We continue now with our discussion with Robert Rothschild. Tell us a little bit about the Isle of Man and your experience there.

Well, the Island of Man, in certain respects, it certainly compared with Buchenwald. It was like a summer camp. Yes, you were behind barbed wire. But we administered the camp more or less ourselves. The camp consisted of blocks of row houses which had been boarding houses before the war, occasional boarding houses. And each house had its own kitchen.

And as I said, I trained-- had trained as a baker so I worked in the kitchen. I made desserts. And inside the barbed wire, we were as free as anything. As a matter of fact, twice a day, once in the morning, the camp was opposite the beach, so in the morning we were taken out under guard to the beach. And in the afternoon, we were taken to a soccer field. We played soccer in the afternoon. And it was very recreational.

As a matter of fact, I remember that across the street from the camp was a hospital. And especially when I was only-- at that time I was 16, but the fellows that a little older than myself, they spent most of the day at the barbed wire watching the nurses come and go.

So inside that camp, it was just-- obviously, you felt the loss of freedom. And the other thing is that families, they are separated because there are men's camps and women's camps. So of course, the children are mostly with the mothers. So it was certainly very hard for young married men, which were there were quite a number of them. And I guess they were the ones that watched the nurses.

But apart from that hardship, the loss of freedom, which is always a great loss, it-- I wouldn't consider it a hardship.

So the people there were from all over Europe?

No, the Germans.

Just Germans.

Because after France had fallen-- the defeat of France was blamed on the so-called Fifth Column, which were nationals who worked for the Nazis, and refugees. So they rounded up everybody who had any connection with Germany at all. And then sorted them out more or less. And the ones that are found sympathizers stayed.

But almost all the others were eventually released. Only some were released faster than others. I was released faster because I said I had a visa. We could go to the United States. Only I couldn't get out of the country anymore because there was no shipping.

So when I came back from the camp, I went back to the same bakery where I worked. And by that time, of course, all the English boys had been called into the army, in the service. And in years of service, I was the oldest of-- the one with the longest service in their place. And when I got back, when I was 16 years old, I was foreman. Because there was nobody there who knew anything more than I did.

And so we hired some refugee boys. And we produced. And, of course, the shortages-- was very difficult to produce, because of the shortages. For instance, jams were made from turnips.

Eggs were by import of a powder egg. We had imported powder eggs from China. They came in big, large crates. They were big wooden crates. And inside of them, line with tin. And we had to open them up. As a matter of fact, one day, the tin-- the tin cover snapped open and cut me right across my wrist. I very lucky. And the scar never went away.

And so we produced under great difficulty. And of course, then the British Empire was still intact, so there were certain things that were available, for instance, cocoa butter. So cocoa butter's very hard. So we used to melt it down and stretch margarine and any other fats to make the fats go further.

And of course, once you have access to certain kinds of foods, that gives you access to almost anything else. Because there is an exchange. And we got involved-- I'm not very proud of this, because after all, I was in England and it had saved my life. But we got involved with a little black market business.

Well, that was in fact [INAUDIBLE]. But what happened was, how it actually started, the English are tea drinkers. So tea was very strictly rationed. And the Germans, the refugees only drank coffee. And the English drank very little coffee so coffee was not rationed.

So what I did, I used to go around to all the German refugees I knew and collect all the tea I didn't use and started exchanging it for other goods, which was fine. No, I was not alone with that, you know. But eventually, we also used it in the bakery to exchange-- coal was rationed [INAUDIBLE]. So if I knew somebody had coal and I had the tea.

My wife and I, we had a house. And at that time, she was my girlfriend. And if we were short of coal, you need coal, I can get you coal. Because I had tea I could exchange for coal, because coal was rationed. So this was not quite legal.

But it's just one of the things you do when you-- because when you-- don't forget, I was only 16-years-old. And I'm the guy who can get you anything. It makes you feel very proud because she knew we could help people.

Right.

Because there wasn't any profit involved. We didn't do it for the money. As a matter fact, I don't think I ever made much. But the question was, oh, you want this, I can get it for you. And this was a-- this was a wholesale bakery that we worked at.

And we had two delivery vans. And every week we had to submit a plan of that route that the vans would take in order to get our gasoline ration. So if you mapped that all out, so many miles, we'd get gasoline accordingly.

So what we did was we submitted the plans for the two vans that [INAUDIBLE]. But then we would load up one to the hilt, as much as we could. And then the other one, use for as little delivery as possible. But we had the gasoline for both, you see? And then at the end of the week, I would use the van for the weekend.

Aha.

So if somebody wanted-- oh, I could move you. I remember I did a couple of moving jobs with that van. Want to move? No problem, I can move you. So I got a little enterprising.

You were really feeling your oats there.

But it felt good at the time.

Yes. You were also an air raid warden, you said.

Yeah. And then, of course-- well, what happened was that I left my rooming house. And one of the fellows was English. And of course, everybody felt very patriotic at the time and wanted to do something. And we-- we joined the-- I think it was called Junior Air Corp or something.

Anyway, it was for young kids before-- before they were called up to train for a service. This was for the Royal Air Force or some kind of-- I can't recall. I've forgot the exact name. And we joined together.

But at that time, the British did not accept the foreign born yet for their services, except for the Pioneer Corp, was a labor battalion. And that I didn't want to do. I was willing to fight, but I didn't want to--

So my friend, who eventually was killed in a raid over Hamburg, he became an observer in the Royal Air Force. I

couldn't stay and so I became an air raid warden at night. I worked during the day. I was in the air raid warden at night. We were on duty twice a week. But on call 24 hours a day, whenever a bomb dropped in our area.

So I was-- I got very little sleep in those days. And I never went to a shelter. Because any night I was home, I was so fast asleep, I didn't hear a thing.

Which part of London did you--

Northwest.

Northwest.

Northwest 10 Willeston. Anyway, again, I was talking about chance luck-- I don't know what you call it. I don't know what it is. But again, during the time that I was on the Isle of Man, the house that-- when I was rounded-- when I had to report to the police, I lived with a family. And I packed my stuff. I had a suitcase, I had a couple of suitcases.

And I stored it at my cousin's house, the one who registered me for that children's transport in which I came to England. And while I was on the Isle of Man, the house I lived in was bombed. And like I said, I never went to a shelter. I was left at home. I don't know if I would have been home.

I lost all my things because my cousin's house, although they were lucky-- they lived on the street in Golders Green, which is on the Northwest 11. And the Germans had dropped a landmine. A landmine is like a sea mine, only it was attached to a parachute so it would stay at ground level. So if it exploded, it exploded laterally.

Right.

So that they had dropped an unexploded landmine in my cousin's back yard. So they evacuated the whole street. And while the street was empty, that land mine went off. And the street was demolished completely. But not one life was lost because it was evacuated before it went off. But all my stuff went. So I don't know where I would have been.

So there's always some kind of interconnection. Whatever happened to me, yes, it was bad at the time, but in the long run it was advantageous for me. I don't know, you see, like I didn't get a boat. Suppose this was the height of the U-boat warfare. Suppose I would have gotten a boat. I don't know, maybe I would have been sunk. I don't know.

And over-- as I look back, and now I'm much older, but even like 20, 30 years ago, I developed this life philosophy, that there's just something you can take advantage of. It doesn't matter how bad things are. And I think there's a survival mentality, that the people who did survive had some survival will, subconsciously or somewhere.

And what do you think--

Some people did not survive because they just gave up.

What do you think gave you personally will and strength?

I don't know. I don't know. It's something deep down in the subconscious. I don't know. I think you would have to go into psychotherapy or something to find out what it is.

You want to tell us all about your brother?

My brother, like I said, he went to one of these Jewish training schools. And he became-- and he trained to be a locksmith. And then after the war broke out, he was taken as a forced laborer for this big German electrical-technical firm, Siemens. And he worked for them in Berlin.

And he was there until he left with my parents, together, to come to the United States. He arrived in the United States

with typhoid fever. He went from the boat into [Place name] Hospital in the Bronx. And eventually, he was cured I guess. He now lives in Silver Spring, Maryland. He's in the carpet business, rug and carpet business.

Yeah.

And do you want to tell us about how you came to the United States?

Well, I was very happy in England. Because I arrived there, I had just turned 15. And I started to work. And I roomed with English people. Wherever I went, I was accepted. And it was such a different --

Now I keep on saying that the little town I came from, everybody knew everybody. Generations of Christians and Jews had lived together. So we really knew each other intimately. But in spite of that, all of a sudden you were a devil. You had horns. And there I came, people who didn't know me accepted me.

For instance, there were restrictions, obviously, during the war, where foreign born wouldn't be able to go near a military installation. Now, as I said, I roomed mostly with English people, so the friends I picked up and the friends from work were English. And you would go out on a Sunday on the bicycles, and you would pass aerodromes, airfields anywhere. Just don't matter, you can pass You come along.

Not even give it a second thought. They knew I was German born. I don't consider myself a German. I want to make that clear. No. And I was one of them. And they didn't know me. And here I come from a background where everybody knew me. And I was thought of as a pretty nice guy. And they rejected me.

So I was happy there. And like I said, I was a big shot. I could get things. And I didn't want to leave. But when I left Germany, my father was in the camp. And the war was over in '45.

So my brother, I met again in England. My brother came to England with the American army as a GI in '43, '44. So I got together again with my brother during the war. He was stationed there for a few months before he went to the continent, to Germany.

But I hadn't seen my parents, my father, since '38 and my mother since '39. And of course, they kept on pestering me-- oh, come on, family ought to be together. And we all belong together. So finally, I guess blood proved to be thicker than water.

And also, I was practically engaged at the time. So life followed me-- who was then my girlfriend, my fiancee, she followed me eventually to the United States and we got married here. So I was quite content staying in England. But then the pressure was too much. And I came here in March 1947.

Where was your wife born?

In Upper Silesia, but now it's Poland. It is -- And she came here-- came to England, rather, at what age?

I think she was nine. Well, again, her family was supposed to go to Palestine-- was in Palestine. And also, this was a temporary stay till all the papers were in order. But again, then the war broke out so all bets were off and they were stranded in England. Her father died there. And then during the war, her sister married a GI. So she was a GI bride. So after I was here and her sister was here, so she followed with her mother.

Was there a Jewish community in London that you were part of?

No after my experience, I-- well, again, there are certain things that are drilled into you from childhood. And as I say, I come from an orthodox background. But like my mother says, well, if you're going to-- that's God's punishment. I'm here with those big bags from my eyes to my cheek, really miserable. That's the simple thing.

Then when I got to England, this Uncle Izzy. I was talking about before, who was the matriarch-- the patriarch of the

family, who was consulted about everything, he had also come to London. And he was still orthodox.

I have this cousin, not cousin-- it happens to be my namesake, Robert, was not. And when I arrived in England, my cousin said to his cousin, my uncle, I say look. I got this boy here, your sister's son. And, of course, he's come from-- his family's orthodox and I am not.

I am willing to pay whatever it will cost me to keep him until he's able to support himself. If you are interested to keep him orthodox, you will have to come up with the difference. Either take him into your house or make some provisions that he live with an orthodox family. And my uncle's answer was, well, just let him live with you.

And then I got the job. And I started to work. And I rode to work on my bicycle on Shabbat. And nothing came out of the Heavens to hit me. And nothing happened to me. And I started to work. And nothing happened to me.

And don't forget this was war and there were shortages, food shortages. But like I said, we were the source of food. And we got our fruits for the bakery from a market, which also had meats. So we would give the owner baked goods, or sugar, or flour, and he'd give us meat, which was not kosher.

And I started eating that. And I never got a bellyache from it. Nothing happened. So I think eventually I got just further and further away, by coincidence, maybe. Subconsciously, I just couldn't believe it anymore. Where was God?

And I had-- and I-- this is when I started looking back and getting this life theory. There's some things that's pre-determined. There was no reason for me to survive. All these things that had happened to me, I didn't plan any of it. They just happened by coincidence.

And even to this day, I can recall incident after incident, that it just-- things just fell into place. I didn't do it. But I found a place. And it certainly wasn't that religion that I was brought up in. Because I had done-- by that time, I had done everything against it.

And so I was never-- it's like for instance, today, I'm still a nominal member of a refugee congregation in New York, Shir tikvah which is 179th Street, between Broadway and Washington Avenue, because my father was very active there. And my mother's still-- my mother's still alive. She's going to be 95 in January.

And so I call it respect. It certainly is not belief. But I sort of feel, yes, I want to keep it up. Certainly, in light of my mother. I don't know, maybe I will send them-- after all, I live now in Westchester County.

I just send them the dues every year. I never go there. But nominally I'm a member. Maybe deep inside there is some kind of urge that I want to belong, but it certainly has nothing to do with my belief in religion. Yes, I want to belong. I'm part of that group. I don't want to deny that I'm a part of it, but not in any religious way.

How did you feel at the end of the war? You were still in London in VE Day.

At end of war, I don't know, you probably can't see it, but if you look at the crowds in front of Buckingham Palace, I'm there. I cheered. Oh, yeah. We won. Oh, yeah. I had made up my mind in England-- and, of course, I was I was a little scared during the war, in case the Germans landed, I had made up my mind, I was never going to be caught again.

I would have been shot trying to escape or what have you. I was not-- I was not going-- and obviously, there's no way of telling what I might have done at that particular moment it happened. Nobody can foretell that. But I had decided for myself that if I could possibly, I wasn't going to be caught again. I'd seen too much.

When you see-- when you're that young and you see all that-- how many 14-year-olds have seen bodies lying around all over the place? Imagine that. I didn't want to see it again.

Were you aware of what was happening in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe, during the time you were in England?

Well, there were rumors. I guess, it must have been the same here. There were rumors. I don't think there was ever anything official. I mean you hear it. Yes, there were rumors. Because during the war, all these small countries, at least in Europe, of course, Western Europe also, have national armies.

Like there was a Polish army. There was a Czech army, which were a part of the British army, but they had their own brigades, own regiments. And of course, there was underground activity. So yes, there was-- I can't recall now how much was actually known. But I know that, yes, there was news about camp circulating.

Because it came in. Because they had the couriers within the forces, the national force in England and the underground organizations in the home country.

Did you realize the extent of the extermination?

I don't think so. I don't think so. I couldn't put my finger on at what point I became aware of the existence of extermination camps, whether it was during or after the war. I don't know that anymore.

When you came to the United States, did you live with your parents?

Well, it was right after the war. There was a shortage of apartments. And I came in 1947. And my fiancee, now my wife, came the following January. So I lived with my parents. And we got married the following May, May '48.

And we couldn't find an apartment. And we lived in my room in my parents house. As a matter of fact, it was a single bed. And I was still a baker in those days. And I worked nights. And so our bed never got cold.

See, I slept in there at night and my wife-- I slept during the day and my slept at night. And then one day I was off. That was the old beds with the mattress resting on slats. And of course, one night, the slats did break through.

And we used to have to go through my parents' bedroom to get to my room. And it was right next door. And every time those slats went through, my father used to burst out laughing in the middle--

Anyway, eventually, my wife met somebody where she worked, who turned up an apartment in [INAUDIBLE], [INAUDIBLE] person's apartment. And we bribed some super. That was a few hundred dollars at that time. And you got an apartment on the fourth floor walk-up in Washington Heights. And then we moved out.

And you're-- both of your children were born--

Yes.

--in that period, while you were in Washington Heights.

Well, my daughter was born in [INAUDIBLE] House, which was that fourth floor walk-up, and so my son also. But then, there wasn't the [INAUDIBLE]. There wasn't the-- it was small rooms. By the time my son was born, the room was so tight, we had to take the frames off our beds in order to fit in the extra mattress, crib.

So this room was wall to wall mattress. There's wasn't room for anything. That's how small the place was. And then eventually, in '53, we moved into a four-room apartment on 81st Street in Washington Heights.

And then eventually-- I had quite a number of jobs in bakeries in New York. And in 1951, I think, '50 or '51, a new bakery, a new pastry shop opened up on 175th and Broadway, called [? Bonnie ?] Pastries. And I was foreman there.

And in '51-- no, maybe not-- I worked there for about 10 years, I guess, '69-'61. And in the summer, a lot of bakeries close in New York, because it's hot and people are out of town, so there's no business. And we closed for vacation.

I was on vacation. And I think it was up in Tanglewood. And on the way there, I stopped at a cousin's house in Springfield, Massachusetts. And I get a call from my mother. And it turned out that the owner of that bakery had drowned on his vacation in a lake in Vermont.

So I went back to New York. And I bought out the widow. And I ran the bakery till 1971, for 10 years. And Washington Heights at that time was in kind of flux. It became very Hispanic. And although there were still a lot of German Jews there, and I ran it, took over for these people. And we had run a continental kind of pastry shop.

And at that time, we had two unions in the place, one for the service girls and one for the bakers. And my lease was up. The union contracts were up. And I had told my accountant, who was an accountant who serviced all kinds of accounts, and I had told him I could see that-- if he ever came across something, some business he thinks I can handle, let me know. I don't think I can stay here much longer.

Because I could have moved the bakery, but the equipment by that time-- the store was modern, had pretty good the showcases, and the counters, and so on. But the back, the ovens, and the mixers, and all the machinery was old. And it wasn't worth moving. Wherever I would have gone, I would have had to start from scratch. And I just didn't want that.

And I tried to sell the place. I couldn't sell it. For Europeans, it was already too Hispanic. And for the Hispanics, it wasn't Hispanic enough. I couldn't sell it. And the landlord wanted to double our rent. And the unions were [INAUDIBLE].

Just about this time, the accountant comes and says, look, I have these friends who are in the display business. And they want to retire. And he knew them from way back. As a matter of fact, they were also German refugees and they had gone to school together in Germany with the accountant, who was also originally from Germany.

Why don't you try it out? So I figured, what do I have to lose? I can always go back to baking. And so I took a look at the displays. There was a display at the time at 63rd Street and Broadway. And I looked these people over. They're old people.

And I figured, these people came from the other side. They started this business from scratch. They started it. They came to America. They didn't know the language, probably. They'd never worked in the United States before. And they built it. If they can do it, I've been here now for-- '47-- 20 years. I've worked here. I know the language. If they can do it, I can do it.

And so I signed the contract with them that I would work for them for one year. And after one year, I would either buy them out or leave quietly. So after a year I figured I could do it. And I bought them out. And I was in the display business for 15 years, displays for jewelry.

And I sold that business two years ago. I did very well there, if I say so myself. And I'm home free.

And at what point did you move to the suburbs?

Well, my daughter lived in Israel for six years. And what happened was that when she graduated from college, my mother had-- who was by that time, also already an old lady. And she had always wanted to go back to Germany, visit the cemetery, her parents, and so on.

And she also wanted to see Israel. So she came to the proposition that she would pay as a graduation present, she would pay my daughter's fare, if I would pay all the other expenses. And I said, fine with me.

And then my daughter and my grandmother-- and her grandmother went to Germany to visit the hometown and the grave. You should hear my daughter's story of that. It's hilarious. And then they went on to Israel.

And that was in the '60s. And my daughter was very involved with all these peace marches and so on and so forth. But basically, she was a student. She really wanted to study. But with all these activities, she just couldn't-- she just couldn't

get herself down to studying because she was always involved with all these extracurricular activities.

So when the time came to come home from Israel, she put her grandmother on the plane and she stayed and enrolled in the University of Jerusalem. And she's been to school in Stony Brook, SUNY, New York. And she had started a program there-- which was like an open classroom program.

And she sent me the curriculum and that they were given a couple of professors. And of course, all that was in her transcript. And one day, she was approached by a professor at the University in Jerusalem, that he was going to start the first open classroom school in Jerusalem. And since she had this background, would she work with him. So she quit the university.

And she taught school, English and some other subjects. And she also counseled the parents, because it was a whole new concept at the time. And she taught in Israel for 10 years-- for four years. But while she was there, she met the Air Force officer whose parents-- that's another story-- whose parents lived in Brooklyn.

And so he was-- came back. For family reasons, he wanted to-- eventually, after his service was over, they wanted to come-- he wanted to come back to Brooklyn to see his parents. And so they came back here. And when they got married, they moved into our apartment and we moved down to Westchester.

As a matter of fact, this is a story you should get because My son-in-law's mother lived in Poland all during the war. She jumped off a deportation train and lived underground all during the war. She doesn't look particularly Jewish. So in fact, she said she was making it-- she survived by selling candy, and cigarettes, and stuff to the German soldiers and lived underground, just survived.

So she has [INAUDIBLE] location. And his father was in the part of Poland which was occupied by the Russians. And he served-- you heard already there was a Polish army in England, but there was also a Polish army in Russia. And he served in the Polish army in Russia. And they met after the war. And they got married in Poland.

My son-in-law was born in Poland. And he went there grade school. And of course, there was a lot of antisemitism right after the war there too. And they eventually went to a kibbutz in-- was it Israel? It was still Palestine then I think.

Before '48, yes.

Yeah, it was still Palestine. And then eventually, I think his father had a brother or his mother had a sister over here. And they came to New York. And he went to Columbia. But then he went back to Israel and joined the Air Force. And that's where he met my daughter. They met square dancing.

Have you, yourself, ever been back to Germany?

I don't want to go. I can't-- I've often considered it. Probably the closest I've come to it is, like if I would go to Holland and just drive through to take a look. I don't want to face these people. How do I know who carried that wheelbarrow and pushed that wheelbarrow my grandmother was on?

I have nothing against this younger generation. It's the people in my generation. Because nobody will admit to having been a Nazi. I showed you this thing before where I wrote for information. And they have a list of all the Jews in that town.

And here it gives you the name of when they were born and then when they moved. Now all the people that moved away from Mellrichstadt, it gives you the time when they moved to either inside Germany, or in my case to England or United States. But here there's a whole list of people that says moved to, and it says to Unbekannt which means to unknown. And they claim they didn't know. They know very well.

Because I also have a newspaper article from the local newspaper. And this is already from two years ago, where they say-- where there is a picture. And this is a commemoration of the Kristallnacht in 1946.

And here's a picture of the synagogue in Mellrichstadt. And here it tells exactly where and what percentage of people moved to other towns in Germany. What percentage of people moved to foreign countries. And they give you the two separate camps where the Jews of the town were deported to.

So for the official record to show that they were transported to destination unknown is a fake. And this I don't want to be told into my face. They know.

Yeah. Have you been able to talk to your children extensively about what happened to you in the time around Kristallnacht and the result.

Oh, they've read it. I told you, I gave you the manuscript. I wrote down my life story. And I wrote it for them. And they have--

And they have read it.

Yeah, they're well aware of it, oh yes.

Yeah.

But see, I don't expect them to be-- it's my own experiences that forms my reaction. They have to form their own. But they still should know what happened to their father, what happened to me.

And I don't want them to discriminate against because somebody is German because of what happened. We've discussed that there are very decent Germans. My parents probably survived on the decency of some of these people.

Yes.

But as a group--

Yes.

For instance, this mayor of the town now happened to be a schoolmate of mine. Now he was-- I don't remember anything antisemitic about him at all. I think he was a fairly decent guy. And I wrote him that. But he sends me a Christmas card every year. And every Christmas, he sends me some memento.

He writes, like maybe this will bring back happy memories. He sent me a whole book of pictures from the town. And one year, he writes not many words. He sends me this picture of our school. And he says, well, maybe this picture will bring back some pleasant memories.

Could you hold it up to the camera? Hold it up this way so we can see it. Yeah.

It's over here. It's over here.

This way, straight in front of you.

A little bit higher.

Higher, higher.

This is our school.

Yeah. And I look at this picture. And the first kid in the second row here is a Jewish kid, Alfred [? Mantell. ?] He must have been-- I don't know. I'm not sure if he was bar mitzvahed or not, but he was around 12 or 13. And he perished. He

was deported.

And so I wrote back to him-- how can you expect me-- how can you expect this picture to bring back pleasant memories when one of the kids on there was murdered. For what? What crime did he ever commit that he deserved this punishment. And who knows under what circumstances?

Please hold up the picture and point to the point to the boy you're talking about.

This boy, the first kid.

We may not be able to see.

And the kid next to him with the cross, apparently, is the man who is now the burgermeister. [INAUDIBLE].

Standing to his right.

Yeah. to his left.

It's actually to our left, but it's to his right.

It's to his left, to his left, the one with the [INAUDIBLE]. So I don't want to come face to face with it. Because I don't know how I would react.

Is there anything--

Because I have seen many Germans-- I've vacationed in Europe many times since. And I have come across Germans in other European countries. Frankly, they rub me the wrong way. It's just their behavior.

Is there anything you'd like to say in closing?

Well, like I said before, this is my story. And obviously, I have survived. So what I have suffered, what I've been through this is minor. It's nothing. Because after all, I'm here.

And very often, especially in the United States, when people refer to me or refer to people like me, I'm referred to as a German. Well, I don't consider myself a German. I'm not German. I don't want to be a German. I would almost be anything else except a bloody German.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.