

Interviewed by Lucille W. Brown and Robyn Katz  
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Mrs. Wolfsheimer lived a comfortable middle class life in Germany from 1897 until 1933 when the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party changed her family's life. She, her husband and two children survived the war in Lyon, France and emigrated to the U.S. in 1942. Many other members of her family perished.

Lucille Brown: Now, you know that this is for [Union College](#), for the [library](#), and students will be able to listen to it. [Professor \(Stephen Berk\)](#) and I will go over these; they'll be typed up and we'll just study the information that's in them for use in history classes. We feel that we're setting up a memory bank where we're storing memories that people have of what happened during a certain period in Europe. All right?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: At the end of our conversation, I'll ask you to sign a piece of paper saying that it's okay for this to go into the Union College Library.

FW: Okay.

LB: Let's start. If you'd say your name so the tape recorder can pick you up.

FW: Freda Wolfsheimer.

LB: Could you tell me what year you were born?

FW: Yah, 1897.

LB: And what town were you born in?

FW: [Weikersheim](#).

LB: Weikersheim. And what's the nearest big city to that? What part of Germany would that be in?

FW: South Germany. It is near Wurtsburg, or [Stuttgart](#) is the capital.

LB: I don't have a map of Germany. Does that section of Germany have a name? I mean, like Bavaria or Prussia?

FW: Wurttemberg ([Baden-Wurttemberg](#)).

LB: So that's the section?

FW: Yah.

LB: What kind of a town was it? About how big was it?

FW: Not big. There was about 2,000 people.

LB: And you were born in this town?

FW: Yah.

LB: And did you live there all your life?

FW: Yah.

LB: And about how many Jewish families were there?

FW: We had about, my time, fifteen.

LB: And could you estimate in 1897 about how many people there would be in each family? How many children, for example?

FW: About four in each family.

LB: Four children or four people?

FW: Four children.

LB: So that would be a household - six times fifteen - approximately there would be about ninety Jews in the town?

FW: No, not so many. Less. Not so many.

LB: What sort of a town was Weickersheim? Was it an industrial town?

FW: Yes, there was an [organ factory](#).

LB: They made musical organs?

FW: Organs, yah, and he sent them all to South America and this country - all over.

LB: And what...

FW: Farming.

LB: Is it mostly flat country?

FW: Mostly flat, but we had some - the wine growed there was very well-known. [Vineyards](#), yah.

LB: So they had vineyards growing there? And factories?

FW: It was one big factory. They have two hundred labored there, working.

LB: The organs were made by hand? Or by machine and hand?

FW: Machine and hand, I think so, yah.

LB: How many people were in your family?

FW: Five; we had three girls and my parents.

LB: And you lived in a house?

FW: Yah, we had our own house.

LB: And what was it made of?

FW: Stone.

LB: Where was it?

FW: On the Haupt Street - on the, how you say in English? On the Main Street - Haupt Strasse. My English is not so good.

Robyn Katz: It's very good.

LB: That's fine, and if you cannot think of an English word, say it in German. Maybe we can work it out.

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: So there were three girls and were you the oldest?

FW: No, I was the middle.

LB: And how much older was the oldest?

FW: We were one year apart.

LB: 1897 - I don't know enough German history, that's my problem. Do you?

RK: (Laughing) Put me on the spot.

LB: You lived in your own house, and it was stone. Did you live in the whole house?

FW: Yah, yah, we occupied the whole house by ourselves.

LB: And how many rooms would you say? Was there an upstairs and downstairs?

FW: Oh, yah, that's two story house and we had a business. Wait a minute - how you say in English, material, where you make...

LB: Yard goods? Fabric?

FW: Yah, fabric.

LB: That's what your father did? He had a yard goods business?

FW: That's right, yard goods.

LB: That was on the bottom floor then?

FW: Yah, that's on the bottom floor and across from the business place was a little office. The other rooms were all upstairs and on the second floor. The living quarters were upstairs on the second floor.

LB: But the business part was downstairs?

FW: Was downstairs, yah.

LB: Who worked in this business other than your father?

MW: My father and my mother. Then, I go to school; it was a Catholic convent in [Bad Mergentheim](#), that's the next bigger city. Bad Mergentheim. It's a good, a well known place for...

LB: Baths.

FW: Baths, yah, like [Saratoga \(Springs\)](#).

LB: Right. And that's where you went to school?

FW: I went to school there for three years, then I went for two years near Frankfurt. Relatives, they have a big department store, and I was working there for two years, just. My father passed away, then I have to go home.

LB: So your mother and father worked in the store, selling yard goods and you went to school in Bad Mergentheim, right?

FW: Yah.

LB: And you went to school in a Catholic convent?

FW: Catholic convent, yah. I travelled in the morning there and come back in the evening.

LB: How did you travel?

FW: By train, you know, just like Albany and Schenectady - apart only 12 kilometers.

LB: Did your sisters go to the same school?

FW: Yes, both of them, yah.

LB: So the three of you would get on the train together, when everybody was old enough and go to school together?

FW: That's right.

LB: And you started at the school at what age?

FW: I finished gymnasia in Weikersheim, also [gymnasium](#), three classes. And after those three classes I went to Bad Mergentheim.

LB: In other words, you went to school before Bad Mergentheim?

FW: Oh, yes.

LB: Where did you start school?

FW: In Weikersheim.

LB: At what age?

FW: Seven years, I think.

LB: And what kind of a school did you go to there?

FW: [Volksschule](#).

LB: Is that like a public school?

FW: Yah, a public school. That's right.

LB: And it was run by the German government? Was it free?

FW: No, you have to pay for.

LB: Do you remember what kind of things you studied there?

FW: I had general, you know, what in the public school. But then, after public school, I went for three years in the [realschule](#). That's like a gymnasium.

LB: How many years were you in the public school?

FW: From seven to, I'd say, twelve.

LB: Five years.

FW: Yah.

LB: And then you went to a realschule in Weikersheim?

FW: In Weikersheim, yah. And after this I went for three years in Bad Mergentheim. There I had some bookkeeping, French lessons, singing, and what else? How you have to support yourself, sewing and all kinds...

LB: You mean economically support yourself? Or you mean how to behave?

FW: Behave, like etiquette.

LB: Deportment.

FW: That's right, that's right.

LB: How to comport oneself in public.

FW: Yah, it was very nice.

LB: Did you enjoy your school years?

FW: Yah, very much.

LB: Were there many other Jewish girls in your school when you were going to school in Weikersheim? First you went to the volksschule.

FW: The volksschule, yah.

LB: Were there Jewish children with you in school?

FW: A cousin of mine and the other children were all older, not my age anymore.

LB: But there were Jewish children?

FW: Yah.

LB: So, in 1909 you were in the realschule and you went there three years. So, in 1912 you were in the convent, going back and forth on the train.

FW: Every day, yah.

LB: And that was for three years?

FW: For three years, yah, that's right.

LB: So that takes us already into the [\(First World\) War](#) period. When you were in Weikersheim, in the volksschule and the realschule, how many other Jewish children would you say were in the school system? There was only the one school in the town, is that correct?

FW: Yah, yah, that's in my time. Everything changed. Everything changed much.

LB: How many other Jewish children in the whole school? Because I know when I went to school in my neighborhood in America, there were two other Jewish children in a really big school. I knew how many there were.

FW: Yah, well, my two sisters; we were only a year apart. And a cousin of mine and then I know another family, but they were after me; they were younger, four more children from another family. But they were younger, not my age anymore.

LB: So, actually there are very few.

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: How did this affect your school life? Did it make a difference?

FW: No, no, no, no. This time, everything was fine. Not so...

LB: It didn't matter as far as the school was concerned or the children were concerned, whether you were Jewish or not Jewish?

FW: No, no. It was no different.

LB: Did you have a religious education?

FW: Yah, yah, after school and Sunday we have Sunday School. There came a man from Mergentheim and give us religious lessons.

LB: But this was aside from the regular school?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: In the volksschule and realschul did you have religious education?

FW: No, no.

LB: In the Austrian school system there was an hour set apart at the end of the day. Catholic children went for Catholic instruction and Jewish children had Jewish instruction and the Protestant children had Protestant instruction.

FW: Oh, when we have our religion thing, there was only - in this time we had no... a rabbi was in our town and he give us some religious lessons.

LB: In the volksschule?

FW: Not in the volksschule, it was in Temple, in the synagogue. When we had religious school often we went to our rabbi to give us religion lessons.

LB: So you would go out of the school to the Temple?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: So, you had a very small Jewish community. Did you have a synagogue?

FW: Yah.

LB: Was it Conservative or Reform? Orthodox?

FW: Orthodox, yah.

LB: Did everybody in the community belong to it?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: And your family did too?

FW: Oh, yes.

LB: Would you consider that your family were observant Jews? Did they observe the Sabbath and the holidays?

FW: Oh yah, very strictly, very.

LB: Describe how they did it.

FW: The business was closed on Saturday and there was no extra work done. We cooked our meals before Friday and everything like this. No business - that's the most strict. That's all. Sabbath, yah.

LB: Did your father go to synagogue every day or just on Friday or Saturday?

FW: Friday and Saturday and on special occasion, you know, the fast day or things like this. Holy Days he went there too.

LB: And did the whole family go with him?

FW: Yah.

LB: Did the women have to sit in a separate part?

FW: Yah.

LB: How was it divided - with a curtain or...?

FW: No, we were upstairs. There's an upstairs and the men were downstairs.

LB: I see, was the synagogue in a house or did it have a separate building?

FW: This was a separate building, very nice synagogue.

LB: It was? And yet it was such a small community.

FW: Yah, because when the children or the young folks growing up they all going big city; we were not living in Weikersheim anymore. Well, was nothing, no business or nothing to do, so all the young people were about eighteen, twenty or older, they're all going in bigger cities, moving in bigger cities.

LB: That happens now, too. (laughs) So then how do you connect that with the fact that you had such a nice synagogue?

FW: Because before my time there were many more Jewish families living there as after us. And then when they get older, the girls get married with the boys and nobody wants to settle in small city anymore.

LB: Before your time they did stay?

FW: Yah.

LB: So the German population was about 2,000?

FW: Yah.

LB: In Weikersheim what did they do mostly?

FW: They mostly have business.

LB: What kind of business did they have, other than the organ factory?

FW: There were drugstores and where you buy grocery and things like this. And I had an uncle there who had a grain wholesale. He bought the things from the farmers, and he sells in big cities or big places - things like grain.

LB: Were these mostly Jews that owned these businesses? What about the German non-Jewish population? What did they do?

FW: Everybody had business, too. And then farmers.

LB: Did Jews work in the organ factory?

FW: No, no, not one.

LB: Why do you think that was?

FW: Uh, were not meant for this. I don't know, this labor were not, I don't say not good enough, but it were not... I cannot express myself.

LB: It wasn't looked upon with favor would you say?

FW: Yah, some like this, yah. The Jews were in better, let's say, conditions. They were not like here, you go in a factory... This were not our place.

LB: They weren't laborers.

FW: Not laborers, no.

RK: No, they owned their own businesses.

FW: Own businesses, yah. That's right.

LB: Was the organ factory owned by a Jew?

FW: No, but we were very close to them. My father were in real estate business besides our store we had and he sold them. He was a *commerzienrat*. He was very friendly and when he



would buy something, he always called my father to handle this business. He bought lots of places there and he was the only one who was wealthy, you know.

LB: Who was this? This friend of your father's you're talking about?

FW: [Laukhuff](#).

LB: Laukhuff? Was he a Jew?

FW: No.

LB: Your father was friendly with non-Jews as well as with Jews?

FW: Oh yah, oh yah. Oh, he was very well liked, my father. Everybody, when something gets sold or changed hands, they called my father to make this business. He was in real estate too.

LB: So he acted like a broker.

FW: Something like that. When Mr. Laukhuff know somebody was selling something he called my father and made the agent. He settled the business.

LB: Your father would be the agent to close the business?

RK: He would draw up the contract?

FW: Yah.

LB: In other words, they considered that your father had the necessary skill or the legal knowledge to complete the sale, the transaction.

FW: The knowledge, yah. That's right.

LB: So he and your father worked together.

FW: Together, yah.

LB: What was expected of you as a young girl when you were growing up before the First World War? What did your parents expect from you? What kind of a life did you lead?

FW: Okay, I went for two years to Hechstermein - was a second cousin of my father and they had a big business there and I stayed there.

LB: Where is this?

FW: [Frankfurt](#).

LB: When did you go there? What year?

FW: After I graduated the convent I stayed there to know and to meet people and learn the business. So I stayed there with my father. He passed away very young.

LB: In 1912 you entered the convent and you stayed there for three years. So if you went to Frankfurt in 1915, the War was already on.

FW: That's right, First World War.

LB: You went to Frankfurt and the war didn't affect you at all?

FW: No, no, not. We were living in the country, so Weikersheim was not a big city you know.

LB: But you moved to Frankfurt?

FW: I didn't move, I stayed there by [Hechtsheim](#), second cousin, to learn the business there; the department store and meet people.

LB: This was during the war though? Did you feel any effects of the war during this time that you were in Frankfurt, before your father died?

FW: Yah, yah. Then my father says I should come home, thus the family stays together, you know.

LB: Because of the war?

FW: Yah, because the little places were not so affected from the war as were the big cities.

LB: How did you feel the war in Frankfurt?

FW: Oh, my parents sent food there so far as they can do, so far was allowed. Otherwise it was not bad.

LB: It was not bad but there was some shortage of food?

FW: Oh yah, oh yah. The people come out there like Weikersheim; they went to a smaller place and buy something so they get enough to eat in the city. People were in Frankfurt, from all over they come.

LB: You mean, they would come to small villages from Frankfurt and other places?

FW: Yah, to farmers, come there to get some food - eggs, butter and cheese, whatever they can get.

LB: So you were working in your cousin's department store. And then you were also meeting young people.

FW: Yah.

LB: Weren't most of the young boys away in the army?

FW: No, these were younger, younger, younger people - seventeen, eighteen years. They were not in the army.

LB: So you met a group of young people just before army age?

FW: Young people, yah, that's right.

LB: So you could still have a good time? Did you have a good time?

FW: Yah, you go out, you go on trips and things like this.

LB: Where did you go?

FW: Ach, on the [Taunus](#) there are mountains; there's a big mountain.

LB: You would go mountain climbing?

FW: Yah, there the young people go together too, you know, for boys and girls together.

LB: Were these Jewish boys and girls?

FW: Yah, only Jewish boys and girls.

LB: Was it ever considered that you could or might go with a boy that wasn't Jewish?

FW: No, it was not considered. This were in Weikersheim, but I didn't know anybody in Hechtsheim or in Frankfurt besides Jewish boys.

LB: We're talking about before the First World War and a lot of things changed after the war.

FW: That's right. No, we are as Jews, we don't know any different - were together with the other people, with the non-Jewish people and we were no different.

LB: Not in Frankfurt and not in Weikersheim?

FW: Especially in Weikersheim.

LB: What about in Frankfurt? Was there a difference there?

FW: No, I have no connection with other people, see. That's it.

LB: Did you have other family in Weikersheim besides your mother and father?

FW: Yah, I have uncle, aunt and cousins.

LB: Did you have girlfriends besides your sister?

FW: Yah, yah, yah.

LB: Were these girlfriends not Jewish?

FW: No, no.

LB: Did they come to your home?

FW: They come to our home and I go to their home. We were very close together. In the evening when it was time to get home, my parents always have to look for me.

LB: How did they find you?

FW: They know I was with - I have three girlfriends and we were very close together.

LB: So you were in one of their homes.

FW: Yah.

LB: And how did you spend your time with them?

FW: Playing. We had dolls and like children here, too, we were playing outdoors and we were together so it was very nice.

LB: Were you outdoors a good deal of the time?

FW: Yah, small town, not much to do.

LB: And in the home, did your mother have help?

FW: Yah, she had a maid.

LB: Did she live in?

FW: Yah.

LB: So she had to live in one of the rooms upstairs?

FW: Yah.

LB: Did she sleep in the kitchen?

FW: Oh no. We have a special room for her.

LB: Did you three girls share a bedroom or did you each have a room?

FW: No, two have a room - my younger sister and I, and my older sister had a room for herself. It's too bad my son-in-law is not here. He can tell you lots of things more as I can tell you. He's down in New York.

LB: Your mother observed [\*kashruth\*](#) then?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: What language did you speak in the home?

FW: German. Yah, not Yiddish. No, we didn't know this.

LB: Did your father talk to you, or was there any conversation in the home, about Jews in other parts of the world? Were they concerned about Jews in other parts of the world?

FW: Yah. You know, from Poland come lots of poor Jews and they go to Jewish families and you give them some charity. You give them some money or you let them sleep overnight in one of your places. I think this were when the pogroms were in Poland. I see them today coming with the kinderwagon, where the babies are lying.

RK: A baby carriage.

FW: Baby carriage, yah. They coming and asking for to help them.

LB: What year was this? Was it after the war started?

FW: (Long pause) No, I think this was before the war. Yah, there were the [pogroms in Poland](#) and they were coming. So many, so many.

LB: And they came through your town? They came through Weikersheim?

FW: Weikersheim, yah. And there were lots more in the section around Weikersheim where Jewish families live; lots more towns, bigger one and smaller one. There they come and ask for help.

LB: Did they settle down there?

FW: No, no, moved on.

LB: Do you know where they were going?

FW: No, no.

LB: Did you hear how your father felt when he talked about these people?

FW: We feel sorry for them, you know. We don't know later on we have to go through the same thing when Hitler was there.

LB: Well, that was later - but at the time nobody...

FW: No, nobody knows, no, no, no,

LB: So your feeling was that these people were helped by the German Jews?

FW: Oh yah, nobody go without giving them anything.

LB: How did they know where to go? How did they know where a Jewish home was?

FW: That's what I asked myself too!

LB: You did? (Laughter)

FW: That's what I asked myself, too. They come from one place to the other one. I guess maybe they're recommended to go there or... So, I had a man coming through our place. He wasn't nothing; had not much money and he only went to my family and my husband's family and another family. To the other Jews he don't went, he get enough there. He was very well-educated, but he was poor, you know. I get a prayer book from him in German. I will show you.

(Tape off while FW fetches prayer book.)

FW: German, you know, for all occasion prayer books. And he wrote this there: "I shall read more often, very often, this. From, and in memory of..." And that's his name. This from 1924.

LB: That's quite late. That's after the First World War then. Is that when the refugees came through? In 1924?

FW: The refugees went through? No, this was before - the refugees.

LB: But this man just happened to come through in 1924?

FW: Yah, yah, yah. He was not a Polish man.

LB: Oh, he was not? What was he?

FW: German. He was poor, but so good manners he has. He was so well educated and he was so nice in every way. He was poor. I don't know.

LB: So he gave you this prayer book? He was not then, running from a pogrom? He was just on the road.

FW: On the road, yah.

LB: So we take you back to Frankfurt and it's during the war and you're meeting young people and working in the store. And then your father died.

FW: Oh, I have to be called home. My father was very sick and I have to leave there and have to go home.

LB: What year was that?

FW: This was 1920.

LB: So the war was already over.

FW: Yah. Then come [the inflation](#). We had no money any more. The farmers, all the people buy all the stuff you had in your store. When you go the next day, you want to buy something, for this money you cannot get anything anymore. We are getting poor, too, you know.

LB: You were in Frankfurt from 1915 to 1920, right?

FW: Yah, yah. I was meantime staying home. I was not all the time in Frankfurt.

LB: No? Did you go home? For what reason?

FW: For visits, so it was a couple of months home, then I don't get paid so... I was not going out for making money to my relatives in Hechtsheim. I just - to see people and to learn something.

LB: So you were not getting paid there? Was the real purpose to find a husband?

FW: Yah.

LB: Yeah. (Laughter) It's a good reason!

FW: I was not too young.

LB: Well let's see how old you were - eighteen when you went there, right?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: Did you meet a husband there?

FW: I meet some people there, but nothing ...

LB: Nothing developed?



FW: No, no.

LB: Well, you obviously got married.

FW: Yah, I married a man from Weikersheim itself.

LB: Isn't that funny? You had to go back home then. How old were you when you married?

FW: How old I was? Twenty-six.

LB: You were 18 when you went to Frankfurt?

FW: About 18, yah.

LB: So you were 23 when you went back to Weikersheim?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: So during that time you were dating and going places?

FW: Yah, well, at home and in the store, whatever it was to do there, you know?

LB: But a young girl was not supposed to work for money?

FW: No, they were saying, "This is no good when you work for money. When you get married this were no good when you work for money."

LB: In other words, if you worked for money when you went to get married, it was counted against you? A woman should not have to work for money to be a good wife.

FW: Yah, that's it.

LB: Why is that, do you know?

FW: I don't know. This was much different, you know, and in Germany when a Jewish girl get married - you have to have money. She has ...

LB: [A dowry](#).

FW: She has to bring the money. It was not like here.

LB: She had to bring a dowry, therefore, if your father had money you had a better chance to get a good husband than if your father did not have money?

FW: That's right, that's right.

LB: How was your father? Did he have enough money to provide for his daughters?

FW: Yah, he had enough money, but we lost everything in the inflation. Everything goes. We had to start a new life again.

LB: In what year was that?

FW: This was 1924, '25 was the inflation.

LB: But your father died in what year?

FW: 1920.

LB: In 1920. How did he survive the War? Did he stay in the store during those years?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: He was not called into the army?

FW: No, he was not in the German army. He was too old but he did some volunteer work, you know, he watched the bridges and things.

RK: Home guard.

FW: Yah, something like that.

LB: As Orthodox Jews living in Germany, how did you feel about the [Kaiser](#)? Was there a picture of him in your home? Did you feel patriotic towards him?

FW: Yah, yah. Very patriotic. Yah, one time the Empress, that's the [Kaiserin](#), come in our city when I was in school. We had to stand and we had to sing for her and wave flags and things like that. And we had a big [kastelwar](#) in Weikersheim.

LB: A castle?

FW: A castle, yah, and it's very well-known. From Bad Mergentheim all the people who were staying there for a cure, they coming and this were open for public. You can see the kastel insides. Everything was in Baroque style and very antique.

LB: Did the Kaiser and the Kaiserin stay in this kastel when they came?

FW: They were visiting there.

LB: Was there someone living in this place?

FW: Yah. Feerst.

LB: This is a title?

FW: Like a baron. This was his home and he has a home not far away from Weikersheim and there he was living. Only certain times in the year he come and live there. And then, when he was not there, it was open to visit and to see.

LB: Did you ever go?

FW: Oh yah, often. I was filming. There was a big, uh, *saal*. How you call "*saal*" in English? A big *rittersaal*, a big place in the *schloss* (castle) and there were a film company and that's when I went to school in Mergentheim and we were taking picture and we were dancing and then we were...

RK: You were in a movie?

FW: For a movie, yah.

RK: What was the name of the movie? (Laughter)

FW: I don't know. *Rittersaal* in Weikersheim. *Schloss* Weikersheim, yah.

LB: "*Schloss*" is a castle, isn't it?

FW: Castle, yah. There we were dancing and...

RK: Was it a ballroom where they hold huge parties? And you were dancing?

FW: Yah, yah.

RK: You were extras in the movie?

FW: Yah.

RK: Wow, that's really exciting.

FW: Like a ballroom, a big room and there were all the pictures of the barons there.

RK: His family going back?

FW: His family, yah, yah. We were dancing there.

LB: And how old were you then?

FW: Fifteen, sixteen years old.

LB: When you came back home to Weikersheim in 1920, your father was ill?

FW: Yah.

LB: And then what happened?

FW: I was only working in the store, you know, household, and we had no maid anymore. This time when we were grown up and you had big gardens where you keep yourself busy. We were growing our own vegetables and fruits and we were busy there. And later on, I get married.

LB: Your father died in 1920. Did your mother keep the store going?

FW: Yah, *mit* us, yah.

LB: How many of you girls were still home?

FW: Two. My older sister, she was in Frankfurt too, but not the same place I was. In another relative's.

LB: And which two were home?

FW: The youngest.

LB: What about the older sister? Did she get married in Frankfurt?

FW: No she met somebody, but she get married in our place.

LB: Where did she live then?

FW: She lives in [Laudenbach](#).

LB: Was that near you?

FW: An hour and half with a car to drive.

LB: By this time, in 1924, you were wiped out. You kept the store going until 1924 and then you say you were wiped out and then you had to start over. Did you start with the same business?

FW: Yah.

LB: Just your mother and the two women? Or were you already married by this time?

FW: No, I were married later. I don't know, it was 1927 or was '28. I were not young anymore when I get married

LB: Well, you certainly weren't old.

FW: No, not young either. (laughs)

LB: What age were you expected to get married?

FW: In the old country you get married not so young as over here. My older sister, she was one time with my father in Frankfurt shopping for the store and there was a sale, like wholesale, you know, and she was pretty and a young man all of a sudden come up to her, ask her if she want marry him. (Laughter)

RK: A stranger?

FW: A stranger, yah. An uncle was with her; he asked the uncle if the girl want marry him. My father ask her, "Julie, you want him? You want marry him?" He says, "No, you be *nacht*, too young." And she was nearly twenty-two already.

LB: So how old would you say German Jewish women were usually?

FW: Twenty-four, twenty-five and the man have to be twenty-eight, thirty.

LB: That's what [Mr. Lowen](#) told us - that the men had to be at least about 30. So they waited until they were established.

FW: Yah.

LB: That's very interesting. So you stayed home. How did your mother manage to get back on her feet in the business?

FW: Oh, my younger sister, she was good in business. She did all the ... She'd go to [Wurzburg](#), this was the closest for us for where you buy wholesale, by the wholesale dealer. Yah.

LB: So you managed? And you had enough.

FW: Yah. And then we had ground, you know we had, how you say in English, we had acres...

LB: Acres, land.

FW: Land, yah.

LB: And what did you do? Did you rent it or did you farm it?

FW: We farm it. My father always used to say, "Don't sell, don't sell your acres. The Frenchmen cannot take this with them," you know, in the war.

LB: In other words, they could take your money but they couldn't take your land. (Laughter)

FW: Couldn't take the land, that's right.

LB: He was afraid of the French? He didn't like the French?

FW: Yah, I don't say he don't like them, but you know...

LB: That's very interesting. How did you feel about the Russians? In those days did you hear about the [Revolution](#) that took place after the war or during the war?

FW: No, no, no. We hear, but we have no interest in the Russians.

LB: How did you meet your husband, Mrs. Wolfsheimer?

FW: I meet my husband in Weikersheim. He was a widower and we were... His wife passed away; three years after he come and ask my mother for...

LB: He asked your mother first if he could speak to you?

FW: First, yah.

LB: So you found a husband in Weikersheim; you didn't have to go to Frankfurt.

FW: No, no.

LB: And then you married. And where did you live then?

FW: In Weikersheim. He has a big business; wholesale, all the grain, hay, straw. And he wholesale this to Switzerland, Italy. And he was big businessman.

LB: Did he travel a lot?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: Did you go with him?

FW: The first time, too, but I had two children from... I married, two children, and then I have to stay home, you know. Two bookkeepers, and I have a maid and have people working for him in the house.

LB: So you were running the home end of the business then?

FW: Yah. And I had to supervise the bookkeeper.

LB: In order to supervise, you have to know bookkeeping.

FW: Yah, I learned this in the convent.

LB: What happened to you when [Hitler came to power](#)? Were you aware that in 1933 his party was voted in?

FW: I'll tell you, my husband was a big businessman out there. He travelled a lot and he had lots of good friends. And one of his friends told him, "Max, go away. The Nazis are coming and they have not much good things to think from them." So my husband was on a trip, he was not home anyhow, and he called me on the phone and he say he had not his passport with him. And he say, "I don't go home." A man, was not a Jewish man, he was a cleric, he was on court, and he told him, "Max, don't go home. (If you) do, you be not alive any more." And so my husband went in. He had good connection with Switzerland and Alsace Lorraine. And he say he can go into Switzerland. And really on this Saturday the Nazis came and ask for my husband.

LB: They came to Weikersheim?

FW: Weikersheim and all the places where Jews were living and they asked my husband where he is. And I say, "I don't know," and I really don't know where he was because he didn't told me. So he was in Germany, in Nuremberg. This I found out later.

LB: He was still in Nuremberg?

FW: Nuremberg, yah. I had a sister living there and two men - Nazis killed them for nothing, you know, because they were Jews. And the other one, you get arrested under the mayory, And the mayor houses, burgermeister, owned - get beaten up and things. All of a sudden they came into my house too, and they arrested me too - with two men with guns. I was escorted in this house where the mayor is and they want to know where my husband is and they asked me questions and things. I have not to look in his face; I have to look against the wall. I was standing against the wall and if you can nothing do to me, they make... And they did house searchings, the whole house, in my place. And they arrested me with the guns in - Nazis on both sides. They ask me questions - where my husband, do you want my husband back, where was living. We were living across from the mayor's house and they see me coming down with the two men who arrested me. A cousin of mine were there and another man were there and they were all blue and black, beaten up. And you cannot talk together, you know. Yah, and then they were watching my telephone and my husband called and they found out where he is. But it was not (my husband) calling, was my sister-in-law told me then he is Switzerland. He had good friends there. And they confiscated my money, and it was after, with the bank and everything.

LB: How did you manage to get out?

FW: How I managed to get out? It took me a whole year. My husband was then in [Colmar](#) and he gave me... A man from Switzerland sent me an engagement that I can work in his store. He had a cigar store.

LB: In Colmar?

FW: No, this were in Switzerland -in [Basel](#), yah. And he sent me that so I went. And I had no passport. I cannot go. So I went down to Bad Mergentheim; there was a court and I went for a passport. I cannot go out, they want my husband back. Then I told them I have no money anymore; I live with my mother and the State had to support me when I can't take the job and signed from Basel being that is true, that's so. I can get this job and I can make so much money. And then my daughter was home with me, she was a kid. And my son, he was by his father already. I sent him with somebody; brought him over in his car. I brought him to [Kehl](#), to a friend of my husband, and he brought him in his car to my husband in [Strasbourg](#).



LB: Strasbourg is in Alsace-Lorraine.

FW: [Alsace-Lorraine](#), yah. This is together the border.

LB: Germany?

FW: No Switzerland. Yah.

LB: But where's Colmar? That's in Alsace-Lorraine too?

FW: Alsace-Lorraine, yah.

RK: So that's where he was at that time?

FW: That's where he was. And he got a job there right away. He had good bar mitzvah in Colmar and the people were so nice to him. And the Colmar Jews don't know that it happens to them too.

LB: That's right. I was going to say that.

FW: Yah, later on we went to Lyon in France and we were living there for nine years - after Hitler came, you know.

LB: So it was 1942 already?

FW: Yah, '42 we come over here.

LB: From France?

FW: Yah, and I bring everything together. The people from Colmar, my daughter. When we were living there, and they come from Colmar - get driven out, like we were driven out ourselves. I mean, I would not believe it. I think they just say so, they told us, I cannot believe it that this happens. This were the same thing happens, but thanks God they getting back on her place, on the houses again, the people from France, Alsace, yah.

LB: You mean after the war?

FW: After the war, yah.

LB: Did they go back there, then?

FW: Yah.

LB: So those people who managed to escape got their houses back?

FW: Yah, then it's come from one and the other. So then I went down and say, "I cannot live anymore, I have no money." And I just start, they have to support me. And this man who give the passport, I remember my husband give them so much, did them so much favor during the First World War, giving them food and giving everything. And he was the worst one. Then finally when I told him I have to be gone, he give me finally a passport.

LB: He was the worst one? Why do you think so?

FW: When I went for a passport, he don't know they want mine husband back. (Long pause). I cannot express myself so. A book I can write once I get through. And then one time I was in - this were when the bar mitzvah of my son. My husband has a good friend in Basel, Switzerland, and his property is on the border from the German property together. And he brought me over without passport that I can see my husband, can be at the bar mitzvah with my son.

LB: This was before you had a passport?

FW: Yah.

LB: So you went to the border...

FW: And he got me across.

LB: But you didn't stay then; you went back. Is that right?

FW: Yah. I had my daughter there. She was a kid.

LB: And without a passport you had no safety?

FW: No, no, no.

LB: You went just to see your son bar mitzvah and then you went back to your daughter.

FW: Just to see my husband and he had to tell what I have to do and what I did. We had a big house, a big place and so much things was going on. I cannot tell you everything.

LB: And was your daughter going to school during this time?

FW: In Weikersheim? Yah, well she have to... it was no good anymore. When I were in Lyon I had two nephews; from my sister, her son - and from my husband's sister, a son. They must have come in 1939 to France. Somebody brought them over the border that they can, why we cannot get into school anymore in Germany. They brought them over, they were living with us in France. And we sent them from France to Italy. One was thirteen, and my nephew was ten. Thus he met my sister and my brother-in-law in Genoa in Italy and for coming over here.

LB: To come here to the United States, you mean?

FW: Yah, yah.

RK: So they came here before you did? They were already in the country.

FW: Yah. And I were in concentration camp in France too.

LB: You were?

FW: In [Gurs](#). On the Spanish border.

LB: Is that where the [Hirschens](#) (another couple in the Schenectady Jewish community) were?

FW: Where the Hirschens were, yah. And my husband were in another concentration camp and we don't where each other is - if my husband living or where he is or nothing.

LB: When did this happen? You were in Lyon for nine years, until 1942. Then when the Germans invaded France, that's when you were deported into a concentration camp in southern France?

FW: Yah, that's right, near the Spanish border.

LB: And how long were you in the concentration camp?

FW: Eight months. My daughter was crying for a piece of bread; I give her my part. I was skinny. We were laying on straw, and nothing to eat - not enough to eat. My son - in 1938 we sent him over here. First, the French was very nice and good to us. Then once it's going bad, then we are not good any more, you know.

LB: How were you able to get out of the French concentration camps?

FW: We had an apartment. The people who have their own apartment in France they let go out. Only the people who have not their own place to live - they have to stay there. See, I was in Lyon and I have apartment there and that's the reason we can get out. But all my money was confiscated in France, too.

LB: Did you have a job, work in France?

FW: I did housework.

LB: And what did your husband do there?

FW: He sell bread. We go from one Jewish...That's Jewish families and sell bread. Like this, yah.

LB: Whatever you could. Was your mother able to come with you?

FW: Not my mother since she passed away in 1936. My younger sister wound up in Weikersheim and my mother were in 1936. And my younger sister, in 1938 she went the last minute out of Germany.

LB: So your sisters all left?

FW: Yah, and the little boy I had, my nephew, he went to Italy. This were the last boat to go out of Italy and we sent him over there. And on the Swiss border my husband has a business friend and we called him up from France and told him that the two boys are coming to Genoa. Thus he passed them at the border and then he sent us a telegram and say, "Moisyeh Kauffman, Moisyeh Becher passed the border, and they are safe in Italy." Then the [HIAS](#) took over and brought them to the ship. Everybody was crying when "Mama, Mama..." You know the boy called. He recognized his mother and he called her. I did housework in France, yah. (Long pause). I want to show you some pictures.

LB: You were working in Lyon for the president of the Jewish community?

FW: In household, by the Mrs. And I found out she and the three children get from the Nazis killed.

LB: In Lyon?

FW: In Lyon, yah. This were after I left.

Long pause. Tape off. FW retrieves photographs.

LB: Was this the house?

FW: Yah.

LB: Was the lower floor the business?

FW: No, he had nothing here, everything wholesale, everything. He bought everything by wholesale, potatoes by the wagon. He bought them by the wagon and he sold them by wagon. Nothing, nothing, (words missing) we used to say.

LB: So you didn't have to store any of this?

FW: No, no, this, no store.

LB: So you lived in this whole house?

FW: No, we lived... All this were rented. We had friends living...

LB: You lived on one end and then you rented the other end?

FW: Yah.

RK: To one other family or several?

FW: Several families. That's my granddaughter.

RK: The one that's in Israel?

FW: Yah.

LB: Where's this? In Washington Heights?

FW: Yah, I guess so. That's my older sister and her husband.

LB: You went from Alsace-Lorraine to Lyon, right?

FW: Yah we had to go. We cannot live near the border anymore. We had to go and everybody say, "You go and you don't live. You cannot make a living there because you don't know the language and you don't know this and this." And thanks God, we made it.

RK: Did you learn French?

FW: I learned French in the Catholic convent.

RK: Oh, very good.

FW: I had the privilege to learn English or the French and I was never thinking I'd come in America so I learned... I liked French the best.

RK: You really learned a lot of very useful things there; you learned bookkeeping and French...

FW: Bookkeeping, everything.

LB: And there was no question in your convent about Jew or not-Jew? If you wanted to go to school there, you went?

FW: Yah, oh yah. I just want to show you, this is my son.

LB: Where is your son now?

FW: In California. That's my mother and my younger sister, that's from the old country. This is home. This is our part of the house.

RK: And what does that say on the front there?

FW: This were a guesthouse but my husband had never rented, this was just before when he bought the place.

RK: So he rented them as apartments? Not like a hotel? People lived there.

FW: That's right. I want to show you - this is my daughter. This made in France. This is my husband in the German army.

LB: Oh, he was in the army?

FW: Nine years.

RK: Nine years in the army!

LB: If I could get someone to come and take pictures of these pictures would you mind? Is it possible?

FW: Oh, I...

LB: You wouldn't like that?

FW: No.

LB: Okay.

FW: He was three years active as a soldier and he was four years in the First World War. And he has two medals for good behavior and things like that. That's when we were married.

LB: Was your husband an Orthodox Jew also?

FW: He was. He know everything, but you know, he was traveling so...

LB: So he didn't observe as much as your father did?

FW: No, no, no.

LB: But he was educated in the traditional way?

FW: Yah, his mother was very religious, very religious, yah.

(Continue looking at pictures)

FW: This were downtown. We had a room and boarding house downtown.

RK: Downton in Schenectady?

FW: On Seward Place, across from the library.

LB: And you rented rooms to students?

FW: Yah, first I had students, the [Kappa Nu](#) were our first boys.

RK: A fraternity.

FW: Fraternities were our first boys and then after, you know, they have to go in the war. And then we had engineers from General Electric.

LB: And you and your husband did this together?

FW: Yah.

LB: Think how many changes you have had to make from - you were brought up as a woman that was not expected to do anything except be married.

FW: That's right, that's right. Go through lots of things. If I can write a book, I would.

LB: Well, you can tell us some of the things instead of writing a book. It's easier.

FW: This were my house, our home in Germany, this is my mother, this is my cousin, this is an uncle of mine, this is myself, sister of mine and my daughter.

LB: When you were in Alsace-Lorraine, in 1934, did you work in the cigar store there in Colmar?

FW: No, I did some helping out with housework. You have not the permission to work in France.

LB: Working visa.

FW: Only housework you can do. So I was scared to do this.

LB: How long did you stay in Alsace-Lorraine?

FW: Wait a minute. Before the German occupied France.

LB: Did you stay in Alsace Lorraine until 1939 when the war (World War II) started?

FW: No, before, before.

LB: You left before then?

FW: Before, Yah. We had *refouillement* we called this in French. We had to go in the middle from France or somewhere else. We cannot stay on the border anymore. We're too close to the border. We cannot stay anymore because we were refugee.



LB: So did you choose Lyon or did they send you to Lyon?

FW: No, we chose Lyon. Paris, we don't want to go; this was too big for us and friends of my husband were there already. He had a *boucherie* - meat and sausage and things like that.

LB: Oh, a butcher.

FW: In French it's *boucherie* and he were there already, and so we were thinking, "Okay maybe we're going there too." And then some more families come over there.

RK: So you collected a community?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: And then you picked up work?

FW: And I worked for the president from the Jewish Community Center and my husband, he sell bread then I'd make *confiture*, jam or jelly. He brought this on the market. There were big markets. And I cooked it and he sell this, you know, things like this. We were many times glad to have half a pint of milk. I bought for the children that they have some milk or for the coffee. And my husband and me, many times we have only black bread. White bread, you have in France, no black bread.

LB: What was the attitude of the local French people toward you?

FW: The people was very nice. But when it gets bad for the French, when they see the German took everything out of France... We were living near the railroad station and you see all the big trucks go by with food and all this goes to Germany. Then they were mad on us, you know?

LB: How did they show it?

FW: It showed. One time they send a controller over and say we had lots of conserves. How do you say, *lebensmittel* - jams and jellies and all. We had lots of things and when we came we had nothing in the house. This were our best friends who were our shoemaker. We had nothing in the house, he can nothing do. My husband brought home the potatoes in his pocket - in his pants. This were after we come back from the concentration camp. We had nothing to eat there either.

LB: You mean that the French authorities sent into your apartment to see whether you were hoarding food?

FW: Yah, but somebody told them. Not the French authority, from himself, but somebody told him. The authority were good; they say, "What are you waiting for?" You know, we have to wait for our visas so long in France. They say, "What? You don't go out? You don't know the Germans are coming. You don't know the Germans are coming." They were very nice to us.

LB: That's what the Hirschens said, too, that they were well treated after they got out of the concentration camp.

FW: Yah, yah. But was very nice. (At) the last minute the French from the *Surete*, the police, they say, "Get out, get out. Leave everything there. Get out, get out." And the last minute we get out of France. But we cannot go; the papers were not ready. And my sister was working here for a Jewish family in New York and they and my son and my sister, they sent the paper. And then we were two months in Lisbon. In Lisbon the war broke out with America and Germany. Two months we had to stay in Lisbon. And when we was on the ship we had to go down from the ship; all German born have to go down from the ship again for come over here.

LB: How could you support yourself during that time?

FW: I had a friend. My husband had relation to a friend and my sister sent us money. She were in New York and she sent us money.

LB: So you were fortunate that your husband had these connections all over Europe, actually. Because people without connections couldn't get out so easily.

FW: No, no, no. And then we sent, you have to pay more money for the passage come over here. We paid already everything and then I have to borrow more money to come over here. And finally after two months, then we get the paper.

LB: Who said that you had to pay more money? The United States or the Portuguese or the ship company?

FW: I think the ship company. Our passage were paid from France out and then we were in contact with the HIAS and they arranged everything.

LB: Yes, the Hirschens also had to pay more after their passage was paid.

FW: Yah, yah. Then there were four weeks of the water and everything; afraid of the German U-boats coming.

LB: And you had your daughter with you, right? You and your husband and your daughter?

FW: And daughter, yah, yah. And then we come over here. Then this were same; we're coming all to Ellis Island and so nobody knows from... We sent so many telegrams but my sister and my son don't receive the telegrams. And so one day we are landed over here in Newport News.

LB: That's in Virginia.

FW: Yah. And then they say we're coming to Ellis Island and there we get the first - they treat us very well and we get the first white bread. Everything's okay when we see the white bread over there, and sandwiches. And then we come New York. And then the man say, somebody come in the train and say, "You are free. You can go where you want." So we don't speak English, where we want go? So we went in and stayed on the station and my daughter, she was speaking a little English. She called my son and he was home and he say, "We're sorry. Where are you? Where are you?" Then she told him and then he told my sister and then after a while they come over here. "Stay there! Don't go anywhere! Stay there!" (Laughter) Yah. (Long pause) And then we worked in Union College, my husband and I. When the Kappa Nu boys had to go in the war and that house get closed, we were cooking for 750 Navy cadets and 150 civilians. Nights from 9:00 to 7:00 in the morning.

LB: Who was cooking? You?

FW: Me and my husband. We made the breakfast and the lunch ready for the Navy cadets.

LB: That's a lot of cooking.

FW: Yah and we don't speak English in this time.

LB: When you came you were hired, is that it?

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: Did you like it there in that house?

FW: Yah. Bill, the manager from the [Hale House](#) say - the second name I don't know - he say, "Max and Freda, will we have our work done." So I called him up and asked what we have to do. And we have every night we break two cases eggs. We have to make scrambled eggs, fry eggs, we have make the lunch and the breakfast make ready for the boys and cook the meat sometimes, you know. And we peeled the potatoes by hand, big bags. They have no machine at this time. So. And we were glad to have something nights, otherwise the time don't go by. And

he say, "Max and Freda, you people have too much responsibility and the people here have not enough." He was telling us.

LB: Did Union College own the house that you were working in?

FW: This were in Union College itself where we were working. No, when we had this house on Seward Place?

LB: Yeah.

FW: No, we bought this place.

LB: Oh, before you bought this you were working in Hale House?

FW: Yah.

LB: Oh, I see. You're part of Union College history then. You were working in Hale House and feeding all. I wonder how you could fit all those boys into a house... So you were really the two cooks in Hale House. You were the night cooks.

FW: Yah, yah.

LB: And how long did you work there?

FW: First we had a place in Voorheesville - we worked in a factory; we had a cafeteria out there. Then the Kappa Nu boys come back from the war and they begged us, "Come in, Max and Freda, cook for us." Then we were looking for a house on Seward Place. I think this were 1948; I think '48.

LB: The house on Seward Place was the Kappa Nu fraternity?

FW: No, the fraternity were on Union Avenue. This were our first job at Kappa Nu, cooking for the boys.

LB: Then you went to Hale House?

FW: Then to Hale House.

LB: And then you bought your own house on Seward.

FW: After this, yah. Then we were three years in Voorheesville. This were after Union College.

LB: Did you spend some time in New York City?

FW: Yah.

RK: You stayed there for two or three years?

FW: No, no, not so long, no. My husband went first in Union College and cooked for the boys and I had a job in New York. I was working in a factory sewing things for the soldiers. My husband went first. He don't want stay in New York.

LB: He didn't like New York?

RK: Too big?

FW: No, no, too big.

LB: How did he find this job at Union College?

FW: He has two sisters here, married, already.

LB: In Schenectady?

FW: Yah, Mrs. Stagman. Her husband had a shoe repair store.

LB: Is she still living?

FW: No, no, she passed away. She was taken here as a young girl. And another sister... You know [Marvin Friedman? The Van Dyke?](#)

LB: Yeah, I know the Van Dyke.

FW: He's my nephew.

LB: Marvin Friedman? On your husband's side, he's your nephew?

FW: Yah, his mother were my husband's sister.

LB: Is that sister still living?

FW: No.

LB: So that's how he made a connection with Schenectady?

FW: Yah, he would not stay in New York. Not for anything. Yah.

LB: So then when he was established, then you came up to join him, and your daughter came with you?

FW: No, she stayed in New York. She had a job; she was a babysitter. First she was governess and then babysitter and then I don't know what she did after. Then she get married.

LB: We've been here for two hours. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us, Mrs. Wolfsheimer? Did we miss anything on the sheet, Robyn?

RK: We didn't talk a lot about politics.

FW: No politics, no, no, no.

LB: You weren't interested in politics, is that what you're saying?

FW: Yah, yah. We were Democrats, that's no secret.

LB: No, I don't mean here. We're talking about European politics.

FW: No, we were loyal to the Kaiser and things like this, but otherwise, no.

LB: But once the war was over and there was all this upheaval going on in Germany, did you pay attention to what was happening? Did you take sides? Did you have feelings?

FW: That's the reason why they want my husband; he was against Hitler, you know. That's the reason they want him back - he were against Hitler.

LB: Did he belong to a political party?

FW: Yah, you know, [Social Democrat](#).

LB: But there revolutions taking place in Germany.

FW: Oh no, we were not part of this. This were the Communists.

LB: But there were other things taking place; there were other [putsches](#).

FW: In Munich.

LB: Right, that was one and there were others. Did you read about them?

FW: Yah, I read about them, we heard about them, but no, nothing.

LB: You didn't really pay attention and you never thought it would affect your life at all?

FW: No, no, no. We had a very nice life before Hitler and like one family together you know, in the place where we live in Weikersheim. Everybody was nice to us and we had a very nice life and no trouble between Jews and... antisemitism.

LB: There was no antisemitism?

FW: No, no, and when this came, this were so bad. This were the worst thing which happens to the man who was living there, when the antisemitism came. It was the baddest thing. The Jews who were there, we had to suffer so much.

LB: And it took them all by surprise?

FW: Yah.

LB: (Long pause) That was a terrible thing. I will say thank you for Union College and for all those Kappa Nu boys and for all those Navy cadets.

FW: You're welcome; the Kappa Nu boys - some come and visit me today.

LB: Isn't that nice! They do?

FW: Yah, very nice boys. One was living in Liberty, one lives in Albany, a very nice boy. We were like parents to them. At one time there were forty boys; I had 40 boys and they all want good eating, you know. And they want I make twice dessert for lunch and for evening time. And I have no mixer; I had to make all by hand. I say, "I cannot do it anymore." And had to clean the rooms. So later on some people told me, "Don't do it anymore, Freda. Say you be the cook, you be not a cleaning woman." But then I say to them, "You have to buy a mixer. I cannot do by hand this anymore dessert for twice."

LB: Did they get you a mixer?

FW: Yah.

RK: Oh sure, can't give up dessert. (Laughter)

LB: Thank you very much.

FW: You're welcome.

RK: Thank you.

Freda Wolfsheimer died in Schenectady, New York in 1990. She is buried at the Agudat Achim Cemetery in Rotterdam, New York by her husband, Max Wolfersheim, who died in 1960.