

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Tove Schönbaum Bamberger
December 26, 1989
RG-50.030*0014**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Tove Schönbaum Bamberger, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on December 26, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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TOVE BAMBERGER

December 26, 1989

01:00:20

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: Yes. I am Tove Bamberger.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Copenhagen.

Q: When?

A: October 8, 1934.

Q: Tell me about your family, your parents.

A: Well, I have a mother and sister, one sister. Mother and father and one sister. She is five years older than me. She lives in Copenhagen still. She is married. She has two children. And I lived there until I got married. Then we moved to America.

Q: Tell me about when you were very little, growing up. What was it like to be a little child in that family in Copenhagen.

A: Well, I have very pleasant memories. I remember, well I was very young, and I remember when the Germans came—

Q: Let's do before.

A: Before the Germans came?

Q: Let's back up. You were very little. You were a child. What did your father do? What was his business?

A: My father had a business, men's clothing business, on the main street in Copenhagen. We were — he was — we were what you call pretty well-to-do. And, my mother didn't work, and I was little and my sister I think she was in school. Yeah, we were both young. It was a very pleasant life. We had a maid. We lived in an apartment and I just have very good memories.

Q: Tell me, did you have lots of friends? What did you do?

A: Well.... You talking about before the war?

Q: Uh-huh. Yes.

A: I was just four years old. I don't – I just remember going downstairs and playing with a tricycle on the street. People weren't afraid of letting the children out alone, and I have only good memories. I don't remember the other friends. It is a long time ago, but just pleasant memories.

Q: What do you remember of when the Germans came?

A: Well, I know that my uncle called up – my, my mother's brother called us up. I remember that. And he said, "Go downstairs on the street and look up in the sky. The Germans are invading Denmark." And I remember very – like it was yesterday going down with my father and my mother and my sister looking up and all of a sudden seeing sky was full of black airplanes. That was April 9, 1940 – 1940, April 9th, and the Germans were coming and – like a little kid was excitement. I didn't realize what will happen. And the Danes fought for, I think, two hours and then they were occupied. They were taken over. Denmark is a small country.

Q: Was there any change in your life once the Germans occupied?

A: Not that I can remember. No. Denmark went on as usual. Nothing happened to the Danes or the Jews and Germany was sort of a friendly takeover. The Danes cooperated. The police was still – I mean they hated the Germans, but they didn't, you know they didn't fight them because there was still Danish police stay – still stayed for few years. And the government stayed. It was really like sort of a benign takeover for a few years.

01:03:55

Q: Did you go to school? By that time you would be six?

A: Yeah. I went to first grade. I went to Jewish school. Carolineskolen, it was called. I think I went to first grade and second grade before we fled.

Q: Tell me about it. Tell me about that school. What was it like?

A: It was only Jewish. We were girls and boys in the class. And I liked it. It was a nice school. I just, I just remember now that it was Chanukah time. I remember learning the "Ma'oz Tzur"¹ in class. And I remember just one instance that – you know, although we weren't religious, but it was still when you sat in Denmark in those days, you had to sit with your hands folded like when you were quiet. But being it was a Jewish school and we shouldn't make a cross,

¹ Ma'oz Tzur Yeshu'ati [Stronghold and Rock of My Salvation] (Hebrew); popular Chanukah song.

we sat with our hands without, without folding them, like this. It was just a, a little memory, but it was interesting. And we went to school, I think it was from eight to two, like all other schools. And I don't know if we learned Hebrew. Denmark is really not a religious – even the Jews weren't religious in those days, but it was a Jewish school. I, I remember some of my friends. I remember one friend from the class kept saying – this was only in like 1941 or '42 – that she heard rumors that the Germans were going to do something to the Jews. But that was like a year before it really happened that there were big boats waiting in the harbor to take the Jews. But we sort of didn't believe her. It proved to be right in the long run, but this was like a year before. One of my classmates–

01:05:57

Q: What was your impression, as a child, of the Germans?

A: Well, nothing at all oppressive. I have no – we didn't know what was going on the world and the Germans did nothing to the Jews. My father had an open store with our name. My maiden name is Schönbaum, which is sort of Jewish or German. And he had a, you know, store with his name on and it was going on, and nothing at all happened to the Jews. We went to Jewish schools. All, all Christian schools, whatever public schools, whatever. I mean maybe because I was so young. Maybe my husband has different memories, but I don't remember anything negative at all about the occupation.

Q: What did you and your friends do to play, say after school? Did you go to ballet lessons? Did you take piano lessons?

A: I did, yeah. But I don't know now if I am thinking if it was after we came back from Sweden or before. But I did a lot. I went to tap dancing, acrobatics – yes, acrobatics in Danish. I took dancing lessons after school. We went skiing. You know there are not that many hills in Denmark, but we went with a train. We went to small hills. I had a very good childhood. I played tennis. My father was an avid tennis player so we would always rent houses at the beach where there were tennis courts. And we always had a maid and I just remember everything as being very pleasant and nice. Some of the memories are, I am sure, from when we came back, because you have to remember I was young when we fled.

01:07:29

Q: When did you get a sense of something changing?

A: Only the day we heard that we shouldn't go home that night.

Q: Tell me what happened.

A: Well, we were told, I think it came from the synagogue, from the Rabbi. He had heard that the Germans were going to round up the Jews. It was on a Friday night and we shouldn't –

none of us should go home to our apartments or houses. And I remember we had a maid and she just took care of the apartment. She stayed home, and we went. I remember, my father, mother, sister and I and an uncle who was married to a non-Jew, he also wanted to flee with us, and his wife stayed home – stayed in their apartment because they wouldn't – they weren't going to touch, touch the non-Jews. So the five of us – I remember, I – we put on two, two dresses and a toothbrush in the pocket. That's all we fled with. And we went and... Would you like to hear about how we fled? We went to the train. No. First – I remember – first, we knew it would cost to flee. We would have to pay. We knew that fisherman were going to charge about 2,000 crowns a head. That's what we were told. So my father took a cab. On the same day in Copenhagen he went to the bank and he took money out and I remember he brought my mother also. We were told that we shouldn't take money to Sweden because we weren't going to use them. And he bought a bracelet, as a matter of fact, for my mother. And when I was 50, she sent me – she send it to me. And this is the one that she sent me. And that is what he bought and I saw it had gotten smaller, narrower, but I thought maybe as a child I remember it as being bigger. But now that my mother passed away two years ago and I inherit the other bracelet which is exactly the same, but just much wider. I have that at home. But I remember that. He went to the bank, took the money, bought bracelet for my mother and the rest of the money he took in his pocket to pay the fisherman. And then he went home and we all got dressed and like I said, we had two dresses on. It was October so I guess a coat you would wear. Remember was two dresses instead of one. And my father probably had two suits. That I don't remember, but my sister and I had two dresses on and a – we each had a toothbrush. We bought new toothbrushes and put in our pockets and then we went to the train station. And strangely enough, nobody stopped us. Not the Germans either. I mean you could see people coming out on the train and there was no, no, no–nobody stopped us and we went up from Copenhagen to Snekkersten, which is a place that's closest at the seashore to Sweden. I mean, my father took care of everything. We were kids.

01:10:19

Q: Sure. What do you remember of that train ride?

A: I remember sitting there and being a little scared, but I didn't really know what being scared meant because we hadn't experienced anything bad. So it was a little bit of an excitement for me. And I also think we did have one suitcase along, but I am not 100 percent sure. But I just knew that nobody stopped us. Nobody came over and there were no Germans on the train to inspect it. Later on, you see all these stories of people being asked to show passports. It wasn't – didn't happen. The only thing that happened was, while we were away that they would – they came to our apartment to ask for us. That I know and I know that our maid said when she opened the door. They knocked, Friday night, on the door. We weren't home. This is just what we heard. They knocked on everybody's door. They had a list from the synagogue about all the Jews, where we lived and she said – when she opened and asked for us, she said, "They wouldn't be so stupid to stay home." And she just closed the door. They didn't go in. They didn't – maybe they went in to look, but they didn't take anything from the

apartment. They left everything intact. And as a matter of fact, I don't know if I am wondering if I should continue. My father had bought a house. We lived in an apartment in the suburb of Denmark [Copenhagen], and he had bought a house meanwhile. But we didn't get to move into it and when, when we came back from Sweden, we moved into the house. It was furnished and everything and he rented it out to a woman before we left, and that woman married a German soldier or Kommandant.² So when we came home from Sweden – my memories are coming back now – there were Hitler's picture all over the wall. And the movers were, you know, like the Danish movers, they kicked and it was like they kicked all the pictures down from the wall and you know they were very angry. But otherwise the house was standing and, you know, a lot of furniture was there and then we moved into when we came back from Sweden.

01:12:24

Q: Okay. Let's go back to the train ride.

A: Meanwhile, let's go back to the train ride. We were on the train ride. It takes about 30 minutes, the train ride from Copenhagen to Snekkersten. I don't know why my father knew to get off at from Snekkersten. He didn't know anybody there except that he was closest to Sweden, and we got off the train station, went down the stairs, you know, out off the train and a man comes to us. Tall, I don't remember his face exactly. He was – he looked he would be about 40 years old at that time. And he said, "I know why you are here. I am Mr. Bagge, Herr Bagge."³ Please come with me." And we just followed him and we came into a big white house and he said, "Just stay with me. I'll take care of you 'til we find you a fishing boat to take you to Sweden." And he took about a week. We stayed there and you know, we had – it was upstairs. We stayed in his house. And everyday – my father's blond so he didn't look Jewish, so he and Mr. Bagge would go – I mean my mother and I were dark or I wouldn't have gone. But my father was blond and he went with Mr. Bagge every day down to the – to see if you could get a fishing boat to take us to Sweden. You know, you had to get a man that would take us and pay and everything. And it was hard because everybody was trying to flee at the same time. And one day my father came home and said he got a rowboat instead. He couldn't get a fishing boat. He got a rowboat. So we would go that night. And we all got dressed and were ready to leave and then he didn't come to pick us, the man. And they said that – I think he did come and he shows his hands and they had big blisters on it from the night before and he couldn't row again he said. So we couldn't go. And then, I think it took one or two more days, my father came back and he said – I mean, he came back every time with Mr. Bagge – that they found somebody would take us the next day at three o'clock. It was during the day, which itself was strange that we were able to flee during the day, but I was told later on that the Germans were paid off. So, the Germans that were guarding the harbor, it was a harbor, wouldn't say anything. So that day we just walked down from Mr. Bagge's house. I remember when we left, I remember his kitchen had a big picture window

² Commander (German)

³ Mr. Bagge (Danish)

and he turned around and he cried and he just hoped we would get over there safely. He was such a wonderful man. I mean he risked his life and he didn't do it just for us. He did it, lots of people went through his house. And every October second – we fled October second, and that day my father would always send him a present in silver to commemorate the day. I just heard that he had died now. But I don't know when, but he died an old man. But he really saved many, many people. So we walked down to the fishing boat and I remember was the going down – you know this fishing boat has where the fish is usually square opening? We went way downstairs and we were with 14 people. It took more than us, and it was a family that I knew and I met the children. They were the same age as me. I just met them in Israel. Their name was Marcus. I remember and they had an old aunt along and she – I remember her putting her foot down, in the fishing boat to go down and she said, "Oh, I forgot my umbrella. I have to go home and get it." And my father took her leg and pulled it down and said, "You are not going back home. We are leaving."

01:15:38

And, and then we all sat around, you know, was very dark down there, and they closed up the, the opening of the boat and then the fisherman came on board and we left. And I remember everybody being seasick and I was a little child. I mean how old I was in '40? Six years old? And I remember I was so proud of myself. I was the only one not being seasick. And we stayed very quietly and the boat went out. And when we were in the middle of the ocean between Sweden – it was about 30 minutes into Sweden – between Sweden and Denmark, a big boat came and we were afraid it was Germans because there were soldiers on it. They were dressed – they looked just like Germans. But it was a Swedish patrol boat that came to pick us up. They came in Swedish waters. They were allowed to go out and the Germans couldn't... And then we were safe. The Germans couldn't do anything. They came a big boat and they helped us up from the fishing boat and we stayed on the deck. Then we were, we were saved. And we went into a little harbor in Sweden. I think it was right outside of Helsingborg. Yeah, Helsingborg. And, you know, they're welcoming us; and they all look like Germans because the Swedes – they were wearing the same dresses and we came in and we got coffee, tea and they told us where we could stay. They put us actually in the Grand Hotel. It's called the Grand Hotel. They paid for the suites, paid for everything and they said we could stay there 'til if we had any relatives in Sweden we could go to them. I think we stayed about a week. Every day my parents would go down to the harbor to see if my grandparents had come. They will still – and an old aunt I had, my grandfather's sister, they were still in Denmark when we fled. And a few days later, four, five days later they came on another fishing boat. I am not sure where they came from, but I know that everyday my parents went down to hear if they had come. And we were all saved. And we stayed in the hotel, until my father – my mother had relatives, an uncle in Malmö, so we went to them. And I remember in that apartment there were lots of other Danes, relatives and I remember we slept on one of these beds you pull out for two, and we slept all four in them. And, and the only sad thing I remember from there was – remember I was only six or seven – that the other children that were there, they had some relatives that bought them a little doll and I didn't get a doll. I remember still that I was very unhappy I didn't get that doll. But we stayed

with this family. You see my father was young. My father must have been at that time when he's born in 1906 so he was 30, 40 years old at that time. He got out and got a job. First, he got an apartment for us, 'cause he had some money along, and he got us an apartment – “Västergatan,” small apartment. I remember we had to buy it furnished with real junky, furniture we bought it and we stayed there.

01:18:55

Q: Where did your father get the money?

A: Well, he had money. Well, he had taken some money along, but actually it cost 2,000 for every – we paid 8,000, 10,000 crowns for the five of us. I remember my uncle was there too. But I think that they did give us money. That's right. The Swedes gave us money. They gave us coupons to eat so we could go into a beautiful restaurant to eat. And they gave us money, pocket money until we got ourselves – I mean they were wonderful, the Swedes – 'til we got ourselves established. My father got a job right away selling artificial teeth. He would travel. I remember the little package with the teeth and he would travel and come home and he got, you know, salary for that. My mother got a job in a store. What is that called? With women's clothes, lingerie? These were Swedish people either that we knew before. I think that my parents must have known them. And my sister got a job. My sister was five years older. I think she was watching children, little children. And I, I just played and we lived in that apartment the whole – in Västergatan – during the war we lived. We moved and then we moved away from our relatives moved into the apartment. Now I know my father – the first job was not with the artificial teeth. The first job was in a chocolates – chocolate factory called Mazetti. It is a very famous Swedish chocolate factory. And they would always give him chocolate when he left to go home to us every day to the – you know they always call us the “flykting,”⁴ in Swedish. “Flykting,” which means, “the refugees.” And they were very nice to us.

01:20:34

Q: What did you do as a child at this point? You are in Sweden?

A: In Sweden? Well, the first – I don't remember when they made the Swedish school, but I would say at the first half year I just played. I didn't – my best friend I remember had another apartment. Her parents had another apartment. At the same street they rented another apartment. We would get together to play and – so, I didn't do anything 'til they started opening a school in Sweden, a Danish school in Lund. I think it was after we had been there a few months or maybe even half a year. They opened the school and I would go and I went into third grade. And my sister was five grades ahead of me. And then we would go everyday to school like in Denmark. They would make it with the Principal was Danish. Her name was Lachman. And there was another very good teacher. His name was Bertelsen. He

⁴ Refugee (Danish)

wrote a book later on about it. He wrote a book called *October 2, 1943*. Aage Bertelsen. He was a head teacher, the headmaster. And she was the Principal. And we went to a little – I went to a little school. It was like a school and a big school, probably like elementary and more of a high school. And it was very pleasant. It was a 20-minute ride with a train to Västergatan, from Malmö to Lund. And we had regular school – we work. And my sister, of course, stopped working also. She went to school. She went to – it's called mellemskole,⁵ the middle school. Probably like ninth or 10th grade. And I remember for lunch, they had a place where we all would go to eat. It would be for kosher and non-kosher. A big place! And I also remember I had piano lessons in Sweden after hours, I remember. So we lived a pretty regular life. And then my father got this other job, which was better paid, I guess, working for his friends selling teeth. That he did the rest of the, of the occupation. And, I mean, life went on. It was a very good time for us. There was nothing, no hardship. We, you know, they – like they gave us money 'til we could – very soon my father, you know, got the job, and my mother. We didn't need to get any money from Sweden. And also a very strange thing is that my father's business in Denmark continued, with a Jewish name, continued going, and they sent us money over.

01:23:10

Q: How did they do that?

A: I don't know how they sent the money. I just know that the Germans did not touch any Jewish store, any Jewish home. Everything stood intact and went on as before, which is very strange even after they, you know, so to speak got rid of all the Jews. I don't know how they sent money over, but they did. Curious. I really don't know. And I know that it went on and my father's – all his employees – he had like about 20 people working for him – and they all took care of it and they were very honest. They sent money over or kept it. I mean there was no stealing, no looting. You know, wasn't – the Danes are good people. They didn't only save us. They saved our things. Saved our things. So, like I said, it was, it was not a bad life in Sweden for us. It was a good life

Q: Did you hear at all about what was going on in Denmark?

A: In Denmark, not so much. We didn't know the bad things that were going on in the world or.... No, I don't think anybody believed it or knew it. No. That's why we weren't really afraid either when the Germans were occupying Denmark. We weren't scared because we never.... I don't think we knew or maybe because I was so young, I didn't know. But I don't think we knew what was going on in the world at all.

01:24:41

Q: What – you are in Sweden. You are going to school. By then you would have been seven,

⁵ Middle school (Danish)

eight, nine. You didn't hear anything about what was happening, about even in terms of Denmark, their attempts to round up the Jews? You didn't know about any of that?

A: No. No. Well, we knew they were going to – that they were attempting and we knew that 99 percent of the Jews were saved, because we knew – you know, we met people and, and the only ones that were taken were the ones that didn't believe it and stayed home. Which was about 400 people. And those 400 people were all sort of taken care of specially. I don't know if you want to hear about that, but they weren't.... No. Where they went – no, that's not–

Q: No. What we want is just your story at this point.

A: Right. Well, I mean my whole family was saved. My grandparents, they also went to Malmö. They lived there in an apartment. My mother's parents and my mother's brothers and sisters with their family. Everybody was saved and they all lived either in Malmö or in Stockholm. Somebody lived near Lund. And we got together with them, and we had like a normal life there.

Q: Did your parents or did any member of your family that you know of have any connections or involvement with the resistance or with any groups that were?

A: Well, my father became a brigadier. I think it's called a brigadier – Brigade⁶ in Danish. He was 40 years old and they, they trained them in Sweden. They trained them to go back when the Germany – when they, when they capitulated. When they knew that it was going towards the end of the war and they were going to send them back to help round up the Germans and so my – the minute the war was over, my father left with the whole battalion of soldiers. And we stayed in Sweden. We didn't go back to Denmark 'til May 28th. The war was over May fifth, I believe. Germany gave up. But we stayed 'til, you know – I guess we all, all the Danes went back on one big boat to Sweden – to Denmark, on May 28. And I remember that very well.

01:27:21

Q: Describe that trip.

A: That trip – I just remember standing on this tremendous boat, being very happy going back. You know, this was just my mother and my sister and I. And I remember when we came towards the shore, all the Danes – millions of Danes, thousands of Danes were standing there with red and white flags, the Dannebrog⁷ waving, welcoming us back. And they were wonderful all the way. And I just remember we went to, to the house we had my father had bought before the war. And that's why I remember all, all these pictures that were broken on the floor from German soldiers and, and I also know my sister stayed back because she

⁶ Brigadier, general (Danish)

⁷ Danish flag (Danish)

stayed for another month to graduate. She was in a middle school where you had 'til – I guess it's like high school here. So, in order to graduate they had to finish the year. So they – she stayed. I think they went to Lund and stayed there. It was like about 30 people, from that class, that had to stay. And when she came back her classmates from school came to welcome her in the house. I remember that. She – in our house and they came all over to welcome her back. And–

Q: What was the–? You came back to Denmark. You found this house. Did you go to your apartment, as well?

A: No, because my father had bought it before and I think that the maid probably had moved all the furniture or I am not sure. But we never went to the apartment. That was rented out. But all our stuff was completely where we – nothing was stolen. And I know my father had a car before the war. It was still standing there. And his business was still running, with the same foreman and same people working there.

Q: Did he get his business back?

A: Yeah. He just, he just started back. And it was just running as if he had been there, there all the time. Which was strange, that they – it was strange that the German's didn't close down the Jewish businesses. They didn't. And I started school, and then I must start in a new school. I went to a public school then, in the fourth grade. Fourth, fifth grade I stayed there. And, you know, everybody was asking us, “What happened in Sweden? How were you're experiences?” And everybody was curious.

Q: Did you either before or after the war, what did it feel like being Jewish particularly in Denmark?

A: Well, there was no– the way I look at it, there was no difference between being Jewish and not Jewish. And I did not come from a religious background so maybe I never felt anything and I remember very – I mean today I feel differently, but I remember standing outside our house with some friends. We had just been going to dance class and we were discussing whether one should marry – one should stay and marry only Jewish people, and they all felt sure, and they were not Jewish. I remember they were saying that they felt that Jews should marry Jews. And I say, “Why you marry? You are in love with them.” This is my background I guess. You don't marry for religion. You marry. But we really did not feel any difference, there was – of being Jewish or not Jewish in Denmark didn't. My husband might tell you different stories. I don't know – because he comes from a religious background. So it's different. But I, I didn't feel any discrimination ever. Never heard the word “Jew” said.

01:31:10

And I went to – well, the first few years I went to Jewish schools and when I came back, I was – there was one more boy that was Jewish in the class. When I went to the higher

schools, there was another girl. I went to an all girls' school then from sixth grade 'til I graduated. And there were two Jews in the class: me and another girl.

Q: Did you feel any difference because there were only two of you?

A: No, I never even thought – it's just that I knew her and I knew her family, that I know she was Jewish. But no, I never felt anything different between being Jewish and not Jewish.

Q: What was it like immediately after the war in Denmark?

A: How I remember that, we couldn't get chocolate. Because I knew my father would buy things that nobody could get, so he would like buy – you know, it was rationing, and he would get it for us. But it was not a hard life. We went to school and just classes – I know people didn't have as many cars as we do now. I would go by bicycle to school always, like everybody else.

Q: Is there anything you want to add?

A: No, not really. Except that I love the Danes and I think the best part that happened to me, is that I'm Danish. I've always been – I feel very fortunate to be born there and I love the country. What they did for the Jews, the way they – later on I realized what other countries had done to their people, and I realized that it was not that the Germans were better in Denmark, it was because the Danes were better. So, I think that should be known always, never forgotten. Alright?

Q: Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

Q: That's it.

01:33:10

[Conclusion of interview]