

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

WORLD WAR II ORAL HISTORY SERIES

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Ursula Kramer

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Interviewed by
Sarah Webb, August 2006

Transcribed by Theresa Tucker, Nov 2008

Edited by
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World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
002 Sarah Webb	<p>[The purpose of this interview]...is to collect, preserve and disseminate personal interviews for historical study and give the voices and memories of people who have first hand World War II experience.</p> <p>So, this is Sarah Webb, and today is August 11, 2006, and I'm interviewing for the first time, Mrs. Ursula Kramer. And the interview is taking place at Pafford Place, where Ursula Kramer lives at a various address, which I've already put away -- At 615 G, Country Road 340A, Burnet, Texas.</p> <p>Ok. Now, we're gonna ask the questions. Want to start generally. We're going to get some background. Mainly, where were you born and when?</p>
018 Ursula Kramer	I was born in 1907 in Konigsberg, Oste Prussia, East Prussia. Which belongs now to Russia -- Russia has adopted it, kept it. The town Konigsberg -- it's under North Sea.
021 Webb	At the time of World War II, was it part of Germany?
Kramer	Yes, it was part of Germany.
Webb	What was your father's occupation?
Kramer	My father was, at that time, Captain in the German Army, in the pioneers -- that is part of the Army, like here. What you call it -- technical...
Webb	Technical support?
Kramer	No. They are called Corps of Engineers in America. Over there it was Pioneers.
Webb	Did your mother work?
Kramer	You know, he was a full time officer.
Webb	OK. So, your mother did not work?
Kramer	No.

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	Did you have any brothers and sisters?
Kramer	Yes. One older brother, one year older, and two years younger sister.
032 Webb	What are some of your recollections from that time period – when you were, let’s say, as you were just growing up?
034 Kramer	I only remember one incident when my mother was on vacation in the sanatorium and my brother took me to his school. He went already to school. And he took me along; maybe the maid wanted to get rid of me for some reason. And so, I was going with my brother to his private school; he was in first grade, and when he was in classroom, I played outside in the sandbox.
042 Webb	Ok. Uh, Did you go to school?
043 Kramer	Yes.
Webb	OK. Where did you go to school?
Kramer	I go to school – by then we lived in Strassburg. And that’s where was my first school year.
Webb	Did you live in town or did you live out on a farm?
Kramer	No, we lived in town when father was an officer. We lived in an apartment as all officers do because they move around so much.
Webb	I just asked that because the other day you were talking about horses...
Kramer	Yeah, that was later, between the two wars.
Webb	Did any other family members live with your family, like grandparents or aunts?
Kramer	No.
Webb	OK. How old were you when war came?
Kramer	You mean the second world war?

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	Let's take it with the first. Let's take it with the first and really get the big picture.
055 Kramer First World War	The first world war – I guess, my father was on the front and my mother and we lived in Marburg where she rented an apartment.
Webb	And how old were you at that time?
Kramer	I was – 1914 – I was seven.
061 Webb	Ok. Ok. And then between the wars, where did you live? Is that when you moved to Strassburg?
068 Kramer	No. We lived in Strassburg first and then, when the war started, we could not stay in Strassburg, since he was an officer, and we had to move out and so, my mother, in 1915, was allowed to get the furniture out and move to Marburg. And until then we stayed with our grandparents in Terwingia [?].
Webb	When World War II came, how old were you?
Kramer	I was just married.
Webb	Were you like – twenty?
Kramer	I was 24. I was married when I was 24.
Webb	Did you see the war coming?
072 Kramer War is Coming	Yes, we was very much afraid that the war was coming. I remember to talk to a cousin of my husband. He wanted to go into the army and he said, "Don't go into the army, you are going to be in the war." And he said very oddly, "Oh, by then I will be in the general ... it was the general - what you call it?"
Webb	...The general staff or something?

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Kramer	Staff, yeah. And it took, it was not true, it took only five years, and he really was killed in the war.
Webb	Wow. And that was a cousin?
Kramer	Yeah, that was a cousin of my husband's.
Webb	What was your reaction – what was the day that war was declared, and what was your reaction?
Kramer	It was in 1914.
Webb	No, I'm talking about World War II, now.
Kramer	Oh. World War II? Oh, when I was married, and that was in 1930?
Webb	...39?
Kramer	It was started, you know. World War II was later. But Hitler took over the government when we were just married.
Webb	And what did you feel about that?
Kramer	There was a vote at that time, for the... what do you call it...
Webb	Prime Minister?
Kramer	No. For the...
Webb	Was it a national election?
Kramer	<p>The Constitution and all that. What do you call it when they meet – they met - in Berlin?</p> <p>The Reichstag. It was the Reichstag and so, we saw it was coming and were much afraid that he would take over, and so, we voted against Hitler -- something that was that was strongly a party that was against Hitler.</p>
Webb	And you and your husband were both against Hitler?

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Kramer	Yeah.
Webb	Were you different than your family about that?
Kramer	We didn't have contact with our family, an officer usually was for Hitler when he was army, you know. Hitler reinstated the army.
Webb	When you say you didn't have contact with them, does that mean you weren't seeing them in any way? Or that you just didn't discuss the election with them?
Kramer	We didn't see them for a long time.
Webb	And why was that?
Kramer	Army families only came together on Christmas because traveling was very difficult at that time. Because troop transports was across Germany.
Webb	Was your husband draft age?
Kramer	My husband was draft age. And he was at the university and ...
Webb	Was he a student or a professor?
Kramer	No, teaching at the university. He was always a professor, and when a friend of his told him that there was in Berlin an institute that did research for the army, for the air force, -- high altitude research for the air force, -- and if he would go, and would -- then he would not be drafted. Because he was working for the Air Force.
Webb	So, did he do that?
Kramer	So, he did do that, and then, when the war started he went into - first he had to take his basic training and then became an officer and was sent to Berlin to work in that research institute.
Webb	And in the meantime, your father was already was already in the Corps of Engineers, so he probably just stayed doing that?
Kramer	Yes.

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	How 'bout your brothers?
Kramer	My brother also was in the army – was an engineer.
Webb	That helps. So, no one in the immediate family actually had to go and actually fight in the war?
Kramer	No.
Webb	That's good.
Kramer	Essentially, my father was always behind the front where the engineers were deployed.
Webb	Yeah. How about your friends. Did you have friends who had to go to the war or whose husbands had to go to the war?
133 Kramer	At that time we were moving around so much we never stayed longer than a year or two in one town. And so we only made contact with colleagues and other people. And we knew some of the colleagues were – they betrayed people.
Webb	So, you had to be careful what you said?
Kramer	We had to be very careful what we said, yes.
Webb	I know you disagreed with your family about Hitler.
Kramer	Yes, because my father was in standing in the army - active again, and that's what he liked.
Webb	Yeah. So he took the army viewpoint.
Kramer	We visited my parents' over Christmas, and my parents lived at that time in Marburg and it was very difficult not to talk. And so, my husband could usually - because only one room could be heated besides the kitchen, and I stayed with my mother in the kitchen and he, my husband, - just walked to town constantly to try not to sit down in the living room with my father.
Webb	Did your father know that you disagreed with his views?

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Kramer	I think he must have known.
Webb	But, he just didn't ask directly?
Kramer	We didn't talk about it – Hitler.
Webb	You raised children during the war, didn't you?
156 Kramer In Berlin	Yes. Since my husband had to go to Berlin to work there in that institute, I later moved to Berlin, and we rented a little apartment. And I had only one daughter, at that time. But then, since he worked in Berlin, he became assistant professor in Berlin University, and he could combine this. And so, we knew that we had an income over there in Berlin, and we moved to Berlin.
Webb	We have a background noise of Sandy panting. Laughing. [Dog can be heard panting in the background.] Before the end of the war did you have more children?
Kramer	Yes. After we moved to Berlin, I had two sons in Berlin. 1940 and 1941.
156 Webb Propaganda	Was there any problem about propaganda that they were being taught in school or organizations that they were asked to join?
171 Kramer	You see, there was propaganda everywhere, but we lived just a private life. Unless he learned at the Institute to say "Heil Hitler" and said "Good Morning," and I could never say it, I didn't want it.
Webb	That could be awkward.
Kramer	At first I had coffee meetings with colleague women, and I finally didn't go anymore because I was afraid to.
Webb	Very difficult. Yeah, that someone would ask you or that they would notice you were...

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Kramer	I couldn't say "Heil Hitler" to them.
Webb	That must have been very difficult, to be in a situation where...
Kramer	I was very isolated, and my husband had to learn to be with his colleagues and say ...
Webb	...say the right things.
Kramer	...the right things, yeah.
182 Webb	Were you bombed? You were in Berlin –
Kramer	Yes, we were in Berlin and the bombs increased so much that we spent almost every night in the cellar from 12 to 2.
Webb	Did the bombs come at certain times, then?
Kramer Bombs every night	Yeah. The airplanes came to Berlin very late at night, yeah. But when [can't understand] my daughter went to school there already, and when, then, the air attacks came also at daytime, then I knew we couldn't stay in Berlin. By that time, my husband's institute for the army, it was moved to the Alps. Because it didn't seem to be safe in Berlin. So, we had to go to the Alps. We decided that we, the family, would go too. And we rented – in the Alps, in the village – we rented two rooms in with a farmer.
Webb	Was it still inside German territory?
Kramer	Yes – it was Austrian territory. By that time, Austria was next to Germany.
Webb	Did it seem unfair that you were opposing Hitler and yet you were getting bombed?
Kramer	No, we never thought about it, you know, everybody was bombed. We had to sit in the cellar almost every night. And so, we were glad we had occasion to go and to leave Berlin with the children and the food situation was very difficult.

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	What was the food situation?
207 Kramer Lining up for food	We all had to line up and so we had to spend – we all spent long hours lining up, and so I couldn't manage without a maid. So, my mother sent me her maid and with that she could stay at home and care for the children and I lined up for whatever.
Webb	Yeah. 'Cause, otherwise, they're left home alone, that would be difficult.
Kramer	The children were too small.
Both	[Discussion about the dog that is panting in the background.]
Webb	Were you able to raise any animals for food?
Kramer	No. No. The only thing in Berlin, I had to - the yard and I raised vegetables and potatoes. All vegetables came from our yard.
Webb	How about clothing. What did you do for clothing?
Kramer	I was able to sew and so, we had tickets for clothing. You could buy only anything on tickets. And so, since I was able to sew I bought material and that came out better, and I could sew a dress for me and something for my daughter, too.
Webb	Was there difficulty with heating and basic services like water and
Kramer	No, we had good luck, when we moved to Berlin to find a house, it had central heating, and so we could buy a certain amount of coals and tickets and with that heating the whole house.
Webb	Did you feel lonely, being so isolated?
Kramer	Yeah, we got used to it. We didn't have anybody to talk to, but we had a friend of mine who had come to Berlin to go to school there, and we gave her one room where she slept, and that was very helpful for me, to have her in there. And for her, too.

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	And did she have the same beliefs that you did?
Kramer	Yes.
Webb	That would be a great help. Were there a lot of people who had those kind of beliefs or do you not know because everybody had to keep quiet?
258 Kramer	Everybody had to keep quiet, but I know that later on my husband found a few men that thought like he did and they came once a week together.
Secret meetings	And that was already secret – the meetings, because I was not going to call him, and I couldn't contact him. And later on we just didn't answer the telephone until he was home. So people didn't know that he was gone.
Webb	Yes. Well, were they doing something to resist, or was it just more moral support?
Kramer	They had installed wards -- they were men from the party who had a certain circle in town where they knew everybody and knew where they were -- where they worked -- and to keep track of us. So that was very difficult to keep secret that my husband wasn't home.
Webb	Yeah, they were trying to...
Kramer	...that he was gone longer than necessary.
Webb	But the group that he met with, did they do something to resist? Or did they...
Kramer	They had the resistance in Germany; that was very secret but very active. And they supported people who were put in prison by the Nazis; they supported the families and so on. They did quite a good work.
Webb	Yes! Did he not tell you much about it so that you would...
Kramer	No. He said, just don't call... I can't be reached.
Webb	Yeah. That would be very dangerous, it seems to me. Very dangerous.
Kramer	Yeah.

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	When they were supporting the families were they like providing them with food and things like that?
Kramer	No, that was almost impossible. But I know that my friend who lived with us -- she had contact. She worked in the Evangelical [can't understand] work. She had contact with a Jewish woman and she took her into our house. By then, I was with the children already gone to the Alps. And so there were rooms available in our house, and she took this woman in. And she did not let my husband know much about it. And there were situations when you didn't ask questions.
Webb	Yes, it would be better not to know. Wow. Let's see. Did you listen to the radio?
Kramer	Yes, a little bit, but most of the time it was really a funny situation. Everybody who had a radio in that street, put the radio in the window and so, it was speeches were transported, spoken into the street.
Webb	Oh, how horrid!
Kramer	And either you opened your window to hear or you closed your window.
Webb	If you closed your window, would people notice and be suspicious?
Kramer	Yeah, it was more dangerous. You had to be very careful what you did. We did it this way: we opened windows in one room, and we sat in the other room.
Webb	Uh-huh! Were you able to get accurate news of what was happening in the war or was it all propaganda, or what?
Kramer	Yes, you learned, the newspaper learned to tell us what was going on. Telling us, saying, like "Oh, these people did such terrible things." And then we know it was something against Hitler. That's the way they gave us information.
Webb	And you just learned to filter...
Kramer	So many newspapers were ransacked and closed. Until the other newspapers knew what to do and talked like the regular people and let

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
	us know the news that way.
Webb	It would be a tricky...
Kramer	It was, it was. You had to be, really, very careful. And I just stayed at home and didn't meet anybody anymore. At first I had to come together with colleague wives, at the university, and later I didn't go anymore. It was just too dangerous that I'd talk the wrong way.
Webb	Wow. Did you have any worries that your kids would say something at school that would reveal...
Kramer	My children were, at that time, still without school.
Webb	OK. That helped.
Kramer	And only when we later went to the Alps, then my daughter was school age, and she went to the village school.
Webb	Was it dangerous there too, or not?
Kramer	It was, but we had contacted the teachers, and we know what the teachers were thinking, and they knew us, too.
Webb	Ah, that's good. But that initial contact might have been difficult when you first didn't know and you're sorting it out.
Kramer	Very, very difficult to find out. Two of you could talk or two of you couldn't.
Webb	Did you ever hear broadcasts of any of the Allied Forces, any of the speeches like...
Kramer	When we lived in Heidelberg, we found out that there was a Center -- an English Center. But we had to go very secretly, so that our maid didn't know it. But we did. And, we sometimes, we had when Hitler makes his speech, everybody had to listen to it. And so, we had to turn it on, and then we turned it on and we went in the other rooms, so we didn't need to hear it.
Webb	Right. Did you ever -- were you ever in one of those great big mass

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
	rallies where they had so many people listening to him?
Kramer	Yes, my husband was, as a doctor, involved in a Nazi group – he had to was directed to go and play doctor for them - make initial tests with people, health tests. And so, he had to go and attend one of these meetings. You just had to do what was necessary.
Webb	Yeah. Right. Did you hear about the dropping of the atomic bomb?
Kramer	I don't really remember. You know I could have heard about it when I came here. I can't say when I heard it.
Webb	Did things change at the end of the war, when things were – did things begin to be more difficult or were you out of that and into the Alps?
Kramer	We had contact with friends who were in the government and they told us what was going on. So they said they had through pastors, tried to get contact with England. And then one of the pastors had got permission from the German government to go to a religious meeting in Norway. And there he met some people from England and told them that there was a resistance in Germany. And they should help us. And nothing came of it. And that was so very disappointing.
Webb	Yes, I bet it was. When did you know the war was lost – that Germany had lost the war?
Kramer	I really don't remember. I just -- Oh yeah, we were in Austria, the children and I living with the farmers – since two years. My husband could come from time to time because that research institute was in the little town next to it. So, he could do – university vacations he could come down there. But, then when the war ended we were supposed to – the institute where my husband worked at, was supposed to move out. And they arranged for old German trucks, army trucks, to come and drive the inventory of the institute back to Heidelberg. And so, we rode with this convoy.
Webb	Back to Heidelberg?
Kramer	Back to Heidelberg. And that took us about four days. I describe that in

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
	my book. ["Where Do We Belong? A Woman's Life During the Hitler Regime"]
Webb	And when did you see other soldiers – I mean, soldiers from another nation and say, England or United States or Russia?
Kramer	I really didn't see anybody. I saw only German soldiers who were on duty or drove our convoy. And they took us to Heidelberg and my husband had been in Heidelberg with one of the American ranks - what is the ranks, lower ranks, of an officer?
Webb	Lieutenant? Captain?
Kramer	No, not lieutenant – adjutant.
Webb	Adjutant. Ok.
Kramer Convoy to Heidelberg	He was able to drive us in a jeep and go to several universities to get some papers that the Americans wanted to have, scientific papers that were done during the war. And this way he came through Heidelberg, and he met our friends from our time when we lived in Heidelberg. And they said they had a big house, and they would take us in. And so when the convoy went to Heidelberg, and then I went with the children in that convoy, and we were riding four days without food. And, I mean, we had little crackers and things to nibble on. But then these friends took us in and let us have their attic rooms.
Webb	And how did you get out of Germany. Did you leave soon after the war ended?
Kramer	No. We stayed there about a year, and finally I found a friend. She lived in an abandoned – what do you call the buildings where they put working people in –
Webb	Barracks?
Kramer	Barracks, yes. There were abandoned barracks and she had two rooms there or three, and I found three rooms there, and I moved in there with my children. And friends in Heidelberg lent me furniture and beds and

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
	so, we lived there, and my husband was taken prisoner by the Americans because they thought he had – he was – he had position in the SS. And so he was kind of a prisoner of these people.
Webb	They thought that, but it wasn't so.
Kramer	When he wanted to go home, they put him in prison. Until he could clear his name.
Webb	You say so in your book, but say how he cleared his name.
466 Kramer Husband in American Prison Camp	<p>Yeah. That happened. He wrote, -- he was only allowed to write to me, -- one page a week. So he wrote that I should write to the man in the lab where he had been professor at the end – and the custodian. And so, I wrote to the custodian, what he could write down that my husband never, -- it was not known that he even was in the SS. And he wrote a very good letter.</p> <p>And when I sent that to my husband, he was released from prison camp. But, the bad thing was, he was about five months in American prisons camp. And they moved the people from camp to camp and always, when he had just settled down, then he had to pack his backpack, and they would move to another place. And most of the time they used him as a doctor for the other prisoners.</p>
Webb	Yeah, cause that was his area - health field, right? And did you want to go to the United States immediately or did that – is that an idea that occurred later?
Kramer	<p>No, when he finally came out of prison camp, he couldn't believe the situation in Germany, now that you couldn't get food, and you had to stand in line everywhere to get everything, and everything was on stamps and it was very, very difficult to get food on the table for your family.</p> <p>And, then also, we heard that our – the professorships were given to young people so he said “ We really can't live in Germany anymore.” That's what he was saying. That impressed me so much, you know, that he said that constantly. And then he found out through a friend who had connections with the Americans to go to America and do research in America. And so, he accepted one of those offers to go to [can't</p>

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
	understand] San Antonio. And, but -- the families could go to Landshut. where they had emptied apartments for the families. They give them some extra food there; they took care of them a little. And there also schools where the children learnt English.
Webb	Now where was that?
Kramer	In Landshut – close to Munich – a smaller town.
Webb	So, has he already gone then, to the United States?
521 Kramer Husband to Landshtul	<p>Yes, gone to the United States, and the families could go to Landshut. So, my sister came to stay with the children, and I only took one of my sons along and went to Landshut, so I was there and could say, “Give me this apartment.”</p> <p>They gave me one room at first, only where I could stay with my son. And then they gave me a small apartment, I said, “That’s good enough, I’ll take it.”</p> <p>And it was only a living room, a bedroom, and a kitchen. And I think there was a bathroom, too. And then there was a room up in the attic for the maid. And, so I took that, and I slept in the living room, and the baby in the living room, and that was it.</p>
Webb	And then, when did you go to the United States?
Kramer	Well, we stayed there almost a year. And since I had been pregnant before my husband left, I had to wait until the child was born, and then they didn’t transport me until the child was nine months old. So, we stayed there almost a year. And this child was born in Landshut.
Webb	When you came to the United States was there any kind of prejudice because you were a German?
Kramer	<p>See, my husband had already rented an apartment where we could stay, and then he had met, through – he was always a musician, you know, he played piano, so through music he had met a couple.</p> <p>Well, she played the piano, and he played the violin. And so he made music with these people. And so they became really two friends to me</p>

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter	Narrative
Subject, Speaker	
	and helped me to settle when I came with the children.
Webb	That's great! Well, let's see if there's some last little things. Are there other things that you remember about the whole situation of living through the war and all, that we haven't talked about yet?
566 Kramer	You know as long as Hitler was on earth it was very difficult to talk to anybody, and you just avoided that. Only when you gradually found out that the other person was not for Hitler either, then you could open up. And, so I had very few friends that were helping me and with whom I could talk.
Webb	Yeah. Ok. Any other last things?
Kramer	<p>I remember when we were in the Alps with the – the institute's leader had invited all the families to come for a Christmas party. So, I had to come for a Christmas party, made arrangements that somebody stay with my children. And it was really very difficult. I came in a little late and had to sit down and the men that were sitting next to me said, "I kept you some bread and some things so you can eat something. We have eaten already the soup and all this."</p> <p>Then we had to get up and listen to the Fuhrer's Christmas speech. And we had to stand in a group and listen to him. And I was not sitting next to my husband, you know, and he managed to stand next to me, and when everybody held his hand out and said "Heil Hitler" he pushed me in my ribs and said "Hold your hand up."</p> <p>And I did.</p>
Webb	Laughing. Oh, Dear. You managed? I know that would be difficult.
Kramer	I did.
Webb	Oh, that would be difficult.
Kramer	Because, I living at home, not meeting any people, I'm not used to say that all the time, you know, like he did.
Webb	Any other memories?

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
SIDE 2	
001 Kramer	...friends told him we could stay in the attic. So, they took the children with me, in. And my husband was in prison camp at that time.
Kramer	<p>...the attic. The people of the house finally found in the neighborhood, we had, a little room for the maid. We didn't have a maid, so we let my mother-in-law sleep over there. During the day she came over and slept with me in the attic. And she walked with my sons for little walks and things.</p> <p>But I had to feed her and it was with cards -- for tickets only. It was very difficult, and she didn't even dare to eat. I had to urge her to always when there was food on the table, "Please eat."</p> <p>And then finally she wanted to go to her hometown. There were no trains going through Heidleburg, because the little bridges were exploded, you know. So I have to go with her to a little town outside of Heidelberg where the train started. Then finally we tried it once and it didn't work. She didn't find room in the train, there were so many people trying to get in there.</p> <p>And so we tried it the next time and I went with her. I had the daughter of a friend of mine; she stayed with my children. She was sixteen already. So, she stayed that day with my children and I went with my mother-in-law to Frankfurt where she had to change the train. In order for her to get in the train; I wound my way through and found a place to sit and then she came later in, stepping over the people sitting on the floor. And I then gave her the seat and I went out.</p> <p>And finally in Frankfurt I found a compartment. There was a – what do you call it – a sister from the hospital – a nurse. A nurse who kept the department for the handicapped. And so I was able to convince her to put my mother-in-law in to help her change the trains in Frankfurt. And so, I didn't go with her all the way, and could go back and stay with friends in the next town overnight and then went home to my children. All this was very difficult at that time. People entered the trains through the windows! It was really bad and difficult to travel at this time.</p>
034	Are you getting tired? Your voice is getting slower. Well, thank you

World War II Oral History Transcript
Ursula Kramer

Tape Counter Subject, Speaker	Narrative
Webb	very much for letting me interview you and we hope this tape comes out.
Kramer	OK.
	End of transcript.