't think I was, or maybe I was in the car. And he drove us through the town, waving to everybody. And all of a sudden, he was proved wrong, because the next thing we knew, he'd vanished. They picked him up, and he wasn't Jewish. He was gone for weeks, and nobody knew where he'd gone. And all of a sudden, he was back again, but he wasn't the same man. He never spoke of anything. Nobody ever knew what had happened to him. And he was a broken man.

CP: When we spoke over the phone, you said that it was—it was like when you beat a dog: that's how he was after he came back. He just wasn't the same.

ED: That's right. But not towards our family, just generally. He couldn't understand that this would be so awful. And that was only the very beginning.

CP: That was one of your father's friends, you said?

ED: Yes.

CP: Was there another person?

ED: Yes, Dundalek or something like that. Yeah. Similar, but he had—he was a quieter—no, he wasn't a quieter man. He was a fun-loving man. He used to entertain me when my dad used to visit him sometimes, you know, from one store to the other, chatting. He'd take me with him, if I happened to be living with my dad. And he would jump up on his counters in the store, and dance and sing and everything. (laughs) His wife then had to come in from the back—they were living behind the store—because she realized that I was getting afraid, because he was dancing on his showcases, you know, and being funny in his way. She knew that I was afraid that he would fall or something, and so she'd come out from her apartment and simmer him down. (laughs) But again, Jewish/not Jewish didn't come into this.

CP: Was that the man who you said pretended to be a Nazi at one point, Dundalek?

ED: No. That was the ice cream man.

CP: Oh, the ice cream man? Oh, he was the one who pretended to be a Nazi.

ED: Yes. He put a uniform on, you see, and he wanted to show the people that he loves them anyway and so on. It was just a uniform, and this was just something new.

CP: Oh, okay. But then he learned otherwise, like you said.

ED: Well, yes, because I think they taught him what he was getting into. And he was a broken man. They left him alone then, 'cause he wasn't Jewish, but he just—I'm sure he had some tough times with them.

CP: And so as things began to deteriorate, did your father—he had a sister, is that right?

ED: Oh, yes. He had a few sisters. Helene was the main one that he was with, yeah.

CP: Can you tell me that story, why he was talking with the sister—and didn't he try to move in with his sister, is that right? Can you tell me about that?

ED: Well, that was when everything was just terrible. We were missing something about the other little store that he rented after the main street one.

CP: Yeah, please tell me about that.

ED: The little one.

CP: So—yeah. He had a third store, is that right?

ED: Yeah. Well, from Vienna and then Mödling, and still Mödling but in another place. That's when—I just looked it up the other day. They went—you know, the Nazis went around, and if they could find a Jewish person they would either say—write on the window or something, “Jew! Don't go here!” and all this sort of stuff. And so this third place that my dad moved to—real tiny, and Hans was living with him then. I guess I was living with my mother at the time. They, um—what was I telling you?

CP: The third store. You were living with your mother and her sister.

ED: Oh, it was—my father and Hans always thought that it was her—the friend he had, the ice cream man. His only thing he could do for his friend Alfred was to have a very small notice put in his window, because other people, you know, they had the notice. And so my brother used to tell me that the Nazis used to come around and see that everybody had these signs that should have had the signs in the windows. They suspected—well, they knew, or they thought that this old friend had something to do with just having them

have the small thing. But when they came to inspect it to see if they're following the rules, they would give him the size that he should have had. And so my father put it on the window, not to get any more trouble than he had. But as soon as they would go away, he'd say to Hans, "Take it down." (laughs) And then if they went by again and said, "Where is it? We don't see the sign," and he'll say, "Oh, Hans—it just fell down." (laughs) "Put it back up." So, you know, he had a sense of humor, too. It helped him.

CP: A sense of humor, and a really serious situation at the same time.

ED: And my brother loved that about him you know, about Dad.

CP: Did your brother take after your father, do you think?

ED: Yeah, a lot. Music. He just looks a lot like him—looked a lot like him.

CP: So you were talking about how your father ended up moving in with his sister.

ED: Well, that was—that came quite a bit later.

CP: Oh, okay.

ED: He couldn't even keep that little store that I've been telling you about. Nobody came, and they robbed everything there again that he had. And so he had to—he thought that if they went into Vienna—there were a lot of Jewish people there, and maybe they would get lost in the crowd somehow, you know, and they would feel safer there. So that's what they did. And he knew that he had a sister who lived there, and she had—she was renting an apartment, and lived there many years, I guess. It was a very meager sort of place. She never had a great deal of money.

He asked her, of course, if he could come and live with her, and she was glad that he would do that because, unlike my father—you know, the typical thing they used to say, "You look Jewish." My father never did look Jewish. I've got photographs of him. And she did: she had the red hair that they expected Jewish girls to have, and she just had, you know—she was brought up to be a Jewess. So, that was her. So she was afraid to go out in the streets, even if she could, because they were always looking. There were Nazis walking all over the place all the time. The slightest thing they would see, they would go

after them and they'd disappear. And of course, she lived alone; she was a widow, but she did have two sons. One of the boys was called Karl, and the older boy was Robert. The young one was fortunate enough to have people who took him to—I think he came to America straightaway, because they had friends there and they realized how things were happening in Europe, and they kindly offered to take Robert and Karl. They both went to—it was either England or straight to the U.S. I really don't know.

But so she was living alone in that little place she had, and she said, "If you would come and live with me"—she was very frightened all the time. Because he didn't look like he was Jewish, she felt very safe with him. She said, "Of course, you can sleep here. I have a little side thing." It wasn't actually a bed; it was like a couch type thing, and it was small, but he wasn't a big man, my father. And so that's—she said, "I can't even go shopping. I'm afraid they'll pick me up, you know?" So he would start doing things for her. I don't know for how long they did that. It was a considerable time, a year or two or so, but I can't be sure exactly how long.

CP: But he moved in there to help her out with the dangerous things.

ED: Yes. Yes. And of course, he had no income. He had no store, and nothing left from his radios or anything. So I guess they just, you know—she gave lessons. Oh, what is that thing? The making of hats, what do you call that?

CP: Oh, I forget what a hat maker is called.

Richard Schmidt: Haberdasher.

CP: Haberdasher?

ED: No. No, no, that's clothes. But the hats—you know, it's an art to making hats, ladies' hats and things. And she taught that to a few young girls who wanted to do that, so that's what her income was. They would come to her apartment, and she would give them lessons on that. So she got the little money that they could both eat; you see they just had to get together. And then it just got worse. He would—my father would—that wasn't enough for them to live on, you know, a few pennies here or there. And she had to pay rent, you know, too. And so he started looking in newspapers to see who had been—who had left their place to live, because a lot of Jewish people, if they could afford it and they had sense enough, they could leave at that point. So they would advertise their—he would see this is an empty place, and then he would somehow try to notify people who

were looking for a place to live, and he'd get a few shillings. They'd be very grateful, because Vienna didn't get any bigger, you know. (laughs) And so that was his side income. He didn't just sit home and do nothing. And Hans and Karl— Helene's little boy; he was about two years younger than my brother. They were teenagers by that time. Oh, gosh. I've lost my track of thought.

CP: That's okay. I'm actually wondering about you at that time, and we're kind of jumping around a little bit in time here. But there's a couple of things you said to me when we first talked that really stuck with me. A couple of them were—you said that you had a "double bad youth," because you had your parents—they were getting a divorce, but also the world was sort of falling apart around you. And you said, "I never knew where I was. I felt I was a nuisance." Can you tell me about that?

ED: Yeah. (laughs) Yeah, I just didn't know where I belonged, you know. I knew that everybody was having a bad time, but I had no way of knowing what could be done about it or anything. And then this thing with my mother and father—my mother, she tried to—she did. She took me away in the middle of the night, and she kidnapped me from my father's place. God knows why; I don't know.

CP: Do you know about how old you must have been?

ED: For that, I was about four years old, because I remember her coming into the house. We called it the house, the place where we lived, where my father lived. And she woke me up—I was asleep—and she brought—she put my clothes; she found them somewhere in the bedroom, I guess, and she started dressing me. And I was sort of dozing; I was half sleeping. It was a very cold, rainy sort of a night. She looked upset. She wasn't saying—they must have had a terrible row about something that I wasn't aware of. She was still upset, you know. Once she gets upset, she was always very upset. She just grabbed me and ran out of the house with me, and she jumped on—no, how did she get there? I don't know if she took—we didn't have a bus. Tramways we had. Yeah, I think that's what it was, from Mödling to Brunn, where she lived then.

She got off the tramway at a certain place: there was a little store there that was an ice cream store. It was raining and everything. She was still upset. And she ran into that store, and she said, "Help me, help me. There's a man following me," and she was crying and everything. She started—they told her she could stay in the store, I guess, and simmer down and all that. But I seem to remember, even as little as I was, there was a station for the tramway; it happened to be you can change tramways. They had a little shelter outside to wait for the next one or something. There was a light to light it up so you knew where to get on the next time. And you know, she was just grabbing me all this

time. I didn't know what was the matter with her. As I told you, they never told me anything. I just saw what was going on, and I didn't know what was happening. I was really little for that, you know, to know.

And I could see—there was a nice, big window in that store, and I could see the roof of the station that you could stand. I could see my father, and he had just a suit on, and a hat. He was dripping with water. And unfortunately—I've written all that myself sometime. But I never knew what happened after that, because I fell asleep again. Now, that's what I mean. I was pushed from one to the other for one reason or another.

CP: It sounds like, from what you've told me, from a young age you identified more with your father than your mother. Is that true? Your mother seems to be more absent than your father.

ED: Yeah, that's true.

CP: Why do you think that was? Do you have any idea?

ED: Well, my mother was so different from my father. I mean, inside, you know. I don't think she would likely give away even pennies to anybody. When she married him, she got into the business with him. She wanted to do things, you know, and my father was more saving things; he'd already done. He was about twelve years older than she was, in the first place. But maybe I'm rambling too much.

CP: I don't think so. I'm asking you some kind of in depth questions. I appreciate it. Your parents, they separated when you were young, and then your mother got remarried, is that right?

ED: Not for quite a number of years, but she had a male friend, yes.

CP: And you said that he couldn't get work. Do you remember that? Can you tell me that?

ED: Well, he was an engineer, and he was an Aryan. A very brilliant sort of brain he had. He was a nice guy, but they just lived together, you know, for as long as they were in Brunn. And I think I wasn't—I was a problem for her, because he used to come and stay

with her and everything, and he didn't like that, I don't think. He liked her, not me. (laughs) I mean, he didn't mistreat me or anything, but it was just a sense that he didn't want me there. So whenever I could, I guess I'd stay with Papa.

CP: But you would go back and forth, a little bit?

ED: Yeah, a little bit. Mainly when she was angry at my father: she'd come to Mödling and start a row, you know, and yell at the maid we had, the housekeeper. My mother was very clean and very special, you know; everything has to be just so. (laughs) And she would go in without telling us she was coming; she would just surprise us sometimes, and go through the little apartment we had, and ran her fingers around the furniture to see if it was not dusty and that sort of thing, and then yell at the maid. And she in turn, whoever she happened to be at that time, would run downstairs and into the shop where my father was, crying. I mean, my mother liked to have a flare up. It was none of her business, but that's what she was like. So the only times I ever saw them was if they'd been fighting.

CP: Well, I think what we'll do is there's a lot more of the story, mostly when you go into the convent and your family goes into hiding. We'll get to most of that, I think, after, on the second tape. But is there anything that we missed about your upbringing or what happened before you went into the convent, before you went into hiding that you'd like to talk about?

ED: Um—

CP: That's always the hardest question. (ED laughs) That's the end of the interview, when you say, "Did we miss anything?" and they're like, "No, we got this." Is there anything else, any other memories that you have from when you were young, that you'd like to share?

ED: Yeah. Let me see. I would just like to tell you what happened when my father decided he had to go to Vienna to his sister, because he had Hans, you know, he had to take his son with him. And that was the beginning of the real struggles for Hans and me.

CP: Why didn't he have to take you with him as well? I'm wondering. Why did he just take Hans and not you?

ED: Well, because maybe she wouldn't let him. I mean, she was very on and off. It was just a weird situation. In those days there were no divorces, you know, and things. And she had married into a Jewish family, and they loved her and they were very good to her, and she loved them. But it had to be her way, you know, or nothing. And to tell you the truth, of course, Hans was always her favorite. I didn't ever feel that she liked me, loved me.

CP: Wow.

ED: I was just a nuisance, you know?

CP: And so to have that going on, on top of all the other stuff.

ED: Then it gets to the really tough part.

CP: I think that's a good place to break, and we'll get to the tough part after lunch.

ED: Okay.

CP: Thank you.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins.

CP: Okay, this is tape two with our interview with Elisabeth Dixon, and we were just kind of wrapping up your childhood until right before you moved into a convent. And you were telling us a little bit more about your mother and her friend that became her husband. Could you tell me a little bit more about that, and how you got into the convent? What led up to that?

ED: Oh, yes, I think I can. Yes, absolutely. Let's see. (laughs) My mother had to earn her own living, really, because she wasn't married then. Her friend was very loyal to her and so on. So she had—Mother had a small little store that she opened in Brunn. In that store, all she could do was—you have to think back to the old-fashioned ways of listening to radios and things they used to have. Well, things would go wrong with the radios, and she could fix little things. There were—I can never remember what it was she used to do for them, but it may come to me later. But so **Friedl**, who's her friend, he also didn't have

any work. Couldn't find anything, for anything. So he decided—between them, they decided that the only way they could ever change anything was to get out of Austria. He would have to go to Germany. And so—am I saying that right? And so he said he would give it a try. He'd go first and see if it was any different in Germany. Well, Germany was very busy, and quite a lot of chances of getting work, the kind of work he needed to get. He was an electrical—

CP: Engineer?

ED: Engineer. And so I remember him taking off. They had a motorbike. (laughs) So strange. So he took the motorbike, and he motorbiked to—I don't know where it was exactly. Berlin or somewhere, I don't know. And my mother stayed back, because they'd had the clothes. They opened a little store for him in Enzersdorf. There was nothing doing there, you know, so they had to close that up, and he said he would have to go to a different place; it just wouldn't work. So, off he went, and he struck it fine. I.G. Farben took him on, grabbed him.

CP: That's a big company?

ED: Oh, yes, it's a huge company. And he started writing back to Mama, you know. "Oh, this is wonderful here!" Suddenly, there was nothing like poverty anymore in his life. He made so much money, compared to the way it was; he was speechless sometimes. But he just kept bombarding, with, "You have to come and join me! You have to come! I need you here. I want you out of the other place." So my mother was living in part of a very pretty house that was very close to a convent, still in Brunn. She was friendly with the owner of the house, and they became friends. Two women, you know. And so she used to speak to her about everything. I was too young to assist her or anything.

So, how did that go? I happened to be living with Mother at that time. I was just playing by myself, you know, but I knew that she was in the basement—which was not really a basement; it was just a little bit lower. It was a place where they store things in the house. And she was chatting to this friend, and she was talking to her about **Friedl**, that he wants her to come and he wants her to come. And she at first was reluctant and kept putting him off, and he was just getting hysterical waiting for her. And I heard her say to this friend, "You know, he sent me a letter the other day, and he said if I don't come soon, he's going to kill himself." He's not the kind of man you'd ever think would kill himself, but he was just crazy about her. And she said—and she was standing there, over boxes. I could see that myself. She knew I was around, you know, but like, "be seen and not heard." She pointed to them, because the friend said, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm packing. When he says that he's gonna kill himself, what can I do? I've got to go." And that's

where it started. That was one of her big problems, was me. He didn't say, "You and **Lilly**." That's my nickname, by the way, Lilly. And I wrote in my book that I'm writing, I think I said—what did I say? Oh, I can't get it. Oh, I don't know.

But anyway, she had this big problem. Where am I gonna be, because Hans was with Father now and Hans was starting high school or something. There wasn't room for me. So, I said she always would find ways to have her way. (laughs) She found a way to get rid of me, really. So she decided that it'd be a good idea if she got me in the convent: a sleep-around place, you know. I think when she divorced—I don't know who divorced whom, but when she left my father. I don't think you could have divorces in those days. But she always said she was divorced, so everybody thought she was. She was Catholic, and she—I've seen her—I used to see her once in a while to go into the church and pray. I never saw her go to mass, so I think they excommunicated her, whatever she did with her marriage. I don't know if they had such a thing. But so that was how it was.

And she went to see the head priest, you know, in the town, and spoke to him about her problems. Was there any chance that my little girl could go in the convent? Well, you know, I was never christened. I was never a member of any church, knew very little about religion at all, any religion. And so she had a number of interviews with him, and she could be very persuasive. So finally she told me that we're going to see this priest so-and-so—I don't remember his name. "He wants to see you." So I had to be interviewed, (laughs) and he decided that I'd be a fair sort of a candidate.

CP: Did you know why you were being interviewed? Did you know that you were going to possibly—

ED: No. I heard her say, you know, when she was packing. What could I do? And I thought about it, and when I wrote it, I said—I can't remember again. I thought that since she is so fireball-ish, you know, with all her plans and everything, she was just talking and she would never leave me. But I was wrong. She left me. But I don't know what kind of a story she told to the priest; I have no idea. He said, "Yeah, we can let her board, but of course she has to be christened. She has to be taught"—something else. And it was settled. That was it. I have no idea if she even had to pay him anything. I never saw or heard anything about that. I doubt that she could, because she didn't have any money. I don't know what story she told him.

So the arrangements were made that that's where I was going. And she said, "You know"—see, in that convent there were girls; it was just girls. Not many, it wasn't a huge place. Maybe in one of the better times there were maybe ten, ten of us in there, maybe fifteen. All ages, you know, till when you were ready to go to high school or something. I

think they couldn't take it anymore. But they teach you, and you sleep there and just live there. And a lot of the girls had parents who had stores, shopkeepers. They could afford to pay, you know. And so these parents would bring the girls on Monday morning or Sunday evening, but pick them up for the weekend to be at home, because their work or something allowed them to be at home with them. But so they were sort of semi-total livers there. (laughs) And she said, "At the weekend when I don't have the store anymore, when it's not open"—I didn't know she didn't have it anymore. But she said, "When the store's closed, I'll come and get you and you'll stay with me for Sunday, and it'll be nice, nice food and everything." She talked me into it. Well, I had no choice; I mean, that's what's gonna happen, and it happened.

My problems started then, because in the first place, I told you—or I didn't even say it yet. My mother was a very good cook and a wonderful housekeeper, and she cooked stuff that I liked, or I liked things that she cooked. She cooked with oil. Now, to me, that was important. In the convent, they used any kind of fat. Well, that didn't agree with my stomach—I wasn't used to it—and so, I couldn't eat the food. So, I didn't eat. I couldn't eat. That was gonna be a problem. So the nuns told her that if I don't start eating, she should take me out. She decided that she would bring things that she had cooked every day, and then I could eat, just till I got used to it. I mean, I thought it was forever, you know, but it wasn't. So she would bring me *gurkensalat*—it's cucumber salad; that still is my favorite salad—and a dish called *eiernockerl*. It's dumplings, and then it's covered in beaten-up eggs. And the two together make a very nice meal, if you're used to that kind of food, and that's what I was used to.

In the beginning, it worked, and then gradually I would say, "Where's my food?" and my mother said, "Well—" I said to my mother, "Why didn't you bring it for me?" and she would say, "But I did. I did, I did." It just dwindled away till I didn't get it anymore, so I had to sit and eat what they put in front of me. I was so—I don't know, I guess I had a sensitive stomach or something, but I would vomit. I couldn't eat the stuff that they gave me. And so the nuns were very strict people, I found out, as far as children were concerned. So they couldn't figure out what to do, you know. "Oh, gosh, she won't eat this either." They started to put the works on me. What they would do is make me sit at the table where the others had been sitting, and I had my own spot there, and I upchucked everything. They made me sit there, and they just made me sit there. The other kids were running away and everything; I had to sit there and just look at my plate. (laughs)

So that went on for quite a while. And then they said that can't work, either. So, what was it now? They said, I think, at that time, that if I didn't start eating, I would not be able to go home for a day or so, a week. And Mama came to see me, and she would talk to me and say, "I want you to come home." Little by little, that's how they weaned me to eat their food in the convent. You know, children can get used to most things, if you do it

long enough. And her visits, my mother's visits, taking me home weekends, just dwindled away.

CP: You said you were always the last kid to go home.

ED: Mm-hm. Well, when I'd be there, Friedl was there, and I know he didn't feel comfortable around me. He wanted just to be with her. So anyway, finally she got—the nuns and my mother, I don't know what they did, but we agreed to just stay there and do what they tell me. I was always told to do whatever I'm told, and I always did that in the end, anyway, 'cause I wanted to please everybody. You know, you feel wanted, really.

CP: Because you must have felt so isolated and alone.

ED: Yeah. So anyway, that was one thing. She then went away; she went to Germany. She fell into that wonderful life without any difficulties, because they could now buy a car, which is something you could never do in Austria at that time the way they were. He had had a motorbike, and he was lucky he had that. But not anymore: he had a car, and I think he even bought a little boat.

CP: Do you remember feeling any resentment about that: that you had to live alone, really, as a kid, and your mom was out there living this kind of lavish life?

ED: Exactly. Exactly. And she—by this time, of course, Mödling and all those places were overrun with—no, not quite. The Anschluss hadn't happened yet. But yeah, you see, I was out of everything. I didn't have a family. But before she went, I must say, before she went to Germany, she used to—I brought pictures; I can show you later. Her little store that she kept in Brunn was down on the main street of this little place, and she would walk home and pass the convent, and then the house that she lived in was just a few houses away, so she lived very close to the convent. When she didn't use to get me out anymore—you know, often—she decided—she said, “I can see where you're sleeping,” because for some reason I ended up near a—I have a picture, I think, of that too. But I could see the road from the window, the big windowsill, and I could crawl on there and I could see her. And she would then say, “I will wave to you, close to your bedtime.” We had to go to bed early anyway, in the convent, and she could close her store whenever she wanted. And she would stand there at the bottom and wave to me, and I would wave back.

But then there came times when I didn't see her anymore. Then, that's when she left for Germany. Of course, there were no ways that—I didn't hear, you know, I didn't get a letter from her, nothing. I didn't even know where she was until she would write to me, so I did get that eventually.

CP: You said even the letters stopped after a period of time, right? You were in there for a number of years.

ED: Two years.

CP: Two years. Did you have friends while you were in there, or did you feel different from the other girls?

ED: I was different, because most of them went home sometime or another, for weekend visits to their families.

CP: Did they tease you?

ED: No.

CP: Or was it more out of, you know, you were kind of—you didn't have too many friends?

ED: No. No, the girls were nice. They were all right, except the one. Our upstairs there was a fairly large room, and there were all the beds for everybody and so on. And next to it was a smaller room: it had two beds in it. After I had been there a while, I considered it my luck that the girl—one of the girls who had one of the two beds was taken out. She was maybe too old or something; she didn't come anymore. And I got that bed. The girl that was with me, she was a little bit older than I was. She knew my secret of waving to my mother—we kept that a secret—and she started to wave to her, too, to my mother, because I said—I think I felt that she felt it was her mother waving to her, too. Everybody was lonesome, really. I wasn't the only lonesome child, I think, but there were different reasons and different degrees of loneliness. So, we became friends.

And all of a sudden she came back from her home stay—she was gone a whole weekend, every weekend; they took her away—and she said, “I want to share a secret with you,

too.” And I said, “Well, what is it? What do you want to tell me?” We weren’t supposed to speak—once we were in the bedrooms, it’s finished for the day—but we could whisper because we were the only two people there. And she said, “Well, I have something, and I need your help with it. I made it.” I said, “Well, what did you make? What happened?” She said, “I’ve been—you watched me bring little things from my house when I come back every week.” I said, “I didn’t know what was in your little bag.” And she said, “Well, I’ve been secretly bringing wire and big glass balls, and then some different sizes of those balls, and some string and that kind of thing. But now it’s finished, so now I need your help.” So I said, “What do you want me? What did you do?”

She showed me this thing: she bent the wires, ’cause she had no tools or anything, and she made a ball with certain distances, so that the bigger balls—the balls would have to be willing to fit, to come through, if she moved this thing, but not really out. It’d still be inside, but they would have enough room to sort of come out a little bit. And I said, “Well, what are those things doing? What are you doing with that?” She said, “Well, I have to cleanse myself.” She decided that she was an evil person—they were all evil persons, you know, in the convent, (laughs) that’s terrible. And she said, “I know that there are some saints who will appreciate my doing this to myself, but I can’t do it enough. I want you to do it.” I said, “What do you do with it?” She said, “Well, I get hold of the string—it’s attached there—and I do this on my back. I throw that thing on my back. But that’s so hard to do. I want you to do it for me.” I said, “No! I won’t do that!” And that broke up our friendship.

CP: Because you wouldn’t cleanse her of her sins with her mortification thing? Wow. And she was about your age as well?

ED: She was maybe a year or two older than I was. I was eight; from eight to ten years, I was in the convent.

CP: And you wouldn’t do it just because you didn’t want to hurt your friend? You didn’t believe that it was helping her?

ED: Well, I didn’t care her reason for it, but I wasn’t gonna hit her and draw blood and stuff. But you see, in the convent you get all kinds of weird things—at least then you did; I don’t know anything about it now. But that always stuck with me. They’re very—my experience was I saw too much—just sort of weird results of when these nuns would do something that normally wouldn’t be done. There was one girl—I think her name was Martha. Very quiet, very nice girl; always does what she’s told, and smart and nice. And that poor girl, she had one fault: she was a bed wetter. They would tell her, “Don’t do this,” da-da-da, but she couldn’t control it somehow, and she would do it every day. So

what they used to do was take her in the upstairs place where they used to do the laundry and stuff, and it was right next to where we were sleeping, and they'd take hairbrushes and take that child into that room and hit her, her bare bottom, and she would cry and she would cry. You know, I think—they had two young nuns who would do this to her. They were told to do that; that was their job. They seemed quite oblivious that they shouldn't be doing this. And to this day, I wonder what happened to her, how she—finally, her parents took her out of the convent. But they were cruel to her, and they threatened her with not being allowed to go home; like they did with me, because they didn't know what else to do. The parents finally kept her home.

CP: But you ended up kind of just having to take part in the normal convent life. Do you remember—can you tell me about your eighth birthday? Is that when you were baptized, you said?

ED: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Yeah. (laughs) Before—it wasn't First Communion, the thing I had to take, too. So I got some lessons, you know, so I knew a little bit about it, which I've forgotten already. (laughs) But they arranged for that. I think it was around my birthday, as a matter of fact. What was it, now? Yeah. My mother had invited her mother—my grandmother, who lived in Vienna—to come for this party that she was going to throw. I never heard of a party before, for anything. And that little house she was living in, it was very nice: it had a verandah outside. She invited—I don't know, all kinds of people I didn't know, never seen before or since. There were some young children there, too. They figured I'm young and it's my party really, so they have to have a few children. And they put us outside on the verandah: the other party was in the house, and they were drinking wine and having a good time. My grandma would occasionally come out to where we were, the children. I didn't know any of these children. She would bring us some goodies to have, too. And I said I didn't know what went on, because I didn't know who they were or what they were doing. So the only time I ever saw my grandma come away from her house—I only saw her maybe four times in my whole life. I loved her; she was a very sweet woman.

But anyway, before that was, of course, the thing to go to church and do all this stuff. Before the whole setup began, suddenly somebody said, "Oh, she's Leopoldine and Alice and all these names." They're saying, "We can't do it—she doesn't have a holy name. We have to have a name for her of an angel or something." So they started saying, "What name would you like?" I don't know. They started saying all kinds of saints—Saint So-and-So and Saint So-and-So. I just said to myself, "Mama, where are you?" She wasn't even there for that for me. So, one of the nuns happened to say, "How about Elisabeth?" I said, "That'll do. That's it." That's how I got Elisabeth.

CP: Wow. That's amazing.

ED: Yeah.

CP: We just have a couple more minutes left on this tape, but I just want you to talk about—you said there's—you have one nice thing that happened to you while you were there. I guess you were musically talented when you were young?

ED: Yeah.

CP: Can you tell us that, really quickly? Can you tell us that story?

ED: Yeah. Yes, that was after I'd been there a little while. I'd got used to the eating and all these other things. I had a very good memory, and I had a very good ear, too—which I don't have neither one now. (both laugh) But I had it. We had to go for a little Mass every day before we go to school, you know, in another building on the premises. So somehow, one of the nuns, who used to play a little organ that they had in the chapel, she realized that I could sing very quickly and remember songs. So it became a habit with her to, while the nuns and everybody were coming in to seat themselves to these events in the morning; she could very quietly play the melody of the next thing they were going to have in the chapel. And I could sing it. They didn't know; they were busy seating themselves and the children, whatever. The only one that was playing the little organ and I were busy getting this song ready, and I could sing it. I had a nice voice (laughs) for a little kid. It was nothing to me, and I was just natural because I'd always heard music at home and everything. It was all very nice for me. And then they started to realize, and they started calling me **Lilly** in the convent. So they said, "Yeah, she can do that. She doesn't practice for hours before or anything." And so they were kind of glad to see that. So somehow, they said, "Well, she's our"—they gave me a name.

CP: You said they called you the Little Nightingale.

ED: I was Nightingale, Little Nightingale.

CP: Well, I think that's a good place to stop this tape, and we'll pick it up with the rest of it on tape three.

ED: Don't ask me to sing for you. (laughs)

CP: All right. Thank you.

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins.

CP: Okay, this is tape three of our interview with Elisabeth Dixon, and is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about your time that you spent in the convent when you were young?

ED: Yes, I think I would, a number of things: some not as interesting, maybe, as others. But it happened after I was there and I knew my mother had left and so on, or was about to leave. I suddenly realized that I was all alone, and that's not a good feeling when you're about eight or nine years old. So, what had to be had to be. I had no choice. Let's see. First—that was my first experience of homesickness. I had lots of practice, you know, as a little one from here to there, but this was—I was older, and I just missed everybody from the family, because there was no way I was going to see them, I thought, not for a long time. And that was—for that, I don't think I had any friends or anything in the same position. They all were moving around and going home and coming back, and I never was. So the weekends, very often I was there alone, and everybody else—just thinking about them, wondering when they're coming back, the other kids in the school. It was not a very happy time.

Let's see. (shuffles papers) Okay. My mother was packing to get on her trip; she just decided that was it. The girls, we saw a youngish nun, and she was very pretty, and that's unusual, to see that in a nun. And she seemed to be, under all her costume and everything, slender and little—like a young little girl, actually. She was—she took over from another nun, and their job had been—the older nun had been, and she will do now, to bring our food to our building and then share it out and see that everybody has something to eat. So she was there alone. The way it was set up, there was quite a large—it really wasn't, because when I went back again, nothing was large in the convent. To me, it seemed it was quite large, for the tables for the girls to eat—to eat from, I should say. Yeah, I don't quite—this is confusing. And we liked her; she was so sweet.

But this room, our dining room sort of thing, had a double door at one end. The food was brought by probably another nun from the kitchen, which was in another building, and I think they rolled it somehow, in big—I don't know what. I don't know, like buckets almost. And we had to take turns, you know, to go up with the plate, and she would give us something and we would go and sit down again. We had her, and we were so glad to see her because she was so different. Nuns get sort of a pallid look after a while, especially as they get older, and they don't look too happy, really. But she was still sort of

love and happiness, I think. She even had a cross on her—they all do that, on their belt thing. So she would walk so quickly, compared to the older nuns that she would sort of hit the thing that was holding the cross, and it would bounce on her. (laughs) We just enjoyed looking at her.

Well, that went on for a little while, and then we suddenly noticed—you know kids, they find things out. After she would have given us our first helping of everything and we were settling and eating, she would disappear. She would go behind one of the open doors, and then come back again. You know, these nuns have big sleeves, and they always put their arms into the open sleeves; they are supposed to pray all the time. And then if anyone wanted more, they could ask for more and she would take her hands out of her sleeves and give them more and so on. But we couldn't figure out why she walks away after we have our—after she feeds us at first. We couldn't figure what happened.

But then we noticed that her habit wasn't fitting the way that we were used to. The habit is the gowns that they wear. We just—you know, sometimes little girls imagine things, but we didn't imagine this. We noticed the difference, especially because her cross wasn't jumping around as much, and she wasn't moving quite as much, and she kept disappearing still behind the door. Sometimes we think we saw that she was actually chewing. And then we realized that she's going behind the door because she's hungry, so she thought, "Well, there's so much food here for the kids; they'll never miss that."

We figured out between us that she goes behind the door and does this with her hand and then puts that in the sleeve, and then when nobody was looking she'd eat it. Nuns are not allowed to do that. They only are allowed, at least in this particular set of nuns—she would only be allowed to eat in her building at a set time. They had their own dining room and everything. But I guess we thought that maybe she had not pleased somebody or something and they were punishing her, not giving her enough time to eat in her own kitchen. Well, the cross stopped getting kicked around, and she was just not the same thing. And that went on for quite a while, and then she disappeared and they exchanged her with another nun and we didn't see her for a little while.

Then one night, not too long after, I woke up in the middle of the night—and I woke up one or two of the other girls, I think, or they woke up anyway as well. We heard a lot of crying and moaning in the middle of the night, when you hear this when you're a youngster like that, and we were just shocked. We couldn't imagine who would be crying in the middle of the night. And then eventually, when all of a sudden the crying and so on stopped, then we heard what sounded like a baby crying. We figured she had a baby, and we didn't see her for quite a while.

Then in the chapel—she came back a few weeks later and we recognized her, but she didn't look like she ever did. She was getting that pallor of the other nuns, and she was not so happy. She was really very sad looking. We never—I never found out just what happened to her, but there was always talk that if a nun had a child when she shouldn't have, they do away with them, because you're not married to Christ anymore if you do that, so you're out of the Church. That was the way they looked at it. So, we were very sad about that.

But many years—I went again—I have to go forward for just a minute. I would say maybe fifteen years ago I went back, and that time I made sure that we were in the nurse's—in the nuns' house. I asked while we were waiting to have someone come and speak, or let me speak to them. I asked one of the nuns, "What happened to the older nuns when we were there?" They said, "Well, there's only one left that I can think of, but she is getting on pretty much in years, and she hardly ever leaves the house anymore and so on." I said, "Well, I'd like to see her and talk to her." She said, "Well, I'll see if she's having dinner, and if you can leave and come talk to you." So she did, and we went to a little private room and we spoke and we talked about the old times and so on. That's when I found out how they fared during the Hitler time. I'll tell you that again later.

So at the end of our talk—she was very friendly. She had no teeth and she was very thin, but I could still see—the eyes, I recognized. I talked about what she had to do while they were not free. I was surprised, really, to see anyone left in the convent from my time. And I finally said to her, "Do you remember at all when you used to feed—bring the food over to us?" I didn't say any more than that. And she got very quiet, and she said, "I think you must be making a mistake. I never had anything to do with the girls who were living here then." Now, I know and she knows that that's not true. So, you know, there are things that happened in the best of homes. It was sad. But that was just very recently, this story.

CP: So do you think she just—it was too difficult for her to recall that and talk?

ED: Yes. She didn't want to remember it. She was very old by this time. Well, old for a nun. I felt sorry for her. She was so pretty.

CP: And we'll talk a little bit more about this at the end of our interview. But for you to talk about these memories—some of them sound pretty difficult to talk about. Is it hard for you to talk about them today? Or, because you've thought about it and written about it, it's a little bit easier? What's that experience like?

ED: No, it's not—I haven't written anything. I haven't added anything to the (inaudible) book for three years, ever since my brother died, because—you'll begin to understand why later on, too. I mean, I live with this all the time, in one way or another. The only way I think I can handle it is to see the fun side, if I can. It doesn't get easier.

You see, when I was writing—of course, Hans was the writer. If I needed a certain expression or something, I'd pick up the phone and say, "Hans, what should I say? Is this better than that?" and he'd tell me. I miss that. And he would send me articles that he had written and say, "Now this one, only tell me if it is good." So we kind of encouraged each other, because it was his career, so he didn't need much encouraging. But I did, and he realized it. It's a terrible thing. I could discuss anything with him, and did, all that we were able to talk about together. Some of it we couldn't, because we didn't know how to express it in English, and it was something that we'd never heard in German. So, we were both deaf and dumb in some places. But I miss him very much.

CP: And even back in that time, when you were young and still in the convent, he was one of the only people that would come and visit you. Is that right?

ED: Yes, he did come a few times, and he even brought Karl one time—his cousin, you know. And I remember—now I'll tell you that little incident. He picked me up from the convent; he had to get permission to take me out for a couple of hours or something, and they said, "Oh, sure, and then bring her back." The three of us walked down away from the convent, and they thought they were doing me a great favor, because they knew that I loved ice cream. (laughs) So they walked down the street with me, and they said, "There's an ice cream shop down there. I'm sure you're going to love it," 'cause I didn't like walking too much, (laughs) even then. But they said, "It's worth it." There was no bus or anything like that. There was a tramway, but that was for longer rides, not just a block or two down.

We got to the door of the ice cream shop, and they went ahead of me. Hans said, "Well, come on, **Lilly**, choose what you want, what kind of ice cream." They didn't have many choices then. "Come on and see what you want." And I could not get up that step and go into that shop. I don't know why, and they didn't know why. They said, "Come on! Come on in," and I said, "I can't. I'm not coming, I can't." And only when I grew up and thought about it, I've been wondering what had happened. All of a sudden, I realized that was the shop that I vaguely remember when my mother kidnapped me from my father when I was real small. It was really—I never knew exactly what happened, I told you, at the end. But I had such a clear vision it would happen again, and I was older and I could then understand. I told him that "I finally found out why I couldn't go in with you." What it ended was the two boys brought me ice cream outside that I could eat. But I could not move back into that store. Weird, isn't it?

CP: It's pretty amazing.

ED: Yeah. But I was glad that I finally realized what had happened. It's just too bad a memory. It just doesn't work anymore.

CP: Well, it seems to work pretty well, at least as I can see it. (ED laughs) So, what happened? How did you get out of the convent? What happened before you left?

ED: Well, the convent was getting smaller and smaller, more and more people. This is now—see, when the Anschluss happened, the nuns had known, or they had been told by their higher-ups, to start growing their hair, because under the thing they have on their heads, they shave. You're not supposed to have the beauty of hair or anything when you're that kind of a nun. But they were allowed, and they were told to let their hair grow, because they said, "We may at any time have to run away. You may not be able to stay to be nuns, to be looked at like that." Of course, us kids, we noticed that occasionally we could see hair under their veil things, you know.

All of a sudden—I mean, I had no idea what Anschluss meant, or what Jews meant, or what anything meant. But I started to learn, because they finally explained to us a little bit. The Anschluss is that now we're not Austria; we're part of Germany, because Hitler just decided—he was an Austrian, you know. (laughs) Nasty man. We belonged to him, because we speak German, you know, and all that, so why not? And they started an invasion: that was what it was, but there was nothing fought because of all of that propaganda that was coming forth when they suddenly showed us all their flags and armbands and "Heil Hitler." No more "Good morning"; it's all "Heil Hitler." No "Good night"; it's "Heil Hitler." And all these uniformed people walking around, and there were too many—well, I want to finish the first thought.

Now, where was I? Oh, the nuns one day, not too long after that, took us outside, the few of us that were still there in the convent. She said, "If you look out in the sky, you'll see airplanes," which we, I don't think, had ever seen in that area anyway. She said, "Well, look up. That's because Hitler says that we belong to them now." So, that was the way I was told the Anschluss had started. But they were all welcomed by all these stupid people. (laughs) They didn't understand, or didn't want to understand, what was going to follow after that. See, he had an easy time with Austria, because they were still poor from prior collapses of everything, and there were no jobs and he promised them all that. And of course, he said, "I'll give you enough to do so you have enough to live on and then some more"—all his propaganda, all his people around him that are yelling all these good

things. And you know, when you've had nothing for a long time, you say, "Heck, it'd be nice to work again and have a little house or something." And that's how he won them over, I think, without a shot being fired.

CP: And so at this time, the convent is shrinking. People are leaving left and right.

ED: Yes, yes. And then there came the day when I was just there. I didn't know; nobody talked about anything to me. If I asked anything, they just said, "Well, you're here. We're here with you; don't worry. Papa will come and Mama will come." Well, one day, a nun called up in the room that I was in, and she said, "Come down, come down to the courtyard. Your mama is here." Well, that was the first time almost in two years that I had heard that. So she said, "Hurry up. She's there, she's in a hurry. Go and see her." And she said, "I think your brother's here, too." Well, I wanted to see Hans more than her. (laughs) I ran down, and that's when this thing comes about with the packaging. I didn't have anything.

But so she approached me, you know—like, if I saw someone, or now that I've had four children of my own (laughs)—it's unbelievable that after she hadn't seen me all this time, that she wouldn't run to me and kiss me or something. She didn't, she just was so busy with herself. I think she didn't know what to do, really. But she just came, and I guess maybe she gave me a kiss on the cheek or something, I don't know. And Hans sort of lingered back a bit, I guess to give her the room to talk to me or something, or hug me or something. Well, I didn't work that way, but he didn't want to get into an argument either. He didn't know what was going to develop.

And she just said to me, "Go and pack your things, because you and Hans are going on a *große*—what is it called? *Große*—well, it meant a big journey. "The two of you." Like, I'd never been further than you could see, and all of a sudden I'm gonna go on a big trip somewhere? So she said, "Now, you hurry up," and she gave me a little suitcase that was made of paper. You know, not leather or anything like that.

CP: Like cardboard, right?

ED: Cardboard, yeah, just a small thing. She said, "Come on now, hurry up." That's when I said, when I was writing about it, I didn't have the heart to tell her I didn't even have anything to put in it, 'cause what I had, I was wearing. (laughs) That's where I was. That's when we left, and we—it's a little bit hazy. I don't know when they exactly came to get me, you know. I don't think they took me that day, but pretty soon I was gone, and

she took me to—where did she take me? She took me to her mother's house, my grandma, and in the meantime must have told them what was happening, about leaving.

CP: Where was her mother's house at the time?

ED: In Vienna. They always lived in Vienna, in an apartment building somewhere.

CP: And your father was away, but he knew that things were getting bad and he knew that he needed to find a place, at least for his kids. Is that right?

ED: That is right. But he had been fighting and standing in rows from morning till night, getting in all kind of weather and everything. There were lines all over this road or whatever; there was no room in any indoors. Just all over these people, and they were all hoping to get their children on a list that they could export them somewhere.

CP: So he wanted to get you on the Kindertransport list.

ED: Oh, yes. He worked his bones waiting and lining up and getting cold and getting wet and all that. He just did it all the time, till finally our names came up. But nowhere did it say that we would be together, Hans and I.

CP: You and your brother.

ED: Yeah. But it was so bad that no matter what it was, if we can go separate or something, "I'm gonna send you." And at that point, I'd like to tell you what I think now, and I wrote not long ago. I was thinking about that, and I said that my oldest son, Michael, has two children. One of these years that I'm talking about now, his children were the same age difference and the same ages as my brother and I were in my time, and it struck me. "Really, I have to tell something to Michael here." And I asked him. I said, "Would you"—'cause I was talking to him about these sort of things; he always liked to hear about it. I said, "What would you do? You have two children which you adore. Could you ever just pack them up and tell them, 'I don't know when I'll see you, but it won't be long,' and send them away to a place you don't know, people you don't know, languages you don't know? And all of a sudden, you're in this train and you're going to this place. Could you do that?"

CP: It's hard to even imagine it. It's really outside.

ED: That's what he said, exactly. He held my hands very tight, and he said, "I could never do that mom." And I said, "Well, even if you thought there was a terrible alternative?" He said, "I don't think I could." So, I've always remembered that. But the thing is, I think it was the fact that our father cared so much for us. He just knew that's the only thing he can do; otherwise, we'll just get killed, because that's how it was going on. And my mother wasn't at it, but I heard later from Michael—from Hans—that she came down from Germany when she heard that he was—I think he had to get a signature from her or something that she would allow that to happen. She came to Vienna to talk to him and say, "What are you dreaming of, to send the children away?" All of a sudden, she was a good mother, you know. And he said yes, and she made such a fight about that. She said, "England or the places? No, that's too far. I have relatives or friends in Holland, and I have friends in France," I think she said, too. "They'll take care of them." But she hadn't done anything about it prior to this. She just heard. And my father said, "No, they're going to England." And finally, after a lot of to-do, she must have signed or something. But we went.

CP: You have a very powerful memory of that train station when you left.

ED: Oh, yes.

CP: Can you tell us about that?

ED: Yeah.

CP: Can you describe that for us?

ED: Well, I hadn't ever been on a big train, I don't think, before that. But it was evening, I think, when my dad—only my dad took us to the station. My mother had gone back to Germany. And the station was fairly filled with many—obviously parents, with their children. There was so much talking, you know, between them, and tension, and the smell of the smoke from the engine. It was kind of warming up or something already; there was much more time. And then as the time grew a little shorter, I actually think I saw somebody, a woman. She could not—when her child was about to get on the train, she couldn't let her go. She got her through the window, and she said, "I can't let you go." My dad must have felt just as bad as she did, but he had the love to let us go.

CP: The wisdom to let you go, as well, to know that he needed to let you go. That was—

ED: That was in the evening, and the train—we were on the platform most of the time, and then finally we realized that it was time for the train to go, and they started shouting. “Get the kids on the train and say goodbye,” and that sort of thing. So then there was a lot of crying and a lot of hugging, and some of the children didn’t want to go. It was just a very sad thing. There were about, I would say, maybe close to fifty of us. I could be mistaken by some, but it was quite a good crowd of kids. It was one of the last trains to get refugees out of Vienna.

CP: And you up to that point lived with so much confusion and isolation. What did you think was happening at that moment? Can you remember at all?

ED: All I cared was that Hans was with me. The train then—there was a whistle blown or something, and we all had to be on board. He and I ran to the first window we saw, and our father was out there. He found us, which we knew that he would. He was still saying, “We’ll see you soon. It won’t be for too long, and we’ll see you again.” Then the last thing—and then the train started to move, slowly at first, of course. So he walked along with us on the platform, and as the train hurried more, he hurried more. He was running, finally. And he said—he sort of called back to Hans and me. He said, “*Gewährt Sie dem Kleinen.*” He meant, “Take care of the little one.” That was me. And then the train just hurried out, and he was gone.

CP: And that was the last time that you saw your father?

ED: Mm-hm.

CP: And Hans must have taken that to heart, because he ended up taking care of you, right?

ED: Yeah. And you know, that’s quite something, because he was only about fourteen years old himself. And he was used to playing in the woods, you know, in the Vienna Woods with his boy friends, go to the swimming pool in the summertime with the other friends. He was a champion swimmer and all that stuff, didn’t have that much to do with me. You know, typical teenager, with the nuisance sister. (laughs) It didn’t turn out that way, at all.

CP: So you take this train to England. What happens? You get to England; you get on the next station?

ED: No, we could only go as far as Holland. (laughs) We could have but (inaudible). No.

CP: Oh, then you had to take a boat ride. Is that right?

ED: Wait a minute.

CP: A train to a boat?

ED: In Holland—oh, I have to tell you first. That train started going, and I think it slowed down somewhere down the line again. Somebody said, “These are the”—there were the Nazis on board, to examine the kids and make sure they’re supposed to be there, if they’ve been signed in and everything; or if they’re carrying anything they shouldn’t be, they’d steal it from them. You know, the parents might have given them some gold things or something, and they wouldn’t get it anymore. It was really nasty, and I was petrified of that. I had a little gold ring from my mother, with a little stone. It wasn’t a real stone, you know; it was just the fact that she’d given it to me. And do you know what a muff is?

CP: (murmurs no)

ED: A muff is—

CP: Oh, okay.

ED: A hand warmer, you know. Well, I had a little hand muff. I said to Hans, “What’s going on? What’s happening?” He said, “Well, I tell you what. You’d better not let them see that ring, because they’ll take it away from you.” I said, “What do I do? What should I do with it?” He said, “Well, I’ll make a little tear in the muff, inside. Put it in there, and then look like you did nothing. (laughs) Because if he sees that, you’re not gonna keep it.” And that’s what I did. That was the first thing that he really did for me, willingly. So those huge men came on—they were so big compared to us; we were all kids. They didn’t actually touch me or anything that I had on me, but I was sitting like—I didn’t know if I looked guilty, or if they would look at me. I was scared. But they didn’t bother

us. They tried to look as though they were very fierce, and I don't really think they were. But they were Hitler's people.

So that train then went as far as the Hook of Holland, and at the Hook of Holland, still in the—wait a minute now. In Holland, the train stopped, of course, because it couldn't go any further. Let me see. Yes, they pulled up in another station. I think I must have dozed off; it was evening already, and I was quite young, eight years—not even eight years old. What was it now? It stopped, and some of the bigger boys that were with us as refugees—we thought we'd better ask somebody why it's stopping; we were afraid that we were going to be examined again or something. And somebody yelled out, "No, we're in friendly Holland." They said, "Look out the window." So it was stopping, and we looked out of the window and it was—the platform was crowded with women, Dutch women. Each one had a big sack of something: it was food they were handing us.

CP: Wow.

ED: And there was milk in there. I don't know, a little bit of fruit or something. What else was in there that they gave us? Oh, sandwiches, of course, which wasn't very well known in those days. But they did it on white bread. I, for one, had never seen white bread in my life, because the European bread is so good, and the best kind is not the white bread. I said to Hans, "Look, Hans. They even gave us cake." (both laugh) And Hans said, "You silly thing, you. (both laugh) You have a lot to learn."

CP: It must have been a disappointment when you realized it was just white bread. No?

ED: I thought it was heavenly.

CP: Okay, okay.

ED: I was hungry! I didn't care what it was. And so then—I have a Dutch daughter-in-law, and I know her mom and everything. Whenever I used to tell **Ellen** about it, my daughter-in-law, I would cry. I said, "It could have been your mother standing there." There were all ages of people handing us this food. "It was such a kindness that I can't tell you." She's a good kid that we have here. Where was I now? Oh, and when we had pulled out of the station—no, before we pulled out of the station. We had a boat, quite an old boat, waiting for us, to take us across the—what is that horrible crossing you have to make for England?

CP: The Channel?

ED: The Channel. The Channel is a wild piece of water. (laughs) That's what we had to get over. There's no other way to get there; they didn't have a Chunnel yet or anything like that. It also was dark and raining, and our sort of—the lady that looked after us, or tried to look after us, made sure we were all lined up, you know, squished together, so we would quickly go as one. Then she said, "Now, as long as we're all quiet and we're all here and everything, now we go on a boat ride. She said, "Run, because it's dark, and we need to hurry up. It's late. Let's go." So I remember looking at the floor—it was dark and wet, because we'd been on the train, so it wasn't like that. Well, that was what it was. She just told us, "Get on it, get on it, get on it. Let's get in," just pushing us in, almost, to get away from there, because there was still a chance that they could have made us turn around. We were too close, still, to Germany.

So we did, and we were headed for London. I think it was to London, yeah. I wrote about that once, too, and I said I was very tired, so the lady that received us in the boat, she could see that I was really weary and I wanted to sleep. She thought I was just so unhappy. Well, I wasn't happy or unhappy. I was nothing; I just wanted to sleep. I was cold. And she brought a blanket from somewhere, and she wrapped me in it, and she said, "Now, you sleep here, and I'll wake you up when you need to get up." And the next time I woke up was when we were in England.

CP: Well, I think that's actually a perfect place to stop for this tape, and we'll pick it up when you wake up in England on the next tape.

ED: Okay.

Part 3 ends; part 4 begins.

CP: Okay, this is tape four of our interview with Elisabeth Dixon. And where we left off is you'd fallen asleep on your boat trip over to England, and you wake up and all of a sudden you're there.

ED: That's right. We landed, and let's see we had to get into a—where did we land? I think we landed in London, and it was morning, close—it was quite a crossing, I guess. I don't know—I slept. Now, when we docked, we somehow had to get on a train again, and there was another lady from the Society of Friends waiting. They helped us all along. She said she wanted—she got out with us and said, "We're in London now. We have your

parents waiting somewhere here, so you have to listen. Don't be rowdy; just listen for your name, because you won't know who it is." And I think I wrote that they gave us—it's an identification that we could hang over ourselves, so that the parents could understand that this is their child, or the child they're gonna look after for a while. But I said, "This is not like the identity cards that they put on people that we had to leave behind, have to wear all the time. We're wearing this for a different reason. We're free now." So that was that.

And then she said, "Now, the ones that are being picked up here, we'll start with that. You get out, and the ones that are not, you'll make another trip with me." So she looked after us. On the platform, when we landed—it must have been in London. (laughs) Yes, it has to be because, yes, she said somebody's name, and two parents came and took one child away. This all went very smoothly, and there's always one child going, one child going, and we were still there. We hadn't heard our names, and we were getting more worried. They're taking one child; who's gonna take two? You know what is this? So, there's nothing we could do about it, except just worry about it. Hans, I think, to just soothe me, said, "You don't know any English," and I said, "I know I don't." (laughs) But he says, "I want you to say some English words." I said, "How? I don't know any English."

He said, "Well, you know, we're here in London now. You can say London. There's a gentleman that's been over there watching this." I hadn't noticed anybody, but he had, and he was a very nicely dressed gentleman and he had an umbrella, because it's always raining in England. He had a hat on, a nice hat. And Hans said, "I want you to go to that gentleman, and I want you to ask if he can tell you where we are." I said, "I don't know how to say that." He said, "Well, I'm telling you how to say it." So he told me what to say, and I went. I said, "Do I have to?" "Yes, you have to," he said. I went over to him, and I said in my way—I don't know how it came out, but I said, "Please, sir, tell me—would you tell me if this is—would you tell me if we're here in London Town?" And the gentleman looked at me, and he smiled a little bit and he said, "Yes, my dear, you're in London." I always cry when I remember that. So, he was very nice.

CP: And eventually you and your brother—you said you were the last two, right?

ED: Well, yeah, just about the last two. We were still worried. Hey, they all left and we didn't. All of a sudden, a little old lady came down to the platform, and he said, "There's still somebody here." It turned out to be our foster mother. She was a little sixty year old lady who looked like she was about seventy-eight or something. (both laugh) I shouldn't say that. She was an elderly looking woman, for her age.

CP: And her name was Maud, is that right?

ED: What's her first name? Oh, Maud Harker.

CP: Harker.

ED: Maud, M-a-u-d, Harker.

CP: H-a-r-k-e-r?

ED: K-e-r. And she didn't—you know, she was as scared as we were, I think. I mean, she took a chance. She was just an old lady. But she had a friend who had a car waiting for us, because we—wait a minute. Where did they take us? I think somehow we landed in Leeds. You must have heard of Leeds, in England. But we weren't gonna live in Leeds; she doesn't live in Leeds, and it's quite a way away from Halifax, which is where we went. She spoke not a word of English; I couldn't understand it, nothing, just like we couldn't understand her. But the lady who was there to sort of give us away, she said, "Well, that's your new mother, to take care of you." But then she went off, and that was it. So she took us in the car. She was talking a mile a minute in English. (both laugh) It's like you're deaf and dumb all of a sudden, if you know nothing of what everybody is saying. It's a very weird feeling. But anyway, that was going to be our life, so something had to be done. She took us in that car, and the friend was driving us then to Halifax, to her house where she lived. Let's see. Well, then we got out. We couldn't even say thank you, because we didn't know how to do that. It was dark by the time we got there. She took us into the house, and we realized very quickly that there was a young man there, too, and an older man. The older man was her husband, and she had a son.

CP: Jack?

ED: Jack.

CP: And Ben was the husband?

ED: Ben was the husband. You know more than I do. (both laugh) Did I tell you that?

CP: I got it from you, yeah.

ED: Oh, thank you. So, yes.

CP: And you said Jack was about five years older than your brother?

ED: Yes, but they had the same birthdays. Weird. And we learned much later that it was Jack who persuaded his parents to take the two children. They were told that we would be two; we didn't know that. So we were very relieved to be together, first of all, so there were two of us who couldn't speak anything. Hans knew an odd word from school or something, but nothing that he could do a conversation in. And we quickly realized that they had—Jack or somebody—it must have been Jack, because the woman was with us. He must have prepared an extra special evening meal to welcome us, which was very nice. The father—well, the reason the father couldn't have done it was because it turned out—well, I'll tell you in a minute about that.

My brother has a thing that he cannot eat or do anything with fish, no matter what it is. It seems when he was a little boy, he swallowed a bone or something, and he had such a scare he just—all his life lasted this horror of fish. He just couldn't. And of course the English love fish, and they thought then—and I'm sure they do still—that it's a very good meal, you know. Besides, we were hungry again. So they had set the table in the kitchen, but it was a set table and they all sat down and started eating with us. Well, Hans was sitting this side of me, and I was sitting next to him, and of course we could just look at each other every now and then. We couldn't say anything even to each other.

But there was the moment when Hans was about to put his fork in his mouth, and I quickly said, "Hans, that's fish!" (laughs) He had to put it down. It was one of his most embarrassing moments ever, because he couldn't explain why, and I couldn't, and we knew that they were trying to be very kind. Oh, it was just a terrible thing. And they were going to keep us for a while, you know. Oh, it was awful. (laughs) But eventually, he hated it so much—the fish—that he managed enough words somehow, or just sign language or something, to make them understand that he just can't tolerate it or something. So he said—he told me then that—well, I knew I was there, but they realized there's something wrong with the fish for this boy here, and he couldn't explain what, but they were good enough to never serve fish for him again, as long as we lived there. So, that was sort of a happy ending.

But I was shown to my room in this house, and it was just a one-story house, on the long side. My room was about as long as this table, and about—you know, about this wide. Then came the wall, and there was one door in there, and I'm looking to hang up

something and I don't see a closet or anything, but there was a hook on the back of the door. That was going to be my hang-up place—not that I had any clothes, really, but I had a coat and stuff, and then later on a uniform to go to school with and all that. So anyway, that was my room. At one end there was a little cabinet with about two or three drawers and that was it, and then at the foot of the bed there was a window leading to a garden out there. Every now and then—well, I just fell asleep again, I was so worn out; just threw myself on the bed and heard nothing till I was waking up. When I started waking up, I kept hearing a bell go *ding-dong*, then nothing, then *ding-dong*. (laughs) It wasn't a clock or anything. I thought, "What the heck is this? What do they do here? Do they think it's Christmas or what?"

So finally, I got dressed, and I went out of my door. I didn't know where else to go; I didn't know where Hans had gone. He had gone in the other bedroom with Jack. I was so glad to see him, and he said he'd been looking around to see what there is here. I said, "What is this bell that's always ringing?" He started to laugh. He said, "It's a doorbell. They have a mom-and-pop type store, but it's in front of their house, part of the house." So anytime anybody came and opened the door, the bell rang. Oh, I thought all kinds of things! I was glad to hear that. Then, of course, we still couldn't talk to the people. Jack worked, so he had gone to town to work in the carpet shop in Halifax. There was no link between us; we couldn't say anything. This lasted quite a time.

Hans then finally said, "Look, from now"—we had a few words already that we could say, he more than me. But he said, "From now on, we're not going to talk in German. No matter what it is, you have to tell me in English. If you don't, I won't answer you. We've got to get ready to talk to these people." Well, of course, I could see the sense in that, but it's very difficult. (laughs) But that's what we did, and from then, I don't think I ever spoke German again. And within about two months or so, I was ready to go to school, 'cause they couldn't accept me till I could speak English. It was time for me to be in school. And Hans, he could take evening classes, 'cause his education was interrupted with all that stuff in Austria.

So one of the first words I remember that I used to have to say—first of all, this lady, Maud, we were told by Jack—through Hans. Hans told me we have to call her Auntie Maud, and Uncle Ben, and Jack. That's who they are. Oh, what was I telling you before? Oh, the first words that I didn't forget so easily in English was "apple," "banana," and that turned out to be my choice of dinner. I could either have a banana or an apple for my dinner, and that was the beginning of being a hungry little girl. The older people in the end had trained me to run for them just about every night to a fish and chips shop; they were big on fish and chips, and there happened to be one around the corner from where they lived, not exactly there, but very close. It wasn't rationed, either; it was one of those things you could just buy, if you had the money. So they would send me to get them for them. They would eat them, but I could choose my banana or apple.

I had experiences because in Halifax—it's in a valley, this town, and it's a mill town. They used to make carpets and bedding and that sort of thing. It was a lot of good stuff they made there, and that was their industry there, the main industry besides ordinary shops like you would get in any town. Really, there was Halifax, and there were the two tops, you know, on the buses—they had a double decker bus still, and even though they would sometimes go on the lower road, very often we'd seen one right on the top, these double deckers, in all weathers. They had terrible weather; they had snow and everything. The double deckers were still going. (laughs) But we got used to it, little by little by little. But that was the beginning of a very difficult ten years.

CP: And at first you only thought you were going to be there a short period of time.

ED: Yes.

CP: But you ended up staying there for ten years. How long did it take you to feel adjusted—or again, did you always feel sort of left out or different?

ED: No, I didn't feel left out. I felt different, because I don't think the people around where we lived—the whole town, I think—had ever seen two foreigners in their midst. And Ben and Maud spread the word that “We have the two kids from Europe,” you know, so the doorbell would go extra often because they all wanted to come and have a look at us.

CP: Did you feel like an attraction or something?

ED: Yeah. (laughs) I hated it! And Hans—I just wrote that he made himself scarce. I don't know what I could do; I didn't know where to go.

CP: So how did you feel towards Maud and Ben? Was there conflicted emotions? Did you feel thankful that they had you there, or did you not like them?

ED: Well, in an adult sort of thought, which we had to be grown up in five minutes at that moment and from then on. But we realized that, A, we have to be very grateful because we knew what was happening in Europe; and B—what was the other thing? For taking us in, and the other reason—we had no alternative. You see, the people from the Society of

Friends, even after we'd been there maybe a month or so, they sent people around to talk to the children they'd left with people. They were very thoughtful, you know, because I don't know what they would do if the kids said, "No, they're beating me," or something. Where would they go? So we heard that they were going around—I think they even called ahead of time and said, "We'd like to speak to the refugees you have."

So she came, I remember, and before she came, Hans said to me, "This is where they're gonna ask you questions." We talked in German, that time. "We'd better just fib a bit, you know." We're not as happy as we make out to the parents. In letters we had written how wonderful it was and everything, and they were so happy and they had written happy letters to them and all that. It wasn't like that at all, but we didn't want to worry our parents, at least our father; I don't know if we could write to my mother then or not, I don't know. But so we had to always watch what we said about them. Now, deep down, if it hadn't been for Jack and they said yes, we would have—I don't know, we never would have been there. So we have that to be grateful for. But the other things—it was not friendly; it was not good at all. Ben was a voyeur type guy, and I had no idea what that was, and so I couldn't explain it to Hans and I couldn't explain it to anybody, because I didn't know the words for it.

CP: You had the sense, you said, that he was kind of an evil man in that sense.

ED: Yes.

CP: You mentioned that there were—

ED: He liked to feel me and pick me up and make me kiss him goodnight when I didn't want to kiss him goodnight. He drilled a hole in the bathroom door, and I said to Hans, "What's with that?" Jack had told Hans, "Now, you know there's a little hole there in the bathroom door." But he said, "My dad thought it best to do that, because his wife, Maud—in case she falls or something and needs help, he should know it." It was all malarkey, because I'd never seen her trip or fall or anything. He was looking when I was taking a bath or going to the toilet or whatever. It was his game, you know, that kind of stuff, and he knew that I didn't like him. That, I couldn't hide. But he had no intention of changing his habits, because he knew I couldn't explain it to anybody, what he was doing.

CP: And you were pretty much trapped there—

ED: Yes!

CP: At least you weren't in Europe being murdered.

ED: Yes, but still, we were alive and we were together. So those were our ten years together like that.

CP: That's still not an easy tradeoff, though. It still sounds very difficult.

ED: It is difficult, because the two people, the older people, they just didn't know how to be parents. They were just weird. They had two dogs, two cats, and two birds in the house.

CP: That's too many.

ED: It was a small house, really. Yeah, what was I going to tell you about them? Oh, and they had one of the dogs was a beautiful Alsatian dog. Betty, they called her; they had names for all these creatures. It's a small house, and they had these six things there. (laughs) Oh, gosh, what was I going to tell you about that? Oh, Maud, she was supposed to keep the house, cleaning it and cooking and so on, housekeeper. Ben's place was the shop, and that's how the work was separated. Jack had to said to her, we heard later, that the reason they should not—they should take the two of us—is that “I'll have a brother that I've never had,” if the boy they will take, “and for the girl, she'll be a good companion to my mother and a helper.” Well, that means you've got to do all the cleaning and dirty work. Ben, he heard probably a little young girl coming, and he was delighted. He was smart enough to know that I wouldn't be able to talk.

CP: Is this where Miss Scott comes into the picture? Can you tell—

ED: Oh, later. That's later.

CP: That's later, okay.

ED: When I got to high school. You want me to jump to that? I can do that.

CP: Is there anything else that you'd like to share about the early years?

ED: There's a lot, because my life did change while I was with them, and it was my doing, the change.

CP: How did it change?

ED: Well, I just did all I could, and we often—oh, Ben was always complaining about me. Not to me: to Jack to tell Hans, and Hans had to tell me. This was endless. I tried everything. I got older and I stayed away from him, and he knew it. That annoyed him, of course. So everything I did—I was getting piano lessons free from somewhere, from a lady, because Jack played piano very well and they had a piano in the living room. I had to practice, of course. I had never played a piano. I chose piano when they asked me at school, high school, what would I play—some jumping ahead there. But when I used to practice, he used to walk through the room and stand there (laughs) and walk out again. He just couldn't stand it that I was practicing and doing something. How long do you think I could stand that? I wiggled out of the lessons. I couldn't do it. So that probably satisfied him for the day: he ruined something else for me. Oh, I don't know. He was just an awful man. Where were we?

CP: Leading up to your high school years when things started to change, you started to change.

ED: Oh. Well—oh, yeah, I was going to continue with Hans and me. Ben started saying to Hans all the time, "She's a troublemaker." That's all he would ever say about me. Troublemaker! (laughs) I never got anybody in trouble, except he was afraid that I might say something about him when I was older—and I didn't. But except—you know, everything I did, when I tried to help him in the shop and anything, "She's a troublemaker, that one," he would say. I was that one, that person. It used to make me—I don't know, I cried a lot. And Hans, I couldn't wait till he came home and I could talk to him again. He knew how tough it was. But he used to say, "Let's go for a walk," and we'd walk down. We had a street leading away from the store, and it was a lane type of a place: very nice, woodsy. And we would talk it out. He wouldn't turn around till we were both laughing again. And it always came back to, "Now, look, if we weren't here it could be worse, because they could have separated us at any time." So that was pretty bad, but he got me through those things.

And then there was one time when Hans just got sick and tired of hearing him complain about this troublemaker. I think he'd swallowed hearing that for a couple of years

already; I can't be sure, but it seemed so. So Hans, who was always friendly with both of them, as friendly as he could be—and he was never nominated as the troublemaker, you know. (laughs) Just me, who was just a schoolgirl doing my homework and everything I should be doing, I was a troublemaker. So Hans blew up, and he just started to yell at Ben. (laughs) I heard him do that. He said, "I'm tired of what you always call my sister! What's she doing wrong? It's not right to do that," on and on and on. And I think Ben was taken aback, because he'd never heard Hans like that.

That was the beginning of a little less ugliness about him—not that he ever liked me, but he didn't talk so much anymore. That suited me fine. If he never said another word, I'd be happy. But he was just driving me crazy, and Hans—and he kept it in, too, like I had. And after a while, he said, "No, I can't have that happen." So he saved me again. It was like that. They didn't care about us as people, and they were annoyed because I think, stupidly, that somebody had started the rumor that we'd only be there for six months, because then they'll send us to Canada. I don't know who started that, but everybody seemed to believe that. After six months, we couldn't go: the war was on then, and we were there for almost ten years. Not me—I left them after, I think, eight years. That's where the other part begins of my life, when I left there. You wonder, "What'd she do now?"

CP: Yeah.

ED: I need to tell you.

CP: Yeah. Did Miss Scott come before that?

ED: No.

CP: Okay. What happened next?

ED: Well, I had diphtheria when I was about—the first year in high school. I don't know how old I was. Eleven, I think. I was so ill I was—I missed a lot in school. I was still learning English on the way and everything. When I came out of there—I was in a hospital for, I think, about two months, 'cause Maud had no idea—or if she had, she didn't practice it—of helping me recuperate.

This is where Miss Scott comes in. She and the school doctor—there used to be a doctor for each school in those days, not to examine but to talk to the girls—it was an all-girls school I went to then—and answer questions and things like that. How am I telling this? The doctor—oh, she and Miss Scott decided to try and interest me in repeating the year, because I was so far behind and still not perfect in anything. They thought that would be better for me. She called me to her office and told me, and she was very kind about it and everything. She knew I wouldn't like it. (laughs) She said, "You know, it's for your own good. You won't be sorry. You really need to have time to get better and all this stuff." Of course, again, I had no choice. I had to do it.

That year—when the year started again and I saw who was in the class, there was a girl there called Pat North, and we became close, like sisters. There was a time when I was living in their house—not right away, I was still at the Harkers'. Pat and I, we just were funny and silly together. She was a beautiful girl, and her parents were a little bit off the norm. Her mother liked to bleach her hair, and I never saw her without makeup. She had a strange figure, so she had to make all her own clothes, this woman. She was very clever: beautiful stuff she made. Anyway, she eventually—I'll just skip all that, the big thing, but agreed to—no, she wanted to—I used to visit Pat a lot, and we played together and we went to school together and we made fun of the teachers together and all kinds of stuff. (laughs) Oh, I'm losing myself.

I think she persuaded her folks that they would let me move into their house, and that is because Miss Scott talked to them. The thing was that Em—that was Pat's mother—once came to the Harkers'. She'd heard a lot about them, 'cause I was more at Pam's than I was at the Harkers' if I could help it—Pat, I should say. Not Pam, Pat. Pat would have liked me to have been—she had a big bedroom and two beds and everything, and places to put clothes that you don't have. (laughs) Between them all, they decided it'd be nice if I would live with them eventually, but that was a bit later, after the other thing.

CP: Is that why you said that Miss Scott saved your life?

ED: I think so, in the long run, because she—when I was sixteen—I had lost a year in school. When I had a sixteenth birthday, I didn't think—I thought, well, legally I can work now; but I didn't have the last school, the last year in school, and it was in that last year that I should have matriculated and finished my high school education, and I didn't. I thought, "Hey, what's it going to do to me? I want to be free. I want to do something and live by myself." Crazy. (laughs) And then Pat said, "Our neighbor, our back-door neighbor, they're looking for a maid." They were a young couple—well, he wasn't so young, but she was young, the wife, and she was expecting her first child. He wanted to pamper her and always had a helper in the house, live-in help. For some reason, he didn't have it at that time, and he wanted it desperately for her. The two must have talked about

me, so Pat said, “You know, Mom’s been talking to them. If you’re not going to go back to school, go and be their maid.” I said, “Oh, good! I’ll have a job.”

Well, that was also a terrible experience, the whole thing, but that’s when Miss Scott came to see me, when I was working for them. A principal never does that for anybody, but she did. She had to first find out where I was, because Pat promised she wouldn’t tell her, and she didn’t. So she had to find—she knew I had a brother, but she didn’t know where he was. She found him somehow and talked to him, and she explained the situation. She said, “You know, I really want her to come back to school and finish. Then she can do what she wants,” ’cause in that school nobody had ever left and gone to be a housemaid anywhere. They all matriculated and they all went on to colleges and everything, and I was going to be the first one (laughs) who worked.

But anyway, that was to my good. Out of kindness she talked to my brother, and he said, I think, that he’d seen her. I said, “How could you see Miss Scott? She doesn’t know you.” Well, one afternoon the doorbell rang and Miss Scott is standing on my doorstep at that house where I was working. (laughs) I didn’t know what to say. She said, “How are you doing?” She was very sweet. “You mind if I come in a little bit?” I couldn’t even think to ask her to come in, ’cause I had it as part of my deal with those people they’d given me sort of another room that they said, “That could be your private room,” which I thought was great for me, I’d never had that. So I had my little sitting room to ask guests in there, if I had any.

She talked to me, and she explained to me that she really wished for me that I would finish and all the reasons that there were. I knew the reasons. And she said—she mentioned the Harkers, and I didn’t respond with anything from the Harkers to her. The more we talked, the more she realized that—the more she knew what was going on between me and the Harkers, and that I was very unhappy there. So she must have had somebody who kept an eye on me all the years I knew her, or she knew me. I thought that was really something. She arranged that I would go to the high school—it was a private school. I’d have no fees; they would, I don’t know, give me grants that I don’t have to repay or anything. I didn’t have anything to repay with. Even my uniforms—we wore uniforms. Anything I needed, I could go and buy and not pay for them. The dinners—or the lunches that they served at the school during the war, they were very good. That’s where I got my real meals, not a banana or an apple. (laughs) I like both, but I mean, you know!

CP: Well, that’s not dinner.

ED: That’s not. No, not really.

CP: Well, I think we have to stop for this tape, and we'll pick it up on the next one.

ED: Okay. Are you all asleep yet?

Part 4 ends; part 5 begins.

CP: This is tape five with our interview with Elisabeth Dixon.

ED: (laughs) You've heard enough.

CP: (laughs) Never, never. But you were telling us about kind of the end of high school and how you ended up going back to high school, and you were living with Pat's family at the time. Then what happened?

ED: Then another life just started with me. I was homeless for about three or four times between that and being married. People would—I don't know, I guess because I was a foreigner. England didn't like foreigners; they hadn't seen foreigners in Halifax. There was one woman who threw me out after we'd been doing fine, and another one—I was sick. I'd had an operation in the hospital, and they'd kept me extra long because I'd told them I had nowhere to go. They said, "We can let you stay an extra day or two," or something. So she came to visit me, the lady that I was staying with—or I was renting from a room. She came to see me, and I thought, "She's left it late, but at least she came to see me." She just came to see me to tell me not to come back. She had packed my stuff. "I can't have you back." That was the next place I had nowhere to go.

Then I met one of my school friends, who was now a teacher; and I was teaching, but not a trained teacher, but I had a teaching job. She said—I was telling her, "Everywhere I go, they say it's okay, then—

(audio interrupted)

On my seventeenth birthday, she called me in the front room. "I want to talk to you." I thought she was going to say, "Happy birthday." She says, "You have to look for somewhere else to live." Just like that! What have I done? Nothing. That's it. She won't even talk to me. I know what it is now: they were getting a stipend for me, and that stops

at a certain age. I didn't know about that then, and she didn't tell me. She was very nasty about it.

CP: So how did you—how did you get by at that time; and also, when did you meet your husband?

ED: Well, because my husband Ernie was Hans's best friend at that time. He'd been away for so long in the air force and everything. They just appealed to each other: they knew about Europe and all that stuff. His mother—he went home to live at home when he was discharged from the air force. The war was over, you know; it was time out. Whenever I would be homeless, he would go to his mother and say, "You have so many friends, Mom. Is there somebody that's got an empty room that they'd like to rent out?" That got me two of them, I think, and the third one I found myself but they threw me out too. She was the one that came when I was sick in hospital and told me not to bother coming home. That's how it was. This friend of mine said, "Why haven't you considered renting an apartment? You're always with somebody. You need to be on your own. You'd like to be." I'll call you sometime and I'll read it to you, how that happened. (laughs)

CP: There's one other story that we didn't get wrapped up, and that was back on the train station when you were leaving and your father was waving goodbye to you. That was the last time that you saw him, and then for that whole ten-year period, you were pretty much out of communication. You didn't know whether he was alive or dead. And then I guess you said at some point, you heard from maybe the Red Cross that he was likely killed, but you didn't know for sure. Can you tell us how it was that you finally found out about what happened to your father?

ED: Only from that piece of paper; and it was his daughter who found out something, and she forwarded it to Hans and Hans, of course, sent it to me.

CP: How long ago was that?

ED: Excuse me, excuse me. (shuffles papers) I have 2005 here.

CP: It was 2005.

ED: Yeah.

CP: And at that time—we'll show this document. But you found out that your father was murdered in the Maly Trostinec camp in Minsk, Russia, and that's M-a-l-y T-r-o-s-t-i-n-e-c.

ED: Yeah.

CP: Was it—when you found out what happened to him, did you have a sense of relief?

ED: No.

CP: No.

ED: No, you can't. We were never—we never really knew how to feel when first notice came, because we didn't know how or what happened to him. Why is he dead? How good are they? But when we got that, we accepted that as a document from something that she found on the computer.

CP: Was there any sense of at least now you know? 'Cause it seems like one of the big themes of your life is you never knew. When you were little, your mom never told you what was going on.

ED: We'd sort of known, since the wrong information—well, the missing information. We sort of thought he was gone, because otherwise we felt he would've—somebody would've written. There wasn't anybody to notify us. It just made all that last longer. It will never go away; you can't just turn it off and say, "Thank goodness he's gone." Again, you have to say, "Well, I hope he didn't suffer." That's all.

CP: And you said this a couple times, and I find it pretty profound. You live with these memories; you live with this experience still to this very day.

ED: Oh, yeah.

CP: And how—do you feel like, then, that it's shaped your whole life, being isolated when you were young? Did that shape your life, do you think?

ED: Yes, absolutely. I was very uneducated with life. I had nobody to teach me anything when I was growing up. And it's been the loneliness, you know, that always creeps in. Other people have mothers or fathers to talk to them, but I never had that. I do know that Hans, even though he had nothing to do with it, but he was her favorite child. But I had him. I think I'll never get over that, losing him. But I have to go on living. I just think that Hans would not be happy if he knew I was unhappy.

CP: So still—

ED: And the same with my father. My mother, I don't know. I don't think she'll care.

CP: So they're still helping you to live, even today, I would say.

ED: I think so.

CP: Does it help you to have children and a partner that want—you know, want you to tell these stories, and want to hear these stories? Does that help, to have a kind of intergenerational connection?

ED: I think the children want to hear more. I don't know—did you hear all the rest of this? You knew about all this.

Pamela Bloor: Most of it, but not all the details. Much of it, but not all.

CP: Some new details.

ED: Hmm?

CP: Some new details. But just to know that they care and that they want to hear about it —

ED: Oh, yes. The only thing I can say is that I have my reward, and my reward is my children. I have listened to my whole family—I have two daughters and two sons. They're all very decent people, couldn't get any better, and they all are married to very decent fellows. I couldn't get any better. I call them my sons; they're really my sons-in-law, two of them. We have no divorces in our family. Everyone is happily married, which is quite a difference from just being married. What else, Pamie?

PB: Your grandchildren.

ED: Well, no, just I want to go on with you first. That comes later.

CP: They all sound like they're very successful and doing meaningful things.

ED: They are all doing well.

Edward Bloor: I'll agree to that. I'll attest to that. I really don't think you can find—

ED: A better family.

EB: —too many other families that have four children who—there've been no divorces and no criminal activity.

ED: Nobody smokes. Nobody does drinking more than they should.

EB: It's just unusual, and amazing.

CP: So that's your reward, is having a beautiful family.

ED: If I didn't have them, I don't think I could—I'd be useless.

CP: Well, I—

ED: But I do have grandchildren now, and I'm even a great-grandma, of the cutest baby in the world. (both laugh)

CP: Well, congratulations. One of the things you said when we first spoke that really touched me, and this has to do with family, is you said you learned everything that you needed to learn about being a mother through your own mother's failings. And like that's how you learned to be a mother. And just the way that you put that, I thought, was pretty profound: out of having a distant mother.

ED: Well, I was looking for things. That's why I can't understand how she could have been like that. I knew what that did to me, and I always tried to do the exact opposite to my children. I may not have always succeeded, but I always tried, at least. (laughs)

CP: Can I ask you, how do you feel about your life today and about sharing this story with the USF Library and the Florida Holocaust Museum, telling your story in this kind of way? How does that feel to you, just today?

ED: It feels good. I felt I had to do it, and here came my chance. I'm still writing, so I hope to finish that one of these days.

CP: But you felt compelled to share your story, even before this interview was set up. You needed to share it.

ED: Yes, I was writing it. I've written it.

CP: Where does that come from for you? What compels you to write?

ED: I wanted the children to know. I did it for the children to know all the details. I haven't finished telling it.

CP: Well, what did we miss? That's an impossible question.

ED: Just little things, nothing very important, really. The kids should know what sort of a person I am and why I am this sort of a person. I sort of had that as the head thing, you know, for when the book is finished. That's why I'm writing it. And I went to the writing

group, and they start out “Do you want to write your life?” and all this, and I thought, “Maybe I will.” I know very little about anything past my father, none of his family except vaguely Tante Helene.

The rest of it—he came from seven children. Two or three of them went to France and had a terrible time during the war, but they weren’t killed. There was only one of them that died on the way to a camp. They caught him: he was their grandfather, I think, who had the foresight to tell them all to go to France. Well, France was invaded, too. Nobody thought that that would ever happen. So they were hidden for the time of the war and doing the best they could. They had friends who tried to hide them. But the immediate father-in-law was instrumental in shipping them out, get out of there, but not far enough, in his case. We lost touch with those people. I never knew them myself.

But we know now—Hans and I said we’re the last Nichtenhausers in the world, because wherever he would travel and look, he’d always look at every phone book for Nichtenhausers. He didn’t have a computer, and I’m not computer enough to have the sense to look on the computer. So that’s where someone in Paris had the idea—he came across the name, and he—what is he? What is Hugo? Is that my cousin? He’s older than I am; he’s about ninety-something. He has a son, who is very well educated, a teacher. You might have met him; I think you’d like him. I haven’t met him, but I know him by writing. I don’t know who started the writing, but we had a letter: yes, you are those people, and then they started talking about different folks.

See, Hans knew more of my father’s family than I ever did, ’cause five years is a big difference. He’s grown and I’m still ten years old. He lived longer in Vienna, you know, till I was born. A five year old can remember quite a bit. And most of that family lived in Vienna and they were always together. They were a very closely knit family, which I missed. I just wasn’t aware of it, ’cause I was too young and I wasn’t even born for most of it. So, that’s how it was. (laughs)

CP: Well, I just have one last question for you.

ED: Yes?

CP: And that is: with your life experience and with your story, do you have any kind of a message for future generations that might watch this video, or for your family that might in the future watch this video? Would you like to leave us with some sort of message?

ED: There's a lot I'd like to say to them. The important thing, I think, in life is: be a kind person, and be loving and lovable. If you're standoffish, you'll always be alone. If you had the misfortunes I had, I was alone for most of my life. Pat was really my first feel of how it might be if I had a relative, but then that ended poorly. It could, because we weren't related. But I told the kids, I think, that I've tried to not be like my mother all my life. I have fought it. I know I look like her. But she was just so different, and she was indifferent to me. To hear her talk and to see her, she was the world's best mother in the whole world, and she really wasn't. And she was not an evil woman, but she just—she came first, and then came Hans. (laughs) And all kinds of other things happened, and maybe then came I down there. It's not nice. She didn't have a very good family. Her father was a mess—he was a cold sort of a man—and her mother was a nice little woman, very nice.

CP: Well, I think that's a very good lesson to take away. Be kind, love, and be lovable. I like that. Well, thank you very much for an amazing interview. I really appreciate it.

ED: I'm glad we met.

CP: Me, too.

End of interview