[0:00:00]

Robert Buckley: … 1996. We're doing the interview of one of Jehovah's Witnesses, who is a survivor of the Nazi era and then of the Communist era. Would you please tell us your name and would you spell it and would you give us your address?

Rudolph Graichen: Right now since 1963, I'm living in Texas. In San Antonio I have been living most of the time. But lately I moved out to a small, little town called Brady in Texas about 150 miles northeast of San Antonio. But, originally, I was born in Germany in a small, little town called Lucka. And it's about 20 miles northwest of – southwest of Berlin. Our town was a small town about 4,000 to 5,000 people living there. And the name of my father is Alfred Graichen, and my mother's name was Teresa Graichen. I had one older brother who was three and a half years older than I, and I have a sister—a twin sister—who was born just 15 minutes after I was born, so we are three children in our family.

Robert Buckley: What type of work did your father do?

Rudolph Graichen: My father was a blacksmith, and he worked out of town. And many people in our town worked out of town in an open pit coal mine. That's where many people. But in our town there was a little industry, too, where many people worked.

Robert Buckley: When did your father become one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, he became one of Jehovah's Witnesses in the early '20s before I was born. I was born with my sister in 1925.

Robert Buckley: So 1925. What religious background did he have before?

Rudolph Graichen: My father was Lutheran, and my mother grew up as a Catholic.

Robert Buckley: Did they both become Jehovah's Witnesses?

Rudolph Graichen: Yes, at the same time. They studied the literature of what was in those days called "Bibelforscher" or Bible Students, International Bible Students. And they liked what they learned from the Bible because they did believe in God, even though belonged to a different religion. But it appeared to both of them what they were reading in the magazines of Jehovah's Witnesses, the *Watchtower* and the *Awake!*. And they accepted that and they became Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: Well, what was it about the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses that appealed to them? Anything in particular?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, it was obvious that after the Germans had lost the first World War, there was no hope for the future for anybody. So everybody was searching something better because nobody likes to suffer, to be sick or to suffer or to have want of necessities, daily necessities. So they looked forward to something better, a better life, a better future. And this is what the Bible is all about because the Bible talks about the coming of God's Kingdom, or God's government, over mankind and the blessings it will bring – pour out upon obedient mankind willing to do God's will. And it's wonderful to know that God's Kingdom will restore—as the Bible or Jesus himself said—a paradise here on this earth and what a wonderful hope. It appealed to my parents.

Robert Buckley: Was there a congregation? Since it was a small town, was there a congregation in your community?

Rudolph Graichen: There was no congregation in our town but there was – the towns and cities are much closer together in Germany as here in the United States. So there was a congregation in a town, a little bit bigger town as ours was. It was about five miles away, so it was not very far. And so from there the brothers of Jehovah's Witnesses came and visited the neighbor[ing] towns and contacted my parents. And then they became part of that congregation of that bigger city about five miles away.

Robert Buckley: What did the people think of Jehovah's Witnesses at that time? That was in the '20s, right?

Rudolph Graichen: It was in the '20s, but in those days people in Germany were still religiously inclined.

[0:05:00] They – where I grew up, it was more Protestant, Lutheran church. There were not too many Catholic people in the neighborhood. These people in general hardly went to church. They did go to church once in awhile, but it didn't mean that they didn't believe in God. They had respect for God's Word, the Holy Bible, and they did believe in God, but they didn't take it too serious[ly]. And so my parents grew up in this kind of a circumstance and surrounding. But they did believe in God, and when they found out there was a way to learn a little bit more details about God's Word and God's purpose for this earth and for mankind, they were glad to learn and to find out details about him.

Robert Buckley: Well, when your father, being a blacksmith, became one of Jehovah's Witnesses, did that affect his standing in the community?

Rudolph Graichen: Not at that time, no, not at that time because there was freedom in the whole country. Anybody could do what he wanted to or believe what he wanted to. There was no hassle or no persecution or that people were thinking something, 'Well, he has a strange religion' or what." Everybody has the freedom to do or to believe what he wanted to, and that was very beneficial.

Robert Buckley: And that was under the Weimar Republic?

Rudolph Graichen: Right, at that particular time.

Robert Buckley: Well, what did your father and your mother think, if you recall, when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, it was obvious to anybody who was not involved in Nazism that it would be a dictator, and everything would be changed in the whole country. Everything would come to an end. Our freedoms would come to an end. And this is how it turned out to be very soon after he came into power. Actually, it took only three months when he made laws to ban Jehovah's Witnesses and occupied what we called "Bible House" where our literature was printed in German and in many different other languages and stopped – banned the whole work and stopped the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: Where was that Bible House?

Rudolph Graichen: That was in Magdeburg. It was a big city, and it was big complex where Jehovah's Witnesses had a big what we call "Kingdom Hall" or basically a church where everybody—the whole city—came together for worshiping God or studying God's word together. And there were other complexes, houses where the individuals lived in there who worked there in order to print the literature like the magazines, the *Watchtower* and the *Awake!,* or Bibles or books, whatever had something to do with knowledge and information, instruction about God's Word.

Robert Buckley: So how old were you then in 1933 when Hitler came to power?

Rudolph Graichen: I was eight years old when Hitler came into power. And I still remember that just a few days before or after he had come into power in February that we had an interesting show in our town

about the creation of the whole world and the story about the whole Bible but was presented in pictures, in … how do you call them?

Robert Buckley: Slides?

Rudolph Graichen: Slides, in slides and that was very interesting and the whole – at that particular time, you know, the Nazis were in power, sure, but had not really taken over power over other people. And the big theater we rented was full of people. They liked to see what Jehovah's Witnesses had to present.

Robert Buckley: What was the name of that program? Did you say before *The Photo Drama*?

Rudolph Graichen: *The Photo Drama of Creation*. That's how it was called, yeah, *The Photo Drama of Creation*.

Robert Buckley: And they were showing that throughout all of Germany at that time?

Rudolph Graichen: At that time, yes, at that particular time.

Robert Buckley: So, they had their headquarters in Magdeburg.

Rudolph Graichen: Right.

Robert Buckley: When they closed the headquarters down, did that affect your little congregation and other congregations?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, then everything just had to be done underground because officially Jehovah's Witnesses were prohibited or banned. To openly come together in a congregation for worship, for worshipping God, then that was all – it suddenly came to an end, to abrupt end.

Robert Buckley: What did your father do in order to prepare the family for this type of opposition? Do you remember that?

[0:10:00]

Rudolph Graichen: Well, we used to have a lot of literature in our home, I still remember. Books and magazines for distribution to people who would like to learn some or read some about the Bible. The first thing he did was to remove all the literature out of our home because we, obviously, could expect that the police would come

and make a search of the whole house, so that's what he did. He took all the literature, was hiding it in other places.

Robert Buckley: Where did you hide it, if I may ask?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, we had some people who were very favorably inclined towards Jehovah's Witnesses because my father and my mother had visited them and studied a little bit, and they were favorably inclined toward Jehovah's Witnesses. And they had a little – a little garage in the back of their home. Under the roof of their garage, there was a place nobody would really look in. And that is where we put – my father put all the literature, what was to be removed from our home, because nobody knew really that these people were Jehovah's Witnesses, but everybody knew that my parents were Jehovah's Witnesses. So the police would, obviously, come to our home to search for literature but not to those people. And that's what was kept all those years until the time after the Second World War was over. And when I came back home after Nazi system had collapsed, I got some of that literature my father had stashed away in – under the roof of those people in that garage.

Robert Buckley: It was still there.

Rudolph Graichen: It was still there, sure.

Robert Buckley: Now, what did your father do to prepare the children for any type of opposition that you might get from the Nazis or the Gestapo?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, at that time, the arrangement under Jehovah's Witnesses was different. It was not as today that everybody went to the meeting and was instructed in Bible education. In those days, more or less, only the adults went to the meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the children usually stayed home. But as time went on, obviously, we had to observe ourselves or we could observe ourselves what was needed in order to stay out of trouble and difficulties.

Robert Buckley: So your father then would take the time to teach you the Bible and so on?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, we still read the Bible because other literature was banned and was, after that, very difficult to obtain in addition to that. Even so, every so once awhile we did receive literature, the *Watchtower* or the *Awake!*, in order for our personal study. But that was only one copy what we received, not as it's available today everywhere in many different countries, lands around the world.

Robert Buckley: Can you remember the first time when the police came to your home possibly?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I don't remember the first time, which one was the first time but because they had come every so once in awhile whenever they felt like. They have searched our home more than ten times what I could remember.

Robert Buckley: And how did they treat the family when they came in to search your home? Did they have a search warrant?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, they didn't need search warrant. The police came and they did whatever they wanted to, so there was no legal, legal procedure. They just came in and they said, "We want to search your home." And, well, what could you do? You couldn't close the door and say, "Get out of here." *[Laughs]* So, that's just how dictators handle it, and so they started searching the whole house where everyone threw everything around on the floor. And there was no reason for them to apologize for the mess they created. But they never found anything, not that I remember, ever did they find anything. Because my father had made a special hiding place for individual magazines. We used to have in those days a stove where we burnt coal and wood. And underneath the stove was a place to put the wood and the coal. And my father put in there a double wall with a little sliding door, and that's where we're hiding the literature when we got under these kind of conditions. So, there was no way for anybody to find it unless you knew where it is.

[0:15:00]

Robert Buckley: How did you feel as a young person when these police would come to your home? Was that the Gestapo, by the way?

Rudolph Graichen: No, there was just policemen, general policemen.

Robert Buckley: General police. How did you feel when they would invade your home like that as a young person? Do you recall?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, as children, we obviously felt that they invaded our freedom and they were out to take our parents to prison or put them forever. Obviously, we felt bad because children are behind their parents. They love their parents, and they don't want to see them getting hurt. So, of course, in the beginning we were a little bit afraid, too, for why did they come around here? But we saw it was just that they hated Jehovah's Witnesses and tried to find some – an excuse

in order to have a reason, a legal reason, to prosecute or put them into prison.

Robert Buckley: When was your father then and your mother arrested?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, my father was arrested after Jehovah's Witnesses had printed a little pamphlet to protest against the unjust treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses as a whole as an organization and distributed that in many different big cities. That was in 1936, and the Gestapo was really shocked. They had – they believed that this was all finished—Jehovah's Witnesses were finished—by taking the brothers away who had the lead in directing the organization. So, after they took all those away and put them into prison or concentration camp, they thought, okay, Jehovah's Witnesses were finished. That was in 1935. But in 1936, suddenly in many big cities all over the country this pamphlet was distributed. Then they didn't – they were shocked that it was still alive, so they didn't really know what to do. So, they waited a long time just expecting some more to happen. But since nothing happened, then in next year in 1937, September 17, my father was picked up by the Gestapo and all the other brothers in the different congregations nearby. Everybody was picked up at that particular time. That was in September 1937.

Robert Buckley: Did it happen in your congregation that I understand happened in other congregations where somebody from the Nazi party would work their way into the congregation as a spy?

Rudolph Graichen: No, it didn't, not in these tiny little congregations. They wanted to have the really upper ones. And so they tried to sneak in in big cities and find out who is the one who still directs the whole work in the whole country because they thought there might be still a couple here or there. But when this pamphlet was distributed at the same time, the same day in all these big cities in Germany, then they realized there is still some organization behind it. Somebody directed that big blow. And so they wanted to get these people, the heads of the ones who directed everything. But in the tiny, little congregations like where I grew up, they thought if you get the higher ones, the bigger ones, the other ones will collapse.

Robert Buckley: When was your father then and your mother arrested?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, my father was arrest in 1937, as I said already. And then 1942 my mother and I was picked up by the Gestapo in December. December the 15th we were arrested by the Gestapo and put in jail. And then our trial was set up. Well, actually, they could not put up

a trial for us because I was still a teenager. I was only 17 years old at that particular time. So they waited half a year until I turned 18 years. And when – at the same day, on the very day when I turned 18 years old and I was not anymore a minor, a child, then they put our court case on that date in order that nobody could say, "Well, the Nazis put even children of Jehovah's Witnesses into jail, condemned them."

Robert Buckley: I see. Well, from the time your father was picked up,

[0:20:00] to what camp was he sent to or what jail or prison and so on?

Rudolph Graichen: He went to Ichtershausen. It's in the state of Thüringen. It's not too far away from Weimar, what was the capital during the Weimar Republic. It's not too far away, maybe 20 miles away from Weimar.

Robert Buckley: Did you hear from him periodically? Did you get correspondence or …

Rudolph Graichen: No. Well, we got some letters. They could write. Every month they could write one letter, so we got one letter from him. It was about 15 lines they could write.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember anything that he said in those letters as to what was going on to him in the –?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, if he would have written something like that, they would have completely destroyed the letter or would have cut out that particular part. So there was nothing he could write what was going on or what happened to him or what they did to him—just about nothing, basically.

Robert Buckley: Were you able to go to see him to visit?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, one time I wanted to go there, but things just went wrong and I didn't. I couldn't go there. I wanted to visit him. And if I think today about it, I'm glad it turned out wrong and I couldn't go because I would have run only into trouble because the first thing they would expect everybody to say the Nazi greetings "Heil Hitler." If I wouldn't have done that, you know, they would've have mistreated me right then and there. So thinking back today, I'm glad it didn't work out; it was the right thing.

Robert Buckley: Now, when your father was picked up in 1937, of course, in a small community that would spread very quickly.

Rudolph Graichen: Oh, sure. Everybody found out very quick.

Robert Buckley: How did that affect you going to school?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, it didn't, no, because the people knew us as Jehovah's Witnesses. In a small town, everybody knows everybody, you know. And my parents were well-liked in the town. And the children, I grew up with them, and there was no hassle from outside or from other people or children who had Nazi parents. You know, I was just another student, and it went on like before. No, I didn't have any problems—not in school.

Robert Buckley: Being that close to Berlin, were there some of the families that adopted the Communist philosophy?

Rudolph Graichen: Not at that time. Actually, we had in town also some Communists in town. But when Hitler came into power, then everyone was ducking under. Nobody dared to risk his neck or stick his neck out for Communism. Everybody just disappeared. Except one person in our town, small town, was picked up and was sent to the concentration camp. And, actually, he was the one when he came back who told us that my mother had died in Ravensbrück in a concentration camp.

Robert Buckley: So, your mother was picked up in 1942.

Rudolph Graichen: Right.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember that day when they came to arrest her?

Rudolph Graichen: No because I was already picked up. At that time, I was working and lived with these people where I was working. And it was about 15 miles away, and I came home only on the weekend. So, I was picked up first by the Gestapo. And then they went to our home, to my mother's home, and picked her up because at that time what I mentioned earlier. Some of the people who had received some of the literature we had tried to stash away because that was only one place under the roof on the garage. My father had put some up with other people, too. And they got scared and put it in a sack and put it in hallway where we live. And when the police came and looked at some sacks and opened and saw this literature, then they said, "Well, where did you get this literature from?" to my mother.

And my mother said, "Well, that's my husband's business," because they expected that this literature would be immediately

turned into the police. Since my mother didn't do that, you know, then they ask her that question, "Why didn't you?"

And she said: "Well, it's my husband's business, and I am not supposed to, not allowed. And it's improper to just go over the head of my husband and make decisions and take it to the police.

[0:25:00] You know, when he comes back, let him do it. It's not my business." But, of course, they didn't take that as an excuse. They just picked her up and says, "Okay, we'll take you along." So that …

Robert Buckley: So were your other brother and sister home?

Rudolph Graichen: No, my other brother—he was a nice guy, as the saying goes, but he finally joined the military during the war. He was drafted, and then he died during the war in Russia.

Robert Buckley: Okay. So he didn't become one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Rudolph Graichen: No, no.

Robert Buckley: And how about your sister at that time?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, my sister—of course, women, they didn't really have to suffer so much as men. They were mostly out after men. And so my sister did become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, too. But she didn't have – she didn't run into problems like that.

Robert Buckley: Now, when your mother went to Ravensbrück concentration camp, was she able to correspond at all with the family, with yourself?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, my grandmother—that is my mother's mother—was still alive. And so she wrote to her mother every month one letter. And that is because I also wrote to my grandmother when I was put in prison. That's how I found out that my mother finally was ending up in a concentration camp in Ravensbrück. But the reason was, what made the difference. Generally speaking, Jehovah's Witness[es] during the Nazi time were treated the following way: They were picked up by the police or by the Gestapo—or picked up by the police and handed over to the Gestapo. Or sometimes the Gestapo in big cities just picked them up themselves. And then they had a trial, and they were condemned from one to five years in prison.

And after five years were up, then they had to sign a statement, a paper, what said that they would renounce their faith in Jehovah God and the Bible and would adjust their thinking and fit in into the Nazi system and society. And if a person would sign that, they would let them go home. But if a person, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, would not sign that statement, then they would pick them up and take them to the concentration camp. So my mother was condemned during the court case to one year and a half in prison. So that was in 1943. So, her time of one year and a half had run out before the war ended. So, since her time was up and she didn't sign that paper, they took her to the concentration camp. In the concentration camp, there were no questions asked. You just disappeared and that was it. There were no legal requirement[s]. They just took you there, and you just had disappeared from the earth.

But in my case, I received four years in prison. And a half year they didn't count—what was the time from the being taken by the police in custody to the court trial was not counted, so it made it four and a half years, actually. And when the war ended in 1945, I still had to go two years in my prison sentence. So that's why I did never wind up in a concentration camp.

Robert Buckley: Okay so when they picked you up before your court hearing for that six-month period, what was the jail you were in, or the prison you were in, and how did they treat you there?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, it was being in prison is just not a vacation, that's for sure. It was not too bad but, of course, it was still – one was denied the freedom. And the food was in a pretty bad shape and also in short supply. But, otherwise, during that time, it was only that one was denied to have his freedom.

Robert Buckley: What did the guards think in that jail or that prison you were in? What did they think about Jehovah's Witnesses?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, most of these kind of people were all Nazis, so they didn't think too much about Jehovah's Witnesses. They thought this kind of people ought to be in prison and eliminated. And that's why they also treated us accordingly—not very friendly, no.

Robert Buckley: So then after your court case, who did you appear before, and did you have an attorney to stand up for you?

[0:30:00]

Rudolph Graichen: No, they did not even give us an attorney, no, because it was a special court that dealt with Jehovah's Witnesses. They couldn't handle us as a criminal case. We hadn't committed a crime, a criminal act. So, they called it a "special court." And in that special court, we hardly had any opportunity to say, or to defend ourselves. We did not have a lawyer to defend us. And whenever we said when they asked us a question why we did this or that, and we said, "Well, we did that because Jesus said –" and they immediately stopped us, the prosecutor, and says, "We are not in church here!" *[Laughs]* We could not. There was no way to say our reasons or quote a scripture. "No, we are not in church. We don't want to hear that. You know, we are in court here." And so they just cut us off. And our defense was God's Word the Bible. That's the only offense we have, or defense we have because we hadn't committed an offense. And that's why they had to form a special court for handling Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: And where was that court trial held at for yourself?

Rudolph Graichen: The city was Gera. It's a pretty big city also in Thüringen, in the state of Thüringen. It's not too far away from Weimar also.

Robert Buckley: Did you have any idea what was going on in the Ravensbrück camp? And what was the name of the camp that your father was sent to?

Rudolph Graichen: Ichtershausen.

Robert Buckley: Did you have any idea of how bad it was in there at all?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I had a chance to talk to a Jewish lady in the museum, the Holocaust museum, when I came out of that one movie about anti-Semitism that has been going on for centuries. It's nothing new. And when we came out, there was some slides there about what they called – what people know as the "Crystal Night." And she had a daughter along with her and she said, "What is that Crystal Night?" So I had the chance to explain [to] her what it was all about, that at that particular time they broke all the windows in the stores, the Nazis, and threw all the merchandise out in the street if it was a Jewish store. And the lady finally asked me, "I do not understand how come that most Germans I ever have talked to them, they say 'We did not know anything about that.,'?" And I could explain her what is the difference. What they were talking about and what they – what she understood about what they wanted to say—there are two different stories or two different aspects.

Everybody in Germany knew about the concentration camps. It's not true that nobody knew nothing about it. Everybody. I knew it when I was a little boy because Buchenwald is not too far away where I grew up, so we all knew that. And in Germany basically it was not called "concentration camp." We called it "concert camp." It sounds *koncert lago*. It sounds as they play beautiful music and you're entertained all day long. *[Laughs]* That's how we called – or that's how it was known, the concentration camp, *koncert lago*, you know, or concert camp in other words. So everybody knew that these "concert camps" existed, but just as a name. But what is true is that nobody knew what was going on inside and this is true – nobody. And she, the lady said, "Well, how come – I don't understand, how could that be."

I said: "Well, the answer's very simple. The answer is that whoever went in there never came out, not alive. So who was going to tell what happened inside? There was no way." And those who were there as guards who knew it and came out because they were the guards, had other reason[s] never to say a word about it. Because if they would have said something and anybody would've found out, they would wind up in there and nobody –

Robert Buckley: Even the guards themselves?

Rudolph Graichen: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They would wind up – they would throw them in, you know, no pardon, no pardon. Oh boy, no. And so they didn't want to stick out their neck for anybody else. So it is true that nobody knew in Germany what was going on on the inside.

[0:35:00] But everybody knew that these concentration camps did exist, oh yes. So, it makes a big difference what one is talking about. If people say, "We didn't know anything about it," then they mean what was going on on the inside. But everybody knew that they did exist—concentration camp[s]—because people disappeared. And everybody knew that they wound up in the concentration camp. But nobody even dared to say why and what happened and the details about it because everybody who was talking about it had to expect that some spy would denounce him, and then he would disappear, too. And so everybody was scared of these kind of retaliation of the Nazis.

Robert Buckley: So, it was a world of fear at that time.

Rudolph Graichen: Definitely, you know, threats and fear and intimidation. That's what it was. And it needed a lot of courage to stand up and be

counted as somebody who doesn't want to duck under and be scared, or let himself be scared or intimidated. And this is why most of the whole nation – of course, many became Nazis and thought that it's the only way to rule the country. But all the rest who were not Nazis – and the majority of the German people were not Nazis, but they got so scared and intimidated that they just went along.

Robert Buckley: I see. Now, okay, so do you know when your mother died in the Ravensbrück camp? And how were you notified?

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Rudolph Graichen: Well, we were never notified by the government. But as I mentioned, that one man, he was a Communist. And they picked him up for underground activities as a Communist and put him in a concentration camp. And, finally, since he was a bricklayer, they used this kind of people to work on the inside keeping things moving, so he finally wound up in Ravensbrück where actually only women. It was a women concentration camp, but they needed some men to keep the camp running, going. So he went up there, and he knew that my mother had arrived there. And when he came back, then he told me that my mother had died just months before the war was over by the end of March or the beginning of April, and in May the war was over.

But when we definitely found out what was – what happened was when another sister, one of Jehovah's Witness[es] from the neighbor congregation came home after years having spent in the concentration camp in Ravensbrück. When she came home – and she knew my mother already from before. And when she came home, she told us that my mother had died [from] typhus just before the war had ended.

Robert Buckley: Now, how about your father? Did your father always stay in one camp or was he transferred to different camps?

Rudolph Graichen: No, he stayed there in one place, and finally he came back home, but he was very, very sick. You know, obviously, he was very sick, and he died very soon after that.

Robert Buckley: When was he released?

Rudolph Graichen: I didn't understand?

Robert Buckley: When was he was released?

Rudolph Graichen: He was released in 1943.

Robert Buckley: '43.

Rudolph Graichen: And then he died very soon after that.

Robert Buckley: So then you were alone by yourself with your brother. Of course, your brother was in the Russian front.

Rudolph Graichen: Right, right.

Robert Buckley: How did you hear about him dying on the Russian front?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, the Nazis, whenever they found out that somebody had died and they were sure of it, then they sent one of their party members to announce that to the relatives. And since my brother was living at that time with my grandmother, so they went to my grandmother and told her that he had died in the war. And that's how I finally found out also during prison time already that he had died.

Robert Buckley: Where did he die at, which part of the Russian front?

Rudolph Graichen: I have no idea. I have no idea, no, because, boy, Russia is big, you know, from Baltic all the way down to the Black Sea.

Robert Buckley: All right so now during this period of time then, you were in jail up through the end of the war, right?

Rudolph Graichen: Yes.

Robert Buckley: And so when the war ended then, what happened to you?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I might just mention one point here before we go to that point.

[0:40:00] When my father was picked up by the police and handed over to the Gestapo, then at that particular court case they had where they condemned all Jehovah's Witnesses in our neighborhood, it was also decided in the court case that we as children were to be taken away from our parents and put in a reformatory school and then later on put into a home of some worldly, or Nazi, family in order to take us away from the influence of our parents. At that time, we were only 12 years old, I and my sister. So, in 1938 by the beginning of the year in March, we went to school one day. And after school was over, they took us to the principal of the school. And there was already the policeman who had been searching our house several times in there. And then they put us in a police car

and took us maybe 25 or 30 miles away to a reformatory school for just children.

But that did not happen only to us. That happened to many of Jehovah's Witnesses and their children. They were taken away from their parents and put in a reformatory school.

[Phone ringing]

Robert Buckley: We'll stop for one second for that telephone. We can pick back up again when you went to the school. What was the treatment like and what was your first day like if you remember, you and your sister?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, when we got there – the reason was they took us away in order to train us and to educate us or to brainwash us in order to fit in with the rest of the schoolchildren to become Nazi Hitler Youth or to join that organization. And they said they took us away because my parents were unable or had no talent to raise children properly, and so that's why they took us away. But when they handed us over to the authorities in the reformatory school, they said: "These people, these kids, they are a well-trained and courteous children. The only problem we have with them, they don't want to say the German greeting 'Heil Hitler.'" But they said: "Don't force them. Just see what's going to happen."

But in this place and the reformatory school just the same as here, there are only bad kids. So, it didn't take very long that the officials saw the difference between us and them. Actually, it didn't take very long that our presence there served as a stabilizing force in some of the more difficult characters in there because we were a good influence in their life. And so, because of that, they treated us very kindly.

Actually, the lady who ran that school—this reformatory school—was a lady. She was so surprised and puzzled, "How can parents be so successful to raise kids so orderly?" So, she wanted to get to know my mother and ask her that question: "What did you do? How did you do that?" So, she invited my mother to come there and visit us. But actually, the purpose was to take us away from that influence *[laughs]*. But this lady was very kind and very friendly, so my mother had – was invited and came and visited us for a whole day. And I think it was very, very kind and I'm thankful, very thankful, to Jehovah God because we needed, as children, that kind of encouragement. It was very much needed for because what still was lying ahead for us as children, you know, to

resist that Nazi pressure and influence even upon us as little children already.

Robert Buckley: Would you just happen to remember the name of that woman who was in charge? It's a long time ago, I know.

Rudolph Graichen: Yeah, we called her "Aunt Ordasz." Ordasz was her name, Ordasz. She was an old lady, and she had been around there and had to handle this kind of bad kids for a long time. So she saw the difference, and she was very kind to us. And whenever somebody – when she needed something to be taken care of, but somebody had to go downtown and buy something or deliver something, she sent us

[0:45:00] down there because she couldn't trust the other kids because they would run away. But we took it – we never – we had the chance, many chances to run away. But we took it as God's provision to take care of us as children because my parents couldn't do it anymore. Because my father was put in jail, so he was out. He couldn't take care of us as children, to provide the necessary food and clothing and shelter. And my mother had worked in a factory that was in our town—was not a big one. But she worked there until the Nazis had a big national rally. And everybody had to go on the street and demonstrate.

Since my mother didn't go there, the next day she was called on the carpet before the officials in the plant and they said: "Why didn't you come? It sets a bad example for all the rest. You know, next time nobody comes *[laughs]* if everyone follows." And so they said: "We have to send you home and fire you." And so she got fired because of that. Since she had lost her job but they said it was her own fault, so she was not eligible for any unemployment or any social payments from the government, government payment, or any program from the government to receive some support. So, she didn't have any money, she didn't have a chance to get another job, so how could she provide for us?

So we, as children, saw the wisdom on God's part to stay there. If that is God's will, okay, stay there and make the best out of the circumstances, and I'm glad we did. So we didn't have any reason to run away because where would we run away? There was no way for us to make a living. So –

Robert Buckley: So how long were you there at that school?

Rudolph Graichen: We were there in that reformatory school about four months. And then they found a worldly family. I don't want to say they were big Nazis. Of course, they were [a] normal, generally speaking, German family. They had – their children had grown up, and they had a big place, a big backyard where they grew some vegetables: potatoes and tomatoes and radishes and what have you. And they needed a little help because they got – they were – I don't want to say they were old, but they might have been in their 50s, and so we helped them. They thought, "Well, if we have some young children, they can help us do this and that and the other." But they were basically kind to us.

And it was also a tiny little village. And in these villages out in the country, the Nazis couldn't get too much a foothold because these people, they had work to do, and they couldn't care less about politics. They had work to do from sunup to sundown, and so we escaped the pressure of the Nazis like in big cities. Everything was regimented. Everything, you know, was controlled. So, we were again kind of – escaped from the real concentrated pressure of the Nazi system because living out there. It was a blessing as I consider today.

Robert Buckley: Can you remember the name of that family that you stayed with?

Rudolph Graichen: Sure. Their name was Kürsten, Emil Kürsten, and he was a real nice—he was a bricklayer—and he was a real nice man.

Robert Buckley: And what did he think about you and your sister being polite and courteous and so on?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, he expected that because he had raised his children, and they raised them properly and orderly, and so he just expected that from us, but they treated us nice. Even though the Nazis had taken us away from our parents with the purpose to train us, to educate us, and to make out of us good Germany Nazi kids, but there was never put a real pressure on it. We just escaped it that they had us under control because of the circumstances that it was way out in the country. And so I never had – was forced to join the Nazi Hitler Youth organization. I never did even though it was the purpose of taking us away.

[0:50:00] So, I'm thankful to Jehovah God that he directed the things, that things didn't go completely out of control.

Robert Buckley: So how long were you with that family now?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, we stayed with that family 'til our schooling was finished. In Germany at that time everybody, generally speaking, went only eight years to school. And then only the rich people went to high school, but they had to pay for high school as here in the United States when you go to college. Well, my parents didn't have any money to pay. And even if they would have had money, I couldn't go there because it was obligatory to join the Nazi Hitler Youth organization. So, either way I was out. There was no way for me to go to high school. But the German school system was different than here in the United States. After eight years of schooling, then all of the rest of the kids who didn't go to high school, they learned a profession as apprentices. So, they worked four days as apprentices in a shop—be that a baker or be that [a] bricklayer or be that a mechanic. And there was still one day they had to go to school every week, and that went on for another three years and sometimes four years. It depended how difficult the profession one learned was in order to learn it.

Robert Buckley: Well, what type of profession were you permitted to take up or did you have a chance?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, the government saw to it and I learned a profession and that was in those days in Germany all the farmers worked still with horses, not with tractors as now here in the United States. So these horses needed some harnesses, so I learned the profession of making harnesses. And so now I was, again, way out in the country out of the control of, the real rigid control of the Nazis. It was, again, providently, circumstance to keep me out of the grip of, the control of, the Nazis, and I was very thankful for that.

Robert Buckley: And how about your sister? What type of a trade did she take up?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, she didn't learn a trade. She went in a doctor's home as a servant in the doctor's home. They had some kids, and somebody had to take care of those kids. And she learned how to cook and to clean and she was – and that doctor was very friendly, too, when he found out what had happened to our family, so they treated her very kindly, too. So, it just shows that not all Germans were Nazis, you know. They were scared of the Nazis but they didn't really – they went along, you know. And we, as Jehovah's Witnesses, did not go along, no, just to put up with it in order not to get into trouble because Jehovah's Witnesses had a conviction, had a principle to live by. They had a hope to work toward. And the rest of the people didn't have a hope, didn't have a purpose in life, okay, so they drifted with the crowd.

Robert Buckley: In your little, small town, of course, perhaps you wouldn't see this too often. But did you ever see any of the clergy actively perhaps supporting the Nazi movement or anything like that or parades along that line or …

Rudolph Graichen: Well, you didn't have to live in a big city. You could see that in the newspapers, in the magazines, that all the clergy—be it Catholic or Protestant or Baptist or whatever—they were always in cahoots. And they always tried to stay close to high Nazi officials, if not with Hitler himself. It was right there. I still have a postcard, you know, where you can see Hitler shaking hands with a cardinal of Cologne. They had that as postcards, to send as postcards to send it away to anybody.

I remember one experience. There was an article about that, how the churches worked together. Actually, the Catholic Church brought Hitler into power because Hitler never won an election. Of course, here in the United States they—people who are Catholics—they deny that. They don't want to have that to be true. So there was an article in our magazine, the *Watchtower*, about that. And it had a picture in there where Hitler shook hands with the cardinal of Cologne. And I left that magazine with – he was a nice man. But when I came back to talk about what he thought about the article,

[0:55:00] he was kind of angry and says: "That is fabricated by Jehovah's Witnesses. That never existed. The Catholic Church never worked with Hitler together." And he even said: "Hitler was no Catholic." *[Laughs]* It just shows he was completely ignorant.

I said, "Look, let me tell you that if you want me to, I can go home, back home. I will be back in ten minutes and can show I still have the same picture that's here in the magazine. And it's a postcard that I bought a store, everybody could buy in a store. And I could show you that's the picture what was propagating the close-knit unity and support of the Church with Nazism." And, boy, he was shook up to see that this is really true because he thought we cooked that up, we fabricated that on our own in order to slander the Catholic Church. But I said: "I have that very same picture. You know, if you want me to, I go home to bring it to you. You can have a look at it."

Robert Buckley: So then, how long were you with this family? And then what happened to you between then and the end of the war?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I stayed there learning profession _____, and they were also very kind people. They were not Nazis, no, so everything went good. But when I had finished my apprenticeship, then I was forced to move in the city and work as a journeyman, a journeyman in my profession. And then trouble started because the new boss in the city, he was a Nazi—a big Nazi—and there was just clashes. There was just no end. And it didn't take very long, and then the police came and searched my little room where I was staying or living, or sleeping in. And they found a book my mother had given me about the Bible from Jehovah's Witnesses and, boy, that's all they needed, you know, so they took me immediately. Immediately they took me along, and then it started to be imprisoned.

And, as I mentioned already before, after our trial was over – it was a farce the trial. So we were both condemned—my mother to one and a half years and I to four years. And after that, they took me to another prison in order to serve my time. Well, it was very difficult there, too. And toward the end of the war, I was transferred to the shoe shop, and there was a guard. He was definitely not a Nazi, no. He was a real kind man. And that was the reason why he never advanced. *[Laughs]* He stayed down as just a little guard, and the other ones got advancements and advancements. But he wasn't a big Nazi, so he stayed down on the bottom. *[Laughs]* But he was very kind to us. He many times brought us something to eat from the prison kitchen because food was very scarce there.

And the kitchen cook had to kind of pay that as a payment for us fixing his fancy boots fast and orderly. And so that's why he finally provided us with a little food if there was just little. But it helped because everybody was just skin and bones just as you have seen in the museum, Holocaust museum. Food rations –

Robert Buckley: Even when you were in jail.

Rudolph Graichen: Right, the food ration was the same. The food ration was the same. There wasn't – oh no, that wasn't – we went to Auschwitz before we came up here. We visited Auschwitz.

Robert Buckley: That was just last month.

Rudolph Graichen: Right, sure.

Robert Buckley: Just this month.

Rudolph Graichen: Just this month when we came back, you know. And the food rationing that was shown there was exactly the same. I mean, it's just not enough to keep a person alive, not in the long run, so he tried to provide us with some food. But one day we had all these—what you could see in the museum here—these wooden shoes. So one day he called me in there and he asked me, "Don't your feet hurt?"

I said, "Yes, sure, they do."

"Well, he says, "would you like me to – do you want to have your own shoes?"

Well, I thought, how can I get my own shoes here in prison?

"Well, you want me to go and get them?

I said, "Sure, I would!" *[Laughs]* And so it took two days I had my own shoes.

[1:00:00] But my old shoes had been worn out by that time, you know.

So he said – one day he called me in. The next day he called me in his little office and says, "Would you like to trade these shoes for some other ones?

Well, I was so – I was choking. I had a lump in my throat. I couldn't answer him. I couldn't hold back my tears either, you know, when he saw that because the guards were not supposed to be kind to us as prisoners. You know, that was prohibited, too. So then he finally – he saw – he didn't want to let that be known if somebody would come in that I'm crying there. Then he said: "Get out [of] here! Don't try to cry like a little baby, you know. Get out!" *[Laughs]* So I left.

Next day he called me in again and says, "I have here some shoes." The sole was completely worn out, but the upper part was still in good shape. And he says, "Would you take those shoes if you put some new soles on?" Well, he didn't wait for an answer. That's exactly what he did. He took some soles what was provided only for the upper crust in the prison and took and put some new soles on these shoes, and I had some shoes because –. Oh he asked me that question after I got my shoes. He said, "If the day ever will come and you will have to walk home . . ." Because [it] was obvious. The Russians came closer from the East and the Americans came closer from the West. It was obvious what's

going to happen very soon. I mean, you didn't have to be very smart to see that.

So he said: "Well, if the day would come that you would have to walk home . . ."—because, obviously, if it collapses, you couldn't ride, couldn't get a ride, you had to walk—"how would you do it with these shoes?" Well, I looked at these worn-out shoes, and I couldn't find the answer. He says, "So, would you trade them in for these?" Of course, that's exactly what he did.

So, when the time finally came that the Nazi's war machine had collapsed, then I could – I had to walk home some 70 miles with some brand-new shoes, and I was very thankful for that, that Jehovah God had provide[d] me some shoes by the kindness of some people who were not Nazis. But, sure, they lived under the system but it's not – it would not be right to condemn all the Germans only because the majority of them were Nazis or supported them and were oppressed by a handful of criminals who oppressed the whole nation.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember the date that the war ended?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, not really, because I didn't know that when the war ended. The war actually ended on May the 8th. And May the 9th they called me to the office in prison and said, "Okay, the war has ended, and you can go home." And they gave us a ration for – a sandwich, two sandwiches and something to drink and _____
[audio garbled, screen goes black, and video repeats]

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sandwich, two sandwiches, and something to drink and says: "Okay, good-bye. You're on your way."

Robert Buckley: What type of clothing did you have at that time?

Rudolph Graichen: What?

Robert Buckley: Clothing – what type of clothing?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I got my clothing back, my personal clothing, you know, so I was set free.

[1:05:00] So, they took us to a place where those who left the prison who had served their time and were released. We got our personal clothes back and were released and set free. Okay, good-bye.

Robert Buckley: So –

Rudolph Graichen: And then I had to walk home.

Robert Buckley: And how old were you then? How old were you at that time?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I was still 19 years old, just about 20. A month later I turned 20.

Robert Buckley: So, you walked all the way, 70 miles?

Rudolph Graichen: All the way under these kind of conditions. I was really exhausted already. But it was good that I worked a little while, maybe half a year or a little bit more, in the shoe shop because then I got a little bit more food, and even a little bit helped. And then I had some good shoes to walk in, and I walked about half the distance in one day. And then in one bigger city I asked if there is some kind of a place for refugees or people on the road. And then a policeman said: "Oh, yes. Just go down the street and there is a big hall where many of those people, displaced people, are in there. And just talk to the lady who's in charge of it and tell her what about."

So when I got there, this lady was also very kind. When I told her where I come from, that I was not a soldier running away on the loose, but that I came from prison and I didn't know what had happened at that time to my family, she was so impressed and so touched. She said: "Sit down here. I'm going to fix you some[thing] nice to eat." And she did. She gave us some[thing] real nice to eat. She gave a real nice place to sleep. And she says, "When do you want to go on?"

And I said, "Tomorrow morning as soon as the sun comes up I will be on the road and go home."

So she said: "Okay. When you wake up, come up here. I'll fix you some breakfast and make you some food on the way." So she provided me with some food. So, I was really glad because many of those who were refugees on the road, they got some food, but it was very scarce. You know, there was just no food available. But she gave me some and provided me some food, and she was very kind to me. You know, I was very glad to find some nice people who still had a heart, you know, after all these sufferings.

Robert Buckley: As you were walking down the road to home, did you meet many other people on the roads walking?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, there were people, you know, displaced people and refugees going and walking. There were quite some people, sure, going from one place to another at that particular time because the war just had ended.

Robert Buckley: Did you come across the American army or the Russian army?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, the Americans were there, and I had to pass by there so they stopped me and one soldier – they suspected I was a soldier, you know, and just putting on civil clothes. And so they asked me, and well, I didn't understand what he asked, and he didn't understand what I answered. *[Laughs]* So, I tried to explain with signs that I was behind bars. And I had a paper from the prison that I was released, and he looked at the paper. It was not a military paper of release, you know, and so he said, "Okay, be on your way." And so they didn't make me any problems, no. So where I was in the beginning, there were no Russians, there were the American soldiers; the American army had conquered that part. It was not until more than a year later that the Americans gave up all the territory where I lived for a little part, a little piece of Berlin. You know, one wrote in a newspaper, one American journalist wrote that the Americans traded a pair of pants for a button; gave the pants away and kept – and received a button, you know, a piece of Berlin, you know, and gave a big part. And that finally became East Germany, you know.

Robert Buckley: Now when you got home, who was home when you got home?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I went home to my grandmother's and my grandmother was home. And she was, of course, glad that I came back home. And it took me quite some time because I was really sick and completely

exhausted, not only because of all that what happened before; also the walking of some 70 miles home but if I'm young –

[1:10:00] If a person is young, then you can recuperate, you know. Your body is still strong enough in order to recuperate. So, I stayed with my grandmother for quite some time, maybe for some three or four months, and I was getting better after that, getting better.

Robert Buckley: So, when you went beyond to your own home, did you meet your sister?

Rudolph Graichen: No, my sister was still working in Leipzig. There was a city more or less 20 miles away from our small town, so she was still working there with that doctor family [that] I mentioned earlier.

Robert Buckley: And how about your father?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, he was still alive, but he died very soon after that. But he was there, but he was in a very sick state. There was nothing I could do. I couldn't even help him very much. But, finally, they took him to a rest home and took care of him—the government did—after the war was over so until he died.

Robert Buckley: Okay so now the war is over and now one year after, the Communists come in evidently.

Rudolph Graichen: Right, right.

Robert Buckley: So what began to happen under the Communists?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, in the beginning, the Russians knew that Jehovah's Witnesses were the only group of people or organization what actively resisted as a whole the Nazi system and did not support it. They told us: "You can believe what you want to, and you can do what you want to. That's fine with us." So Jehovah's Witnesses were recognized as a religious organization again, and we started working in East Germany just the same as in West Germany. But, as it turned out, that in East Germany the recuperation after the Second World War was very slow partially because there was no money, and the Russians didn't give any help either. Actually, they took everything [that] they could and took it out to Russia. All the factories they took apart and put it on the railroad and took it to Russia. So now instead of getting things started again, it went from bad to worse.

So, people were looking for a hope, looking for a future. There was no future, so people were very friendly at that time when Jehovah's Witnesses visited the people. And they listened and they enjoyed to read *[sic]* our literature because it gave them a hope for the future. And many people became Jehovah's Witnesses after the Second World War in what was – what used to be East Germany. So, finally, the Communists in Germany, they saw that these things got kind of out of hand. There were too many people who gave attention to our preaching activity. And they said: "We have to stop that. We have to do something in order to stop that kind of activities of Jehovah's Witnesses."

And then in 1950, Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in East Germany again, and everybody was thrown into the penitentiary again. But during that time—five years from '45 'til 1950—Jehovah's Witnesses could work freely in East Germany just the same as in West Germany. And it was very successful and fertile that people became acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses. And they accepted the information presented and believed it and became Jehovah's Witnesses themselves.

At that particular time, I was working full-time as what we call "special pioneer service." And I went to a city that were – most of them were elderly sisters who had survived the Second World War, but they were very active. They had a good spirit. But I was still a young lad, so to speak, working with all the elderly ladies. And we rented big halls in town, the biggest halls, and invited everybody to Bible discussions and Bible public talks, and that hall was full of people. And that is why the Communists finally said: "We have to stop them. There are too many people giving attention to that kind of foolishness," as they considered it. But we made nice progress. But whenever we had planned a public talk to the public, a talk to the public, inviting everybody, we –

[1:15:00] at that time in Germany, there was an arrangement to print big placards and put them all over town on specified places in town. It was a big column, really big column. We called it *Litfaßsäule*. And there these placards were pasted on, and then everybody was notified what was going to happen over the weekend. And then we printed little handbills to invite everybody to come and listen to a very interesting subject, what was appealing to the public.

In order to do that at that particular time, everything was rationed—even the paper. So, only the police chief had the right to give the permission to get the paper and print that. Well, we went to [the] police chief, but there was no way for Jehovah's Witnesses

to get permission, not for that, no. So, we finally found out that in addition to the police chief, only the Russian commandant had the right to give that permission to get the paper and to be printed. When we found out that the Russian commandant had the right, we went and visited him. Well, it was interesting to see. He was – we had to wait a long time before he came into that room where he kept audience. We stayed there for a long time waiting, and it was kind of dark in there.

Finally, he came in through the back door and was kind of hiding behind a big desk. I hardly could see his face because he had a big cap on and the desk was high where he's standing behind. And so he asked us very politely – he was very polite – and he spoke perfect German, he did, perfect German and fluent German. And he asked what we – what was our desire and what we tried to obtain his permission, and he was kind and willing to listen. He didn't interrupt. But after we told him what we wanted him to approve, then he saw that I was just a young lad still. I wasn't 22 years old. Then he says: "Let me ask you a question. I wonder, how come that a young, intelligent man still believes in God when all the facts in the world prove that there is no such thing as God?"

Well, when I tried to explain the reasons why there is good reason to believe in God because everything around us, God's creation, proves that somebody had to make it. Well, he couldn't say too much against it, but he was patient and was listening. He didn't interrupt me. Then suddenly he asked me the question and said: "Let me ask you one question, another question. Why didn't you believe in God at the time when the Nazis were still around? Because maybe then this horrible bloodshed"—the Second World War—"could have been avoided."

Well, I could understand his question he had on his mind. After I told him that I did not want to join the Nazi military force and my mother – or my father was five years in prison and my mother even died in the concentration camp in Ravensbrück – then suddenly he came out from his hiding, and I could see he was himself a relatively young man, a young Russian officer. And, boy, was he friendly after that, and I didn't have any problems to obtain his signature on his permission to receive the ration of paper. In addition, I had a good chance to talk about *[sic]* him because he was wondering about the hypocrisy of all the churches who worked with and supported the Nazi war machine—all of them, from the Catholics over the Lutheran and all the Baptists, and all the little sects we had in Germany. He saw that only Jehovah's Witness[es] as a whole, as a group, as an organization, did not

support the Nazi regime. And, boy, after, [if] we had a need or wanted to have another permission to print some more handbills and placards, he always received me very kind and hospitable.

[1:20:00] And [there] was never a problem for me to obtain the permission. He was very friendly to us.

One day we had a big assembly in town. On Friday evening the assembly started, and everything went fine. On Saturday morning, the police chief came and said: "You have to cancel your assembly here. Not that I want to be it canceled—but the Russians don't like that. The Russians are behind it. They don't want you to have your peaceful assembly here."

Well, the brother in charge of the assembly—called a "circuit assembly" because there were many different congregations coming together at that particular time—he said, "Okay, we will go and talk to the Russian commandant." And the police chief was very agreeable to that. He said, "That's fine with me." Because he had a chance to save face, because he knew that the Russian commandant would never give an audience, not on Saturday, unless it was a real emergency. But he – there was no such emergency. He wasn't afraid, so he was agreeable and said, "Okay, that's fine." You know, that saved face on him. "I – no, not for me. You know, the Russians. He is the bad wolf."

When he left, I talked to the brother in charge of the assembly and I told him: "Please, let me go there and see the Russian commandant because, first of all, he knows me. I have been talking to him before. And he kind of liked me because he saw that Jehovah's Witnesses had some courage to stand up against the Nazi monster." So when we got there, a solider came to the gate. And when we told him we want to see the commandant, he said, "No audience today." *[Laughs]* Well, we knew that already. There was no audience, not on Saturday. Would never have an audience except on a real emergency.

So, I told the soldier, "Well, the commandant knows me." And I gave him my name and says, "Please tell the commandant I would like to see him and ask him a favor. It's a real emergency, and we need his help." And it took quite some time. The door opened. The soldier came and said very politely, "Come in." And he was willing to receive us on a Saturday, what was next to impossible. For the police chief it was not possible, but yet it did happen. So when I got in, he was very polite. He asked me for what request we had. And when I told him that what happened with the police chief,

that he painted the Russian army as the bad wolf, boy, I don't have to tell you he was really angry. But he was very, very, very – how do we say that? Not reserved, controlled, self-controlled. *[Coughs]* He was very self-controlled. But I saw he was boiling, you know, because 'the Russians are the bad wolves.'

So he said – all he said is, "I will take care of it." And, boy, did he. He took care of it, and we had a wonderful assembly the next two, Saturday and Sunday, and everybody enjoyed that. And the brothers went back home to their respective congregations with really rejoicing. But you could see already the bad clouds came closer and closer. It was inevitable it would happen. And it didn't take very long—just a few months after that. Then the Communists, the German Communists were worse than the Russian Communists, you know.

We have in Germany a saying. It says that some people are *[speaking German]*. It means they are more pope-ish than the pope. In this case the application is the German Communists were more Communist than Stalin himself. So finally in –

[Phone ringing]

Robert Buckley: Answer that telephone.

Rudolph Graichen: And as I mentioned, he took care of it. We had a nice assembly, but the ban was imminent. In the beginning of September 1950 the place in Magdeburg where our …

Robert Buckley: Branch?

Rudolph Graichen: … work was – our branch was located was occupied by the police.

[1:25:00] And then all the brothers and sisters who worked there were taken into custody by the police. And all the rest of the brothers throughout the whole country of East Germany, what used to be East Germany, were picked up and put into custody. Now East German Communist Gestapo, what was now called *Stasi*, and after that, everyone was put into the penitentiary. And one can see Jehovah's Witnesses all did the same thing to go out and visit people and teach them something about God's Word the Bible. So if it's a crime, then everybody did the same crime. And, yet, the same crime was treated so differently that some brothers received one year in prison or in the penitentiary. Some were sent home as innocent, and others received 3 or 4 or 5 and some 10 years. And

two received even a life sentence, for the same so-called crime they committed.

Robert Buckley: Because of teaching the Bible.

Rudolph Graichen: Sure. If it is – that in itself is already obvious that it's injustice. If somebody steals a chicken and gets one year in prison, and another one steals a chicken and gets 10 years in prison, I mean, obviously something is wrong with the judge, no? But for those –

Robert Buckley: So, what happened to yourself then?

Rudolph Graichen: For those people, they have only one thing on their mind, and that's their political ideology, you know. And some are fanatic, and others are a little human. And so it depended on the individual judge how strong he was administering or dishing out the sentence.

Well, I was picked up, actually, before the law went in[to] effect. I was picked up by the *Stasi* by the end of August. It was either the 29th or the 30th. I'm not quite sure. On September 3rd they made the law. So, actually, I did not break any law, but it didn't matter, you know. It didn't matter to them. *[Laughs]* So I was condemned to four years in a penitentiary. And others, like I said, were put in for 5 years and for 6 years and for 10 years and for 15 years or in for a life sentence.

But my sentence was four years, so when my time was finally up, I couldn't stay there. There was no way for me to stay there in East Germany. But at that time, Berlin was still open. The wall had not been built there yet. So the only thing difficult was to get to Berlin because you could not just go to the railroad station and ask for a ticket to Berlin. You would be under suspicion. "What do you want there? You want to run away?" So you had to get around that. But I bought a ticket farther up north from Berlin, and so the train had to go through Berlin. And when we got to Berlin, we just left the railroad station and went to the subway. The subway went in those days still all around Berlin, and we went just out a West German station. In those days since the wall was not there, the one side of the street was East Germany, and the other side was West Germany. So, you just passed the street and you were out, basically. This was the reason why they built the wall.

Robert Buckley: And what did you explain to the authorities there in West Germany in Berlin?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, I didn't have to explain anything because it was obvious because my papers. I had the release from prison and why I was in prison as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I mean, they knew all about it. I was not the only one, not the first one, and not the last one, so they treated me very nicely. But it was very kind of some of Jehovah's Witnesses in Berlin that they opened their home for me. They had only a little flat, but they made a little corner free for me that I could stay with them during that time of processing the papers in Berlin. So I did not have to stay in the overcrowded refugee camp in Berlin because that was not a good place either. So, Jehovah's Witnesses helped one another, and so I didn't have to stay in there.

And the authority was very glad about that because they didn't have any place where to put so many refugees.

[1:30:00] So, they were very glad that I had a place with private people to stay so they couldn't – I left the place open for somebody else. But they did pay me for staying in a private place. Instead of paying over there, you know, they just paid me for food because I didn't eat in the camp. So, they paid me to buy some food and to stay with some brothers. So, it was not just completely on the shoulders of very nice Jehovah's Witnesses, but the government paid for that, so that was really nice. So, it was a favor to the government because they didn't have any room. And it was a favor to us, even so, to those – also to those who made a little room in a little corner of their little flat to keep me for about, well, maybe two months I stayed in Berlin. And then the Americans flew me out from Berlin to West Germany.

Robert Buckley: I see. I'd like to go back a little bit to the time when you were in the penitentiary under the Communists. What was the treatment like there? What was the food like? What was your – what did you do all day long, assignments or work or … ?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, the first place, they dragged me around from one prison to another. The first place they sent me was in Brandenburg. And that was the worst place they had in the whole country because it was a very clean place—a very modern place—but the treatment was awful and very vicious. *[Coughs]* They had people there. It was kind of a special guard just the same as the Nazi[s] had these SS troopers, and they treated us especially mean and brutal. The food was not only bad but also not enough, just not enough. But they permitted us to receive a package, a food package, a small food package every month. And that helped a little bit before completely starving to death out of exhaustion because I know they

took out every day people who died [of] tuberculosis because that's what they finally got. The place was cold and not enough food and not enough exercise. And many people just died [of] tuberculosis in there, and they treated us very badly. We couldn't talk to anybody. I was in solitary confinement for all the time I was there in Brandenburg.

Brandenburg they used for their own people who did not shape up or got a little bit out of line. For instance, one day the prime minister just disappeared. He just disappeared. Nobody – no questions asked. And when I got to Brandenburg, there he was in the penitentiary with us. They had another fellow. They had problems with distributing not only food but all needed materials for people. And so somebody had to become the scapegoat, so that was the transportation minister. Suddenly, one day he just disappeared *[laughs]*. Nobody knew. But he was there, too.

Robert Buckley: They acted just like the Nazis.

Rudolph Graichen: Right, their own people, their own people. After something went wrong, you know, somebody had to be the scapegoat, and so they disappeared.

Robert Buckley: And so you were in the Brandenburg prison with them.

Rudolph Graichen: Yeah, right there—Brandenburg Penitentiary.

Robert Buckley: Is that where they beheaded people during World War II, the same prison?

Rudolph Graichen: Yes, yes. That was Brandenburg where many of our brothers got beheaded too, right, during the Nazi time. But I do not know exactly and I don't believe that they beheaded any people in Brandenburg after the Second World War. I don't believe it. I think all the people, all the criminals who were beheaded in East Germany, were beheaded in Frankfurt an der Oder. That's a different Frankfurt as in West Germany—an der Oder on the Polish border. I think everybody was executed there. And I don't believe really that anybody was executed in Brandenburg after the Second World War during the Communist time. But all these brothers from what we call "Bethel" in Magdeburg where our magazines were printed and Bibles were printed, they all put them over there. And many of our servants who were traveling overseers among Jehovah's Witnesses, they put them in there too.

[1:35:00] So, but I was considered a little fish because I had only four years. Most of them who were in that particular penitentiary had 6, 8, 10, 15 years and up, you know. *[Phone ringing]* So after a little while, I was there maybe less than a year. Then they took all these little fish out, so to speak, and sent them to other penitentiaries throughout the county in order to make room for other more serious criminals to keep them there.

Robert Buckley: And what was the treatment like in the other …

Rudolph Graichen: Well, it was not so rigid. It was more … more loosely *[sic]*. The food was not very much better, but at least you could move around a little bit, you know. Finally, after some time, they even let us work a little bit, doing some work to take military equipment apart in the individual metals, you know, steel and copper and stuff like that. So, at least we had something to do, you know, and the day went by. But if you sit in solitary confinement all day long, have nothing to do and have nothing to read all day long, day and night just being hungry, it drives you up the wall. You know, then it can drive a person really nuts, and it has happened. It has happened, you know, and they liked that. If they could make – drive Jehovah's Witnesses crazy, then they could say and use that in the propaganda. "See, that's the result of if you read the Bible too much." So, we had to be very careful to control our mind and our emotions in order not to just flip over and to turn crazy. They would like to see that. That was the whole purpose of doing that, to put all that emotional pressure on.

Robert Buckley: Were you able to get any Bibles in there or any pieces of the magazines, of your magazines, of your books maybe?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, in Brandenburg *[clears throat]* that was the most secure prison they had in the whole country. And, basically speaking, nobody could get – no mouse could go in or out and nobody could smuggle in not even a pin. It was just not possible. There was no chance. And in spite of all this impossibility, like Jesus said, 'nothing is impossible for God.' And God saw to it that that some brave brothers smuggled in a whole Bible in spite of all these precautions that not one can smuggle in anything. But God can do things and bless the efforts. And we needed some spiritual food because the pressure was especially in this place very strong.

Now, it was difficult not only to smuggle it in. But it was difficult to spread it from one cell to the other. So, what the brothers did to hide a whole Bible – it was a very small one, a pocket Bible. To hide a whole Bible, you didn't have a place to hide. The cells were

just walls and you couldn't hide anything. So what they did was to take the whole Bible apart in individual books and then tried to pass it onto some other brothers. Well, it was very difficult to do so. Actually, there was only one opportunity to do that. And that was when they gave us – every two weeks they gave us a shower if you need it or not *[smiles]*.

[1:39:00] We had to take a shower after two weeks, every two weeks. There was the only opportunity for us to come a little bit close together because every time we left our cell, went down to the patio to walk around and get a little fresh air, we had to stay between three and five steps behind one another, so there was never a chance to come close. So during that time, when they gave us a shower every two weeks, then in my case when I was new in there, a brother from our old congregation, from neighbor congregation, put his small little towel next to me on the tiny little bench. And we went under the same shower, and he whispered [to] me: "After that, take my towel. I take yours. and watch out that nothing falls out." So, and he was whispering, really just whispering. You could hardly hear it. But one of the guards must have heard that he was whispering something.

[1:40:00] He couldn't understand it, but he was whispering something. When he heard that, he took his billy club out and really beat him up mercilessly, really mercilessly. And when I saw what happened, you know, I just mingled quickly under the other brothers, and he lost sight of me, so I got away with it. But the other brother, he was really mercilessly beaten *[coughs]* only because he was whispering to me. Well, when I finally took up his towel, I made sure to take it very easy that nothing was falling out. And, finally, I found out that he had one part of that Bible. The book of Esther was in there. And I took that along, and I had a chance to read that.

Of course, that was difficult also to read because there was a little hole in the door. People could look in and they could see anytime what you were doing. So, if you were sitting there reading, they knew you're not supposed to have anything to read. They would come in and take it away and punish you too in addition to it. Where did you get that from? So, what I used to do is to sit with my back toward the door reading so they couldn't really see what I was doing.

So, after a little while, I was thinking, 'Well, what would happen if they suddenly would open the door?' And then I was thinking, 'You have to stay one step ahead of that.' And I said, 'You have to get rid of that. How do I do that?' So I opened my shirt in the front

whenever I was reading in case it should happen. I could just slip it in in my shirt, and it definitely happened. One day suddenly the door went open, and could they open the door fast. It was amazing how fast they opened the door. So, I had to get up, took a step, slipped the Bible book of Esther in my shirt and took a step back towards the window and turned around.

And at that time, it was unbelievable. He threw—the guard—threw me two apples for me to catch them with both hands. If I would have kept it in my hand, he would have seen that I had something in hand. "Where did you get that from?" I'm really glad that I didn't do that. It will never happen again. I mean, I still can't figure out. Maybe it was a scheme. He knew there was something wrong there, and he must have had some[thing] in his hand. 'How can I find out?' And so he threw two apples. I had to catch them. And if I would have had something in hand, you know, he would've seen. Since he couldn't see anything, he said, 'Okay, well, maybe there was nothing to it.'It was a trick. It would never happen another 100 years or more, something like that. I mean, I couldn't figure out. You know, they were so vicious against us, and here he threw two apples in my cell. I went 'How did that happen?' I mean, it's unbelievable.

Robert Buckley: So how many jails and prisons were you in under the Communist regime?

Rudolph Graichen: Well, it was about 10 different ones, but let me mention another point. One sees that we many times need God's help because we do not know what they are out to do. When I had that Bible book of Esther and reading it, I heard that somebody opened doors, was talking and closed the doors. And then they opened another door and another door. And I saw or heard they are coming closer, so I knew that's what they were doing every so once in awhile just to come and search the cell. They knew we didn't have anything. But they came just to irritate us as prisoners in order to have a reason, if we would say something or get mad, to beat us up.

So, they [came] and threw everything what was in there on the floor, you know, took the bed out—the straw in the bed—and threw it on the floor in order to just irritate us until we get mad and say something. And then, of course, they had a reason to beat you up. So when I heard that they come nearer, I had to do something. What am I going to do with that book of Esther? We had some wooden shoes there, too, and I put it in the wooden shoes in the front of the shoe. And I was walking up and down and walking up and down.

[1:45:00] And the only thing we didn't know what they were going to do because sometimes *[clears throat]* they came in the cell and searched the cell and threw everything on the floor. But sometimes they just searched the individual, his body, if they could find something. Now, which one would they do? Only God knew what they were going to do. So, the only chance for us to do the right thing was to pray to God to direct our steps to do or make the right decision under these circumstances, and that was all I could do. And that's what I did, too. So, after little while walking up and down, I was thinking I felt uncomfortable to leave that in the shoe. So I took it out and put it under my shirt. And I hardly had put it in, the door flipped open. He says, "Get out!" So, I stood outside the door in the hallway. And the first thing the policeman entered was to grab my shoes. That was the very first thing he did—to look in the shoes. And I could see that through the side of my eye and, boy, was I thankful to Jehovah God that he directed my step in order to avoid being caught.

So, many times our stay faithful and loyal and be protected was in God's hand—literally God's hands—because we didn't know what to do. Only God knows the answer to that. But it shows that prayer will help if we are really honestly praying to Jehovah for his help, for his protection, because that's what we needed because they would just throw it away and would have punished me in addition to it, you know, put me three weeks down in a bunker, in a cell in a hole, you know. So, and others needed it too, you know. We didn't want to give it away. We were glad we had it because we needed some spiritual encouragement, too.

Robert Buckley: So you were in 10 other camps as well?

Rudolph Graichen: Yes.

Robert Buckley: And the treatment wasn't quite the same as in …

Rudolph Graichen: Not there. That was the worst one, right. After we left, things were a little bit looser. And especially after Stalin had died, then things really got a little bit looser. Then we had a little bit [of] free time. They let us even play a little ping pong or whatever. But it didn't take very long, and then the screws were tightened up again, you know.

Robert Buckley: So, did you meet Jehovah's Witnesses from all over behind the Ukraine and different places?

Rudolph Graichen: No, not from out of the country—just Jehovah's Witnesses from East Germany. There were no foreign Witnesses in the penitentiary—no, just from East Germany all of them.

Robert Buckley: I see. Well, is there anything you'd like to say in conclusion to your very interesting story as to what happened to you, both under the Nazi regime and under the Communist regime, because the Holocaust Museum appreciates very much the telling of your story so that we can learn from it.

Rudolph Graichen: Well, what I would like to say as my experience is that humans, many times find themselves completely helpless in the hands of these kind of big and powerful and unscrupulous people. What can you do? There's nothing you can do, not even to protect yourself. [In] other words, the only way we can have protection is – if God is not give us his protection, we are lost. There's nothing you can do to defend yourself because, if you try to defend yourself, that gives them only more reasons to wipe you out, to kill you, to mistreat you, and to unscrupulously punish you. So it is a privilege to know that God does have interest in us as humans to keep our integrity toward him and not collapse only because of the powerful pressure behind the Devil and his crowd. He is interested to help us. And we have seen that God's hand is not too short to help because, otherwise, we would have never had a chance to stand up against all this kind of pressure and persecution. Because Jehovah's Witnesses, all they needed to do was sign a small little paper and they could go home.

[1:50:00] And that – to resist that—because nobody likes to suffer—is very difficult. But faith in Jehovah God and his help to have a hope, even if we would lose our life, that God can bring us back in the resurrection—and he will because he has promised that—gives a person the inner strength to endure even this kind of hardship. And that was just the same under the Communists because God's help or God's hand of help is not short because we have seen that not only the brothers in the concentration camp had Bible literature like the *Watchtower* and the *Awake!* that helped them to get spiritual[ly] strong. We also smuggled in in the penitentiaries in East Germany literature, the *Watchtower* and *Awake!*. How is that possible? Many wonder. But for God, nothing is impossible. And that is an indication that what we do—our faith in Jehovah God and trust in him—is not in vain. And that gives us also the conviction that all the rest of God's promises that he will eliminate all wickedness here on this earth and will restore a paradise on this earth where everybody on this – of his earth, his creation will do finally God's will as Jesus has taught us in the Lord's Prayer. "Let

your Kingdom come"—or your government in other words—"in order that your will"—God's will—"will be done not only in the heavens, no, but also here on this earth." And here on this earth, that's where we need God's will to be done. And anybody can understand that if all people, especially those who claim to be Christians, if all these people would start doing what the Bible says we should, or what God expects us to do as humans, because we are not animals, even today the whole world would look different. It would be a wonderful world and we would be able to live in peace and happiness on this earth. Even though politicians have tried many tricks, it doesn't work. Nobody, no human knows the answer. God knows the answer, and he will finally see to it that this answer, the real answer, will be finally brought into a reality because Jehovah God is the only one who does not only have the know-how, how to do it, but also the power to enforce it, what no human has. And what a wonderful hope that is of everlasting life to live on this earth, a paradise restored on this earth, and live under God's blessings and doing finally God's will.

Robert Buckley: Thank you very much. We appreciate –

[End of Recording]