

Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. And I'm the director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me as Marcia Weisberg. We are privileged to welcome Justin Rothschild, survivor, presently living in Plainfield, New Jersey, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about his experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mr. Rothschild, I'd like to welcome you.

Thank you.

And I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about the town or city where you were born and about your earliest memories.

Well, I was born in a town called Herrstein, West Germany, which is today West Germany in the Federal-- the next largest city was Aschaffenburg, which was about 60 miles from there. And the really largest city was Frankfurt am Main, which I would say was about 75 miles from Herrstein. There were about 60 Jewish families living in Herrstein. And about 30 of them were named Rothschild. Some were related. But I think this goes back to the time of Napoleon where he forced surname's on most of the population in Germany. So I guess they must have had a red shield, and that's the name Rothschild.

Some of the things that I remember my parents telling me and some of the other things I remember, for instance, my mother told me that after every Jewish holiday, one of the towns where she comes from, which is called Kirchheim, they would hold balls and dances. And this is how the young Jewish people met other young Jewish people from the other parts of Germany. And these were advertised in Jewish papers.

Is that how your parents met?

No. My mother had an uncle, who had a very large business, a textile business in Frankfurt. And he told my mother about him. He said that he was the best businessman that he knew. Also the teacher, rabbi, of the town where I was born, Herrstein, and my family had lived for at least 300 years that we know met my mother when she went to visit her grandmother and also said, you know, I know of a good shidduch for you and mentioned the name. And my mother said, oh, yeah, my uncle told me about him.

They eventually met in Aschaffenburg. And my father brought his oldest-- my father was the youngest of eight. His father died when he was 2 and 1/2 of pneumonia. And he brought his older sister along. And I think he was quite impressed with my mother. But he asked her to walk in front of him as they went into the restaurant, because later on he told me he wanted to make sure that she also had nice legs.

And they got engaged. And in fact, they got engaged on January of 1928. And they were married about six weeks later. And I was born January 27, 1929.

The German Jews, you know, first of all, the women didn't work. It was very rare for a woman of my mother's station or class to work. But they had to know how to cook and sell and take care of a house. So most of these girls, when they graduated from grammar school, would serve an apprenticeship at somebody's house. My mother went to work for a rabbi in Mannheim for a year to learn how to keep a Jewish home, to learn how to kosher the food, to learn all there was to learn about keeping a home. And most of the girls her age went away from home for about a year to learn this.

The other thing about the German women, most of the men they married were a minimum from 7 to 15 years older than they were, because it was considered that if you get married, you married a man who was already established in business. And there was just--

How much older was your father--

10 year difference.

So there was a tendency among the men generally to marry older than--

Yes--

Would be the case here--

Yes--

In the United States. Were your parents always very observant Jews in--

Well, in Germany, from what I understand, the town I came from, everybody was Orthodox. Everybody went to synagogue Friday night and Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon. Anybody who didn't was ostracized. And they had very little to do with them.

What was the Jewish population in your town as compared with the non-Jewish population? What percentage?

A half a percent. There were about 2,000 people, and I would say 60 Jewish families. We had our own school. I remember being punished. And my friends put a ladder up against the school, and I climbed down. And the next day, the teacher whipped me with a bamboo stick, which was normal.

What were you being punished for?

I didn't recite my lesson loud enough. And I never told my father if the teacher punished me, because if the teacher punished me, my father would punish me again, because the teacher did no wrong. I mean, it was always your fault. So after second punishment from my father, I never told him again that the teacher punished me.

Was this a Jewish school?

Yes, only Jewish students. It was supported by the community--

Yeah--

And the government.

On what basis was the school established? Did it have anything to do with the fact that the Jewish community felt itself isolated from the other communities? Or--

I don't think so. I don't know, but--

Was it a yeshiva?

No, no, no, it was just a day school system, like we have day schools here. You learned the Hebrew and the secular. And like the Catholics went to Catholic school. No, it was nothing strange about that. In fact, it was part of the synagogue. The building behind the synagogue was the school.

I see. So it was a Hebrew day school, as opposed to--

Can you tell us something about the house you lived in and the members of the family who lived there with you?

Well, when my parents first got married, my grandmother was still alive. And she died the year after I was born. There was my mother, my father, my brother and myself, plus a maid, and sometimes two maids. We lived in an old house. And then there was an addition to the house, which was part of the business. We had a dog, who when the Nazis started to come in to power, our next door neighbor shot him, killed him. Even though I didn't like the dog, you know, I was sorry to see that he killed him.

Some of the things I remember about our life is a few times a year, people-- we called them [? Hinterjuden-- ?] used to come to the town. [? Hinterjuden ?] means anything beyond Berlin, mostly Poland and Eastern Europe. And they were schnorrers. They came to collect money for yeshivas and that thing. And the various people in the town would take them home. They would sit in the back of the shul when we came in on Friday night. And the various families would invite them to their house. And they would eat, and they would sleep there. And they collect money.

And, oh, I used to love it when they came. By the middle of the week they were gone. And, you know, we waited till the next one came.

Why did you love it when they came?

I don't know. I thought it was exciting. You know, they have these black coats on. And they had beards and--

Exotic.

Exotic.

And the German Jews were clean shaven. They wanted to assimilate. They looked like everybody else. And this was something different. It like the circus coming to town.

Yeah. What was the attitude of the community that you lived in toward Eastern European Jews generally? Were they--

Well, I can explain it to you best when Hitler started coming to power and people started talking about Hitler's program against the Jews, most of the German Jews were saying, it's not against us. We're good Germans. We're good Jews. It's mostly the [? Hinterjuden, ?] the bad Jews, the ones that haven't assimilated or the ones that don't want to act like cultured Western civilization.

And they couldn't believe-- everybody was saying Hitler was a madman. He's only going to be here for a short time. I remember sitting in my uncle's house who lived in the same town and listening to the radio as the Nazis marched into Vienna. And they couldn't believe it. They said, I thought by this time the Germans would have kicked him out already. You know, this is a mad man.

And until my father was beaten up rather badly, he didn't want to leave. My father one day-- I don't remember the exact circumstances, but one of the townspeople who he had known whipped him.

Was that the first warning that you had that something very bad was going to happen?

Well, there had been other little things in business. But everybody thought this was going to go away. When this happened, I remember my father coming home. I must have been about seven years old. And he said to my mother, write to your relatives in America to send us a visa.

My father had a brother who was one of the top industrialists in Germany. And I remember how he used to come to visit us twice a year. And my father asked him, what should we do? And he said, what are you going to do? You speak the language here. You have potatoes to eat. Stay here. There's nothing to worry about. Well, he perished in a concentration camp.

So the German Jews were lulled that this wasn't happening to the "good Jews," quote unquote. This was happening to the other Jews, until they really felt it, like my father being whipped. That's the first time he knew something was wrong.

And this been around '36.

I would say was about '37.

So things were already in place. By this time, the Nuremberg laws had already been passed.

But they didn't believe it affected them, that it was directed against them. They were good Germans. My father fought in the German army in World War I for four years. He was decorated. His brothers fought in it. They were proud of this, just as I was proud that I served in Korea in the American army. This was their country.

I mean, the Germans were industrialists. They were professors. They held high positions. They were attorneys. They were doctors. You know, nothing is going to happen to them.

Prior to your father's being beaten, is there a memory of anything that happened that made you, as a child, aware of something?

Well, he'd come home and say, some of my customers badmouth me and said we'll get you Jews. But he just-- that was the normal antisemitism.

I was going to ask you. Prior to this beating of your father, what was your family's relationship with the Gentile community?

Very good. They grew up, they knew each other. The Shabbes goy came to the house, turned on the lights, turned off the lights. They would even come you know-- the SS or the Hitler Youth would come and have an encampment. And they would come to my father and say, why don't you stay off the street for the next two days, close up your business, or something like that. These are troublemakers. They're not from the town. They don't know you.

So, you know, there was always a reason for hope and that it wasn't going to happen. It wasn't going to turn out that bad. And where were they going to go? They spoke German. They had a livelihood. They had good livelihoods. Were they going to go to America where they didn't speak English? Or were they going to go to South America where they didn't speak Spanish and had nothing? It's very hard for them to start over.

How were your parents at that time?

My father was in his 40s. And my mother was in her early 30s.

But one thing we didn't establish at the beginning, what was your father's occupation?

Well, my father had a department store. He sold anything from a thrashing machine to a thimble. He was a representative of Duerkopp, which was a large enterprise. He was a representative of BMW. And anything you wanted, if he didn't have, it he'd get it for you. A mercantile merchant.

Yeah. And he had served in the military also.

Yes.

The First World War.

And so had his brothers. And they were very proud of that.

OK, so your father was thrashed. And he suggested to your mother to write to the relatives in America. What happened next?

Well, a few things happened. First of all, the Jews were not allowed to have their business open on Sunday. And one Sunday morning, the police called and said that somebody broke into my father's business and would he come down. And as soon as he unlocked the door, they arrested him for opening the store on Sunday. And they were threatening to put him in a concentration camp. And they were talking to him-- not the police, but the SA from what I understand--

about giving his business to his Aryan employees.

The next thing that happened was in 1938, about three months before Kristallnacht. A whole group of German youth from outside of Herrstein came to Herrstein, and Friday night went through the town yelling Herrstein is going to be Judenrein. We're going to make Herrstein Judenrein. And they started breaking windows and knocking on doors. And any Jew they found out on the street, they beat them up. And especially on Saturday morning when they went to synagogue, they were all beaten.

So being orthodox, he waited till it was Saturday night. And he called my mother's uncle in Frankfurt. And he sent a car. And we went away. My parents rented a room in Aschaffenburg and then the next day took us to Bad Nauheim to go to school, Jewish boarding school, my brother and I. And we stayed there until Crystal Night.

The next morning, I think it was SS that came to the school, told everybody to go out into the school yard--

The morning after Crystal Night?

Yeah. And to take things with us because they were going to burn the school down. And they had us lined up. And I couldn't find my younger brother, who at that time was about six years old. And I started to cry because I couldn't find my brother. And somebody said, I saw your brother go up to the attic, because that's where our suitcases were--

Of the school building?

Of the school building. And I wanted to get into the school. And they wouldn't let me in. But one of the SS men, I guess, took pity on me and asked me why I'm crying. And I said, I'm looking for my younger brother who's up in the attic trying to get a suitcase. Well, he went up and he got my brother and he threw him out bodily onto the ground and said, here's your brother.

They then marched us off to the police station through the city. And at the police station, they had two machine guns set up, and they said they were going to kill us all. And we were waiting there for hours. And nothing happened. And then they said we could go back to the school.

Well, that night my parents came and picked us up from the school. And we went to live with them in a one room in Aschaffenburg. And my parents packed a lift with all their possessions that they send off to the United States. And somewhere along January of '39-- I don't remember the exact circumstances, but somebody came to warn my father that they were coming to arrest him to put him in the concentration camp.

Excuse me, by this time, had he already given up his business?

Oh, yeah. Well, that night when we fled Herrstein, that was the last of the business.

Did the Gentile employees get it?

Sure.

Did you hear?

Of course.

Well, my own theory is the reason that many of the Germans didn't say anything about what's going on against the Jews, because if you're going to get something for nothing-- you got their homes, their businesses, whatever it was-- why not kick the Jews out? You know, you're getting something for nothing that you've always coveted.

There were no cases of loyalty among the employees your father had?

I don't know. And what good would it have done them? You know, here they were getting something for nothing, a natural instinct. So when they came to warn my father that they were going to come to arrest him that morning, he took my mother, my brother, and I, and we got onto a train and went to Holland, where one of his brothers was living.

What city was that?

In Amsterdam. And from there, we stayed a few weeks. But since we didn't have any permits to stay in Holland, we went to England. And I remember that the first time I saw a colored man in my life was when we went to this hotel where we were staying, there was this colored man outside with a bowler. And I didn't know what it was.

In retrospect was he Indian perhaps?

No, no, he was Black. And I remember from seeing pictures in storybooks of Black, but I had never seen one up close. And I looked at him, and you know, that's the only thing I remember about London.

From there we went to Paris and stayed in Paris three days. And then we went back to Amsterdam and stayed there again. And again, we went back to England, this time to Liverpool, to take a boat, the Europa, for America. But the Europa went from Liverpool to Le Havre. And the French authorities really didn't-- because our papers weren't in order or something or other wanted to throw us off the boat--

The Vichy authority?

No.

Not yet.

The Germans hadn't--

OK.

Also, another incident, I think it was in December of 1938, we went to Stuttgart to get our permits, visas, I guess OK'd or whatever it was, and went to the American consulate. And he just didn't want to give it to us. He kept saying to my father, why do you want to leave Germany? Nobody's bothering. You have a business, and you have money. Why do you want to go to America to add to the problems we have in America?

And this went on for over an hour. And I saw my father getting very nervous. So I thought they're not going to give it to us. But then some marching music started floating through the window, and he ran to the window and there was a German band playing and the Nazis marching. And I guess he liked that. And he waved his assistant to stamp it, and we got our papers and got out of there rather quickly.

So you might be alive today because of a German marching band.

That's right. I remember coming then to America. We went to live with my mother's aunt. They owned a store. And their delivery boy was Black. And he came up that morning to see the new people that had come. And I got so frightened I hid under the bed. Does--

Can we backtrack for a minute?

Sure.

Tell us a little bit about the trip on the Europa.

That was luxury. I remember the movie I saw in there. To this day every time it comes on TV, I go to watch it.

Ships of Fools.

No. It was with Tyrone Power, Don Ameche. It was the burning Miss O'Brady's cow or something other, the burning of Chicago.

In Old Chicago.

In Old Chicago. And I didn't understand a word because they had no subtitles. But I remember seeing that movie. And even in 19-- now the Europa was a German ship. So even in 1939, they still had kosher food. And it was strictly kosher. It was large dining rooms. I mean, they were beautifully dressed women and men. They were dancing.

What nationality was the ship?

German.

It was a German ship. So what do you mean they had a separate kosher dining room to accommodate Jewish passengers?

No, they had a separate kosher kitchen.

Aha, OK.

But you ate in the regular dining room.

So you could order a kosher food.

Yes.

I see. How ironic. So you were fleeing from Hitler and having kosher food on the Europa. How long did it take, about?

I think it was about four or five days. And I was very sick.

And then you came to--

New York.

To your aunts or uncles.

To my mother's aunt's house. And we stayed there. And I remember my father walking the streets for six months looking for a job. This is 1939. It was hard. My mother went to work as a maid in people's homes. Every day she had to scrub the floors with brushes. Most of these people were also refugees, but most of them were Belgian who had brought out money. And I remember it was a very hard time for us.

What part of New York was this?

First we lived on Amsterdam Avenue between 80th and 81st Street. The ironic part is I own a house, a building, across the street from that today. We at that time lived 427 Amsterdam Avenue. And I own a building at 430 Amsterdam Avenue right across the street.

I lived around the corner from you. OK. So what happened with you and school?

School? Well, I didn't speak English. I went to PS 9 on 82nd Street.

I did too.

And they put me in first grade. And the teacher promised-- there were twins. They lived on 82nd Street and Broadway-- promised the girl of the twins-- the other one was a boy. The boy was sat behind me-- that if she taught me how to speak English by the end of the term, she would get A's in all marks.

And I remember one incident in school, because math is math, and we had a problem that was, how much is 3 times 25? And I put down 75. And I was the only one in the class to have it. But the teacher marked it wrong. And to this day, I remember trying to explain to her that couldn't be wrong. But I didn't have the words to tell her. So she marked me wrong.

It took quite a while to catch up. We went to Camp [? Dio, ?] which was a camp run by the Gottesman family of the Jewish Center. I remember many of the families in the Jewish Center on 86th Street. These were Jews that we looked up to, wealthy Jews, like the Gottesmans, the Rothenburg, Horowitz.

Is at the Horowitz from the Matzoh--

No, they lived--

Because lived in that neighborhood.

Rabbi Young was the rabbi there. And he was a very upstanding man. And he--

What did your parents do about learning English? Did they go to school at night?

They went to night school and had dictionaries. Every word was looked up, you know. My father, I think, more or less gave up, because I always wondered why if he was such a good businessman he never did anything else. But I think his religion supplemented everything else. My father was Orthodox in Germany. But in this country, he became super Orthodox. He tithed.

I know my brother couldn't wait to get away from this. And it's a very interesting story--

Why do you think that happened that your father became more orthodox in America than he had been in Germany?

I think that he felt that he couldn't put his trust in human beings. That the only one he could trust was God. That it was God that saved him. That the Germans looked on the people who sent him affidavits, if they were part of the family, originally they had been thought of as misfits. The ones that were anything stayed in Germany. The ones that were the third and fourth and fifth sons where there was nothing to inherit were sent to America. If there were daughters in the family, if there were problems, they'd also send them to America. So they called the relatives that lived in America the misfits. And I remember my father saying many times, thank God for the misfits in the families, because they're the ones that saved us.

Going back to Germany, you mentioned before that the name of a family could signify where they lived and maybe what they did in the community. Can you talk to us about that?

Now, if my parents were talking with other people and they would mention a name of a family, and everybody would say, oh, yeah, they come from Alzenau or whatever. Because, again, going back to Napoleon, when Napoleon gave out the names, certain names became from a certain section of the country. And everybody knew everybody else.

One of the wealthiest Germans-- I'm not going to mention the name-- who came here and who today is thought of very highly, the German Jews didn't think anything of him, because he went bankrupt. And among the German Jews, the honorable thing to do was to work off the bankruptcy and make sure everybody got their money. These people took off for America. And among the German-- even though in America they became multimillionaires and their name is a household word, most of the German Jews have nothing to do with them, because everybody knows they came from--



Now, Henry Kissinger, everybody knows where the Kissinger family comes from. That's Fulda. You just have to say-- or certain names, they'll say, oh, yeah, that town they come from. And that's where they come from. To me that's uncanny.

Is there still a kind of cohesiveness among the group that came here at the time you did? Do you still--

Most of the German Jews moved to Washington Heights. They called it the Fourth Reich, because Germany was the Third Reich and they established a Fourth Reich. Now, the bakeries, the butchers, they all spoke German. Even today some of them are left. You walk in there, and they still speak German. There are certain congregations in the Heights, and they're only German Jews. Now Rabbi Brauer's congregation, but that has branched out a little. But there are others where you walk in there, some of the rabbis still give the sermons in German.

It's interesting. Even today?

Even today.

Coming back for a moment to your father, did he find work that he wanted to do?

No. No, he just took a job. And he had that job until he was 70 years old. He never went to work for anybody else.

Yeah. Doing merchandising or something like that?

No, he was a factory worker. And it was hard on him.

And how did your mother fare?

Here?

Yeah.

My mother eventually went to work in a garment factory. I think they pinned all their hopes on their children. I think in that respect, both my brother and I, I think, we make them proud, as far as I know. My brother is an M.D., Ph.D. And he's head of the genetics department at LSU Medical School. And I've done fairly well. I consider it fairly well.

Your mother is still alive?

Yes, she is.

Does she ever talk about the old country and her experiences there with your children and you?

With my children. But they're not interested. She tells them about the people she grew up with and what it was like. Like her father was gassed in World War I. In fact, they took out his stomach. And one of the first operations, they implanted the stomach of a pig. Well, he died in 1934, '35. He was a very sick man. You know never really functioned right, but it allowed him to live for a number of years.

Why are your children not interested? Do they say?

I don't know. I think they're more interested what's happening today in Israel. All of them are very conscious of Israel. In fact, my older son has told me he wants to make Aliyah to Israel when he's finished with school.

Have they been there?

Yes. All my children go to Solomon Schechter. And in the senior year, the senior class goes to Israel for four months. So--

Have you ever been back to Germany?

One time, only for business. It was a very bad experience for me. I went to Hamburg because I was doing some consulting work in Israel. And a German company was building a machine for the citrus marketing board. And I had to look at the machine to see if it was what they wanted. And I checked into a hotel. And the clerk called the bellhop and said, show the dirty Jew to his room, not knowing that I understood German. And I just walked out and I told the company that they'd have to send somebody else.

When was that? Very recently?

No, that was in 1963.

Did you go back home or did you stay--

No, I don't want to go to Germany. We don't buy German--

No, I mean, did you go back home to the States right after that incident?

No, I went back to Israel because I was running a job in Israel. My wife and I, we don't buy German products. We won't drive a German car. It's just something-- I don't want to give them anything. And anything I can get from them, I'll take-- reparations.

Did your family get reparations?

Yes, but a pittance. They still send my mother a check every month, which averages about \$200. But I'll take, but I won't give.

You were telling us about the incident that happened in the school that you were attending with the SS and the threat that they were going to line you all up against the wall and shoot you. That happened around Kristallnacht--

Right, the following day.

I realize how traumatic and how frightening that that event must have been. Are there any other memories you have of that particular few days because it's such a crucial aspect of the history of those times? Do you remember something happened the day or so before that signified a tremendous--

Oh, I remember that one of the teachers at the school was a Polish Jew. And there had been talk that he was going to be deported, that Germany was going to get rid of all Jews that had Polish passports. And I remember that sent a big fright through the school. That was just about that time.

What happened with your parents during Kristallnacht?

Nothing. They were living in this house in this one room. And they weren't--

And by that time your father's, at that time, store was no longer his already.

No. They burned the synagogue in Aschaffenburg. But further than that, again, I think my father felt that because of his belief in God that he was protected more or less. Also, that he fought in the German army, because the Germans constantly were saying it was the Jews that caused us to lose the war. But other than that I don't remember.

Now, I know that my uncle by marriage was thrown in a concentration camp at that time. My mother's uncle in Frankfurt was thrown in the concentration camp. My mother's brother had been charged as defiler of the Aryan race. They claimed that he had had sexual relations with a German married woman, whose husband worked for him.

There was I remember one day going to the train station and seeing these pictures mounted there. And there was my uncle. And I said to my mother, why is your brother's picture up there? And she didn't want to tell me. And they hired a lawyer. There was a big trial that went on for months. And it was proven that my uncle had not been involved with this woman. But I remember that the lawyer who defended him was thrown in a concentration camp. And he escaped-- my uncle escaped to England. In fact, he just died this past year.

Did the other people you mention who had been thrown into concentration camps survive?

My uncle by marriage who was married to my father's sister, he survived. They released most of those that they picked up on Crystal Night within about 6 to 10 months. And they fled to England.

Where were they sent? To Dachau?

I think it was Dachau.

Now, if you and your family were aware of these relatives and friends being sent to concentration camps, obviously, the Gentile community had to have heard about that too.

Yeah. By this time, I don't think most of the German Jews had any more illusions about what the Nazis intentions were. But '37, '38, beginning of '38, they still thought there was hope and that Hitler would be kicked out.

When you look back at all of these early events, how do you think these events have shaped your life or changed your thinking or affected you?

Well, affected me, even to this day, when I see a policeman, I react. I mean, I might be driving along, and if there's a police car behind me, I think, my God, what have I done? When I first came to this country and I'd see a policeman, you know, it was frightening. I didn't know what was going to happen next. The policeman was never your friend.

Has this been in terms of all authority figures? Because you mentioned you'd been in the military, how you were in Korea.

Yes.

How did you handle that aspect of your life in terms of what--

How did you feel about the tough sergeant?

I was one of them.

Oh.

That's a great defense mechanism, right?

But the army was a different situation. I thought that is such a waste. I'm not a pacifist. But I thought that-- I can't see carrying rocks from one side of the road to the other just to pass time. And, you know, stupidity. And the war, I don't know, maybe it was necessary.

Well, things happened to me just before I was sent to Korea that turned me. I didn't want to go to Korea. I figured I don't want to get killed. And I went to see Rabbi Young, who's now dead. He was my teacher. I had taken basic training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, as a combat engineer. And they had told me I was being sent to Korea, and it was my last leave home. And I wanted to get out of the army, or at least be stationed someplace in the United States safe.

So I went to see Rabbi Young. And I said to him, you know, you've known me since we first came to America. And you

know I come from an Orthodox family, where we believe in the Ten Commandments, and we only eat kosher. And one of the Ten Commandments is thou shalt not kill. How do I handle this? And he said, well there's a midrash or we learned--

Interpretation--

That says if somebody comes to kill you or has made known the intentions to kill you, it's your duty to kill him before he kills you. And the communists have said that they are against all religion and religion should be wiped out. So you have a right to kill the communists. Well, I figured, you know, that didn't answer my question for me.

So I said, but, OK, fine, but what do I do about food? I've never eaten non-kosher food in my life. And he said, well, if you're on the front and your life is in danger, you're allowed to eat anything to save your life except, you cannot gnaw on the bones, because gnawing on the bones means that you're enjoying it. You're only to eat to sustain yourself.

At that point, as far as religion in my life was concerned it plummeted.

Nothing in the army, food, would be that delicious.

In fact, I'm very sorry about that because I haven't found anything to take its place. But I can't believe in it that strong as I once did.

Why did what he said affect you that way?

Because if you can rationalize everything that happens in your life or things, then I don't need religion. And I don't need God. I can rationalize myself also. Why do I believe in this God? I guess I started questioning certain things about God is after the World War II was over and we started hearing what happened in the concentration camps and the 6 million were killed, I started questioning, how could a God, not only for the Jews, but how could a God who is all knowing, all seeing allow something like this to happen? Why didn't he strike Hitler dead or the Nazi hierarchy dead? And once you start questioning, that's very difficult in religion.

Can we go back to when you arrived in America? I'd like to know what your family thought of New York and "Americans," quote unquote, and the American culture.

Well, first of all, let me tell you a funny things. I had never eaten corn. Corn was something you fed to cows. And when I started going to school, I remember I made one friend. And he would invite me to his house. And I would see his mother feeding him corn. And she'd offer it to me. And, of course, I said no thank you, you know. And I would look, and I'd say, my God, what is with these people? This we fed in Germany to the cows.

And I couldn't understand Americans. I mean how much power the children had, how they talked back to their parents. In my wildest dreams, I would never speak to my parents or dare to disobey them, because my father would hit me on behind.

And then once I started to learn a little English or you'd hear something about somebody leaving a fortune to a cat or how people were solicitous to animals they had, they went to the store to buy food for these animals. And my parents didn't have enough money to buy food.

I remember hearing my father cry at night because he was making \$12 a week for 60 hours where he worked. We lived on the Amsterdam Avenue and 80th Street. He worked on Kent Avenue in Brooklyn. It took him two hours to get there. He took a subway to the Delancey. From Delancey Street, he took a trolley over the bridge and then a bus. And this was a two hour schlep in the morning and two hours sleep at night. He worked 12 hours, and he made \$60 a month. And \$48 of that went to pay the rent.

We would buy bread that was a day old, because bread was a 10 cents. And so we got it for a nickel. I'll never forget a butcher we went to. His name was Mountner. He knew how tough it was. And I remember him giving bones to my

mother. And he used to leave a lot of meat on there. He would say to my mother, oh, the bones I throw out anyhow. Make soup for the children. But I knew he left the meat on there. And when we first got married, the neighborhood we moved to, he had a store there and I made sure that we bought from him. We bought eggs that were cracked.

Were there are many other German refugees in the neighborhood?

In that neighborhood, no. But most of them lived in the Heights. And, in fact--

What made you, your family--

Because my aunt lived on 80th street, the one who had given us the visa.

I see.

But my father's sister lived on 179 Street near Fort Washington Avenue. And every Sunday, we would go to visit her. Now, from 80th to 179th is about 100 blocks. We walked up there, because the subway was a nickel, and we didn't have the \$0.20. But we took the subway back, because my aunt fed us. We had supper up there. Her circumstances were better than ours.

I went to work, and I remember working with an engineer who was not Jewish from Vienna. He had married a Jewish woman. And when the Nazis came in, he left Vienna because they were just newlyweds. He loved his wife. She got a job as a domestic. He was an engineer, but he couldn't speak English. So he got a job at Horn and Hardart because he could get food.

Now, his wife's day off was on Thursday. So Thursday was the maid's day off. And he allocated a nickel for his pleasure every day. So he would buy The Times and The News. The Times was three cents and The News was two cents. And the other night, he would call his wife, because she was not allowed to use the phone. She can only get incoming calls.

So every other night, he would call his wife. And he told me when he told this story to his children, they used to say to him, come on, pa, we don't want to hear these things. It's old hash. That was in your day doesn't mean anything today. But that's what people did. And to me that wasn't unusual. People took roomers to live with them in order just to make some money. It was a tough life. And I guess with World War II and full employment, things got better for everybody.

Had you completed college before the--

No, I went at night, because there wasn't enough to send both boys to college. And--

Where did you go?

NYU. And my brother seemed to be the brighter one. He took the New York State Regents and he was second highest in New York state. He got a scholarship to Cornell University. And you know, you talk about antisemitism, he wanted to go to Columbia. Columbia wouldn't take him.

They had a quota.

That's right.

Even though he was second highest in New York state.

Their loss.

I remember I wanted to get a job at New York Telephone Company. I wanted to be a tool and die maker. They wouldn't hire me because I was Jewish. So, you know, it wasn't-- America was great, and it wasn't that great. And I sometimes still think it can happen again.

I keep telling my kids, whatever you learn, I want you to have something that you can use your hands. Because how many German Jews-- and my parents would talk about this-- where the girls, good looking young women married older men in Germany who were well off who lost everything. And when they came here, they had nothing. They had no skills. And the young woman had to go to work as domestics in order to support their husbands. So what did you have?

So did your daughters follow your advice or your children?

Well, they're still too young. But I want them all to learn something. I don't want any of my children to become attorneys. Again, this is a carryover. See, the German Jews who were doctors could practice in this country, even though they had to go to a hospital for a year or two to serve a residency or an internship until they passed the boards. But most German attorneys never made it, because the different code.

But anything, a skill that you use your hands is something you can carry with you. But something that's purely in your head, even though it's learning, if you're past a certain age, it limits you. So if you asked me if it affected me, yes, it did. There are many things you know that--

You carry with you--

That bother me.

Did you marry somebody also--

No--

From Germany.

Jokingly, we say I'm married down. I married somebody of Polish descent, because the German Jews considered themselves--

We know--

Up here. And my--

Wait till Harriet see this tape.

Well, she knows that. In fact, one of my uncles jokingly once said to somebody that Harriet is [? geschmut, ?] that we accept her as a Yekke.

I hope she knew you were kidding.

She's got a great sense of humor.

Maybe at that time she did. Today, I don't know.

So she's second generation Polish?

Well, her parents were born in Poland. And they came here when they were quite young. And she went to a yeshiva. And they made fun of her because many of the students in that yeshiva were refugees. Now, there's a difference between refugees and immigrants. You came here on your own free will. We had to come here.

Pecking order. So tell me, do you ever speak German?

Yes.

What about your children?

No.

No. So you speak German to your wife?

No, to my mother every day and sometimes when other German people I know. That's another-- they're very clannish. All their friends, my parents friends were German. In fact, my best friends go back to the time we first came here. And we still see each other.

I think our tape is just about run out.

OK.

So we want to thank you very much--

You're quite welcome.

For the time you gave us.

This very enlightening and a very different slant, wasn't it?

Yes.

Thank you.

I think one day maybe you ought to interview some people who can tell you about the German Jewish community and how they were set up to take care of their own, because that's a very fascinating story.

In Germany?

In Germany. The orphans and the widows never became a problem for the German government. The German Jews never let anybody go hungry. I mean, they were not rich, but the community had organizations to take care of that that the Germans could not say, you see? And I know that the orphans went to the best schools and got jobs in the best industries and eventually became the titans of German industries that were run by Jews because of these orphanage schools.

Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you very much.