

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Doriane Kurz
July 10, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Doriane Kurz, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on July 10, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

DORIANE KURZ

July 10, 1990

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: My name is Doriane Kurz.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Vienna, Austria in March of 1936.

Q: Can you tell me about your parents, where they came from?

A: Yeah. I...my mother's name, maiden name was Klara Biberstein and she was born in a little town called Huszityn (ph) which was in Poland at the time, part of the Austria-Hungarian empire and my father's name was Meilech Kurz. Uh he was known as Emil in the family and his early years, certainly in Poland his official early years, he was known as Meilech Weiss, which was his mother's maiden name and uh that was because in Poland in those years Jewish marriages performed by rabbis were not recognized by the state and the Jewish children were considered illegitimate and took their mother's name on official uh documents, so that I have some documents showing my father as Meilech Kurz. From very early years when he was eight I have some uh report cards from the schools on him and leading right on up to his compulsory time as a cadet uh in the service in the Polish army, which was mandatory, and uh and until he really became an adult he he was known as Meilech Weiss, his mother's name. So my father's name was Meilech Weiss or Meilech Kurz and my mother's maiden name was Klara Biberstein Kurz and both of them came from Poland and uh my mother then grew up in Germany, in Essen and my parents met and then married in Vienna and we were born there, we being my brother whose name was given as Alfred Kurz and uh who is known as Freddie and who was born in the year 1937, sixteen months after me, so that there were four of us in the family.

Q: Would you tell me what you remember about your very early childhood?

A: My uh very earliest tableau memories are from the time after we left Vienna. We left Vienna with the Anschluss and went, eventually ended up in Holland. My father and his brothers and brother-in-laws and father had a world-wide business of selling optical frames with branches really all around Europe and as well at the time and we're talking about the 1920's and 1930's, the business was uh in what was then known as Palestine, and in Egypt and there were branches all over Europe and there were plans of expansion into Asia and to America, and uh at the time of the Anschluss various of the brothers...there were four brothers. My father had uh there were four brothers. He had three brothers and one sister, so at the time of the Anschluss there were my father, his three brothers and his brother-in-law and father and various of these uh family members were living in different parts of the world manning

branches. My father's sister at the time was in uh Egypt, in Alexandria with her husband and so their children were born in Egypt and one of my father's brothers whose name was Michael was in in Yugoslavia. The branch was in Belgrade and he was there with his wife and children when the war started and after the year 1940 nothing is known of them. They...none of them survived the war. And at the time of the Anschluss uh some of the brothers were where their headquarters were and some were traveling, but it became apparent very quickly that Jews should not remain in Vienna. Uh there was...anti-Semitism was ripe and almost at once things like people who worked in houses, maids and so on, uh became rude, insulting and took advantage of the fact that they either worked for Jews or knew Jews. It was a not good climate and everyone left Vienna. All, all the family left Vienna, or the immediate family left Vienna. My father uh went eventually to Holland where we had a branch of the business in a in a town in Holland called Maastricht and we followed. There were some uh stops between Vienna and the time we got to Maastricht. We went to Abbazia which I think is in Italy or in Yugoslavia...somewhere on the border. There were some detours on the way out. I I tell all this because those things are really not within my factual recollections. My first tableau recollections are in Maastricht and since we arrived there in the year 1939 I would have been three and so my earliest tableau memories are really in a nursery school there learning colors with little fuzzy balls. (laughter) Uh we lived in Maastricht uh for less than a year, and my father was in business there and the business was eventually extended into Amsterdam and uh we then moved to Amsterdam and it is in Amsterdam that I begin to have more than tableau memories. They are really uh long specters of time that I can account for. I remember very well that when we first moved to Amsterdam we lived in a hotel, a residential hotel, and my brother and I uh caught several childhood diseases at that time. I remember being stuck in a darkened hotel room with him at the same time when we both had the measles and uh my father worked and my mother stayed with us. I I have lots of memories of our time in that hotel, but uh they're not really relevant to this discussion. And from the hotel, for some reason we we we shared an apartment with some other people by the name Nussbaum, whom I remember very well and who survived the war and who lived on the street adjacent to the only skyscraper that Amsterdam had for very many years. The word in Dutch for skyscraper is Wolkenkrabber which means a cloud scratcher, and we lived there and I have absolute memories of of that time. Uh I'm not sure why we shared an apartment, but I know from there we shared someone else's apartment and eventually we had our own apartment on the street in in uh on a street in Amsterdam called Amsterdam ____ (ph) in the southern part of Amsterdam called ____ (ph) and uh we had a flat there and my memories from that time on are are pretty complete. We must have moved to ____ (ph) somewhere in 1940 or so, because by 1941 I know we were living there so I I don't know the exact dates that we moved but I can tell you it goes '40 to '41.

Q: What was life like for you as a child?

A: Well, uh uh I suppose at that time...I mean I I have recollections as a four year old of things normal four year olds remember. I...friends of my parents, uh visits, wearing a snow-suit, uh

playing on the street uh in front of the house, playing moving games with my brother and going to school, and one of my early recollections really of really moving recollections are that I seem to have been able to read at a very early age. I was interested in reading and uh learned how to read Dutch. Having having been born in uh Vienna I guess my first language was German and my mother...when we moved to Holland my mother never...I remember never did very well in Dutch. Dutch and German are related languages and they are dialectally different and I remember my mother could never quite pronounce the Dutch properly which use to embarrass me. Uh my father spoke lots of languages since he was in an international business. I...we have some correspondence from him. He wrote fluently and spoke fluently several languages, and uh I remember that my mother, when I was very little...I must have been around four...uh wanted us, wanted me...I don't really remember whether my brother was involved...but she wanted me to learn Hebrew and I remember she hired a red-bearded young rabbi who use to come to the house and sit me on his lap and taught me how to read Hebrew, so that I know I was able to read Hebrew about the same time that I was able to read vernacular Dutch and uh uh I...we were going to nursery school. I have pictures of some of those nursery school things, performances and things from uh from my early days in Amsterdam. And then the first time that I really remember things having to do with the war...in fact there was uh one of the incidents related to the nursery school...uh we had to wear Jewish stars, big stars, yellow stars and uh uh I remember going to school wearing a star always accompanied by my mother and I remember one time in the uh nursery school that there was an air raid and they sent us home from the nursery school and they rushed us through the streets and they covered us, our clothing up so that the Jewish star wouldn't get to be seen and uh I remember bombardments that were at least in the neighborhood in Amsterdam. I remember a plane being shot down and seeing a parachute come down. I remember once being out in the street to get ice cream with my brother...we were allowed out by ourselves and we got caught in an air raid and uh we ducked...you weren't allowed to walk on the street. If there's an air raid you had to take cover so we ducked into a little doorway and we stayed there. There was no all clear and after a while, a long while it seems to me, my mother came rushing past and we called out to her and she was crying. I guess she had gone out to look for the children, the two little children. We must have been six and five or five and four who were missing in the midst of the air raid so she must have gone out illegally and gone out to search for us, so I remember the Jewish star and being aware of that. Uh also wearing it one time and having some children say a rhyme at us which was, in Dutch it goes: "Jood Jood op een poot, met een stukje rochedroot" (ph), which means, "Jew Jew on a paw, with a piece of black bread," but I didn't know I knew that still. That just came back to me now. Anyway, I remember being somewhere in a market place or something and two little boys saying that at me. Uh I was also going to an elementary school, in the first grade and uh learning with other children how to read and do arithmetic and then uh after a while I did not go to school anymore and I guess the time had come when Jewish, Jews could not, Jewish children could not go to school anymore. Uh I do not know from my own knowledge but from correspondence that I have from uh my mother

uh from those times that in 1940 uh Jews were not allowed to do certain things anymore like go to the movies or go to parks¹ and that by 1941 those rules had tightened to uh include time you could not go on the buses or trains or on trolley cars which Amsterdam was run. By 1942 you could no longer go in stores or into the homes of the non-Jews and they uh could not come to your house and uh I...my father's business employed several people many of whom were gentile and I know, I remember very well being taken to the beach at Sunford which is a beach community not far from Amsterdam as a little child with one of those young women who worked for my father. She took my brother and me to the beach, so that much have been a great treat because we couldn't have been allowed otherwise² and I remember being on the beach when there was a sound of a lot of bombing, of bombs, explosions and I don't know whether I'm right or not but I I seem to recall that somebody said something about Rotterdam³ and I I don't know whether...I don't know whether if we checked on it whether the big bombing of Rotterdam happened in the summertime. I I couldn't tell you that that is so, but it's...but somehow it seems to be connected for me in my head. Uh I...there were other outings that these people took us to. Uh life changed abruptly because I remember coming home one day from somewhere, nursery school or something, to uh find my mother in tears and my father not there. I want to backtrack before I get to that because there were some things when my father was still there which uh I don't want to leave out. Uh I remember one evening we were sitting out...our living room had a bay window overlooking the street and I remember being in that living room and my brother was sitting on the bay window sill and looking out the window, and he said oh, look at that fire engine out there and my parents rushed to the window and it wasn't a fire engine but it was a truck and there were a lot of men in black uniforms that were jumping out of that, off that truck. It was a like a black fire engine kind of thing with men sitting on the outside and they all ran off and my parents grabbed us and we ran out of the house. In Amsterdam the buildings that have flats are differently configured from the way we know them here. In order to get downstairs there were, in the house there were stores and then there were like stoops, stairways that went up from the from the street and at the top of that stair there was a landing and there were four doors and they led to four flats. Actually, in our case, they didn't lead to four flats. They led to two flats and ours so that our flat took up half of that space and the other two doors, when you entered them there was a stairway that went up off them up to the next level and there were flats and then there was another level and up there there were rooms, and we, that evening when my parents looked out, they grabbed us and we ran into one of those center doors and up the two flights of stairs where we seem to have had a storage room that must have come to us with the apartment and there were lots of things lying all over and we went into that room and I remember my mother putting something over the keyhole so that you couldn't look in and then they said, shhh...and we sat there much of

¹ Decree No. 138, came into effect on September 15, 1941.

² Prohibition of 1941.

³ Rotterdam: May 14th, 1940.

the night and we heard boots going up the stairs and I remember my mother crying. They tried to tell us to go to sleep, my brother and I, and we stayed there most of the night and when we came down in the morning I remember our door was bashed in and the house was a wreck and it was the uh SS that had come to the house so it must have been one of the early attempts to gather up people for transports but they didn't find us. I I remember the sound of boots coming up close to us and going past our room so, I guess that was a miraculous escape because this must have been, you know, early. It must have been something like '41 or early '42 and so since uh it must have been at least a year and a half or two before actually we were taken so I suppose if we had not escaped it that night I would not be here to tell the story. It would have been another year and a half or two years, and so uh in that that was a narrow escape that we had. I also remember uh the place where we lived which was a like a nice uh middle-class or upper middle-class part of Amsterdam. For some reason my parents took us after that to uh the equivalent I guess of the Lower East Side in New York. Very densely populated and I was very upset at that because I didn't know why and I said why and they said because we are going to be living here, and I didn't...I I knew enough even though I was little to know that I didn't want to live in those very crowded surroundings and didn't quite understand it, but we didn't move and I...in retrospect I uh again uh I put two and two together and I think at some point my parents felt it necessary to merge or move away so that they would be able to to hide better and they must have thought that my moving into these surroundings they would be harder to find but it didn't happen and I I can't really answer for it. Uh uh I'm going to skip back to now to a to the time when uh when I know life changed very radically. Uh I I I came home one day and uh I know my mother was crying and there was a a family friend with her, a man who served as uh _____ (ph) blower in our synagogue and whose profession was uh a green grocer. He and his wife were friends of my parents and their two boys were friends of ours. We spent some time together. And I...my mother was crying a lot and she said that my father was not coming back to us. He was taken prisoner. Uh I cannot tell you that I understood all the implications of that at the time, but I I I know what happened and, of course, as as an adult and uh I can fill in on some of those early things. Uh my father, as I said, was involved in the optical business and somewhere by 1942 Jews weren't allowed to have any business and they certainly weren't allowed to have any goods. Jews had to uh register with the Nazis and uh and they were restricted really to the house and they weren't allowed to uh do business anymore and at this point uh my father had to take whatever assets he had and he uh converted some of them into a diamond. Well one of the things Jews weren't allowed to do was to have uh jewelry. It had to be given up and uh my father bought a rather large stone which he, I gather, had as uh as a small item which he hoped he could keep and hide. Uh my goodness...I I find that in the telling of this I enter...my my brain is skipping about from early things to later things and I find that I would like you to refresh me in my memory later so that I may go back and tell you about the hiding place, if you'll do that for me uh so I can continue this story with the stone. My father converted some of the assets to a diamond. I think uh probably many Jews tried to convert some of their assets into small items that they felt they could secrete without uh greater danger than had to be and so it was a rather large stone that he bought. I guess from, in Amsterdam, which was one of the diamond centers of the world, that was fairly common and

uh he hid it. He hid that, and uh as Jews were not allowed to do business anymore he was home more than not, and he was bored and so he had friends who had worked I guess in the stock market and he began to uh visit them and my father had friends both Jewish and non-Jewish and uh he accompanied some friends who were willing to take the chance uh to the stock market and uh I guess at some point he must have felt he wanted to do something so he, I guess he wanted to do a little investing and with that in mind I suppose the thought came to him that in order to get some capital he needed to uh sell the stone, which was an eight carat diamond, and uh there was a person that he knew, a Jew who uh whose judgment he trusted. I guess he was one of these people who who was a...who knew a lot of people and who was one of these well-connected sorts that we all know who always seems to know a little bit about everything and has it right, and so my father uh consulted this man about the value of the stone and this man, who assured him that the stone had a greater value than he had been told it had when he had attempted to have it evaluated for sale before, advised him not to sell the stone yet, that he would try to get him more money for it. It was, of course, not known to anyone that this creature was working for the Nazis and that he had...he offered to deliver to the Germans this stone which he knew my father had in exchange for some further time saved from being transported for himself and his family. And so uh he denounced my father to the uh Nazis and uh my father and my mother were arrested and brought into for questioning and my mother denied knowing anything about it and my father also said that uh he didn't have the stone and uh he was then confronted with the man face-to-face and uh he was told that he would not get out unless he gave the stone up but if he gave the stone up that he would then be released. And this was uh...I think this was in 1942. I did make notes on that...uh it was in uh in 1942 in uh in August⁴ and uh so eventually he gave in and he was brought home and they uh they were given the stone. My father took it out of its hiding place and gave it to them and uh they released my mother directly and they released my father in fact uh a day or so later, but both my parents realized that uh things would not be well for them and that they had to get out, so they attempted to find some ways out but by this time of course gentiles who consorted with Jews were themselves in danger of being transported. Uh and uh there were people who at great, great danger to themselves uh uh went to the Belgium border and attempted to find a way out for my parents. Uh there were illegal trans...ways out over the border at night...uh bicycles and so on and uh but my brother and I were very small and the people who who led these expeditions out were afraid to take children along and so my mother then tried to get my father to go out on his own and he wouldn't leave us and uh a few days later they...my parents stayed hidden but it was all to no avail and my father was in fact arrested uh the very first time he went out again and he was sent to a prison for having hidden and lied about this stone and he was kept in a prison in uh Holland for three and a half months and uh there wasn't any help for that. My mother was not badly connected through the, what was called the Joodscher Raad, the Jewish Committee and uh but there wasn't even...nobody really knew exactly where he was so this was uh in August of 1942, August the 6th, and uh he was then kept in that prison called Vught in Holland for three and a half months and from there he was sent to a prison camp called Amersfoort and

⁴ Date uncertain.

he was detained in Amersfoort for two weeks, not just as a Jew but as a Jew who merited special punishment and after two weeks in Amersfoort he was sent to Westerbork and Westerbork on the borderline between uh between Holland and Germany was a transit camp to which people were sent when they were first arrested and from there the transport went to concentration camps in Germany and in Poland. We had some distant cousins...I will name names here when possible because they are people who were murdered and perhaps their names will not appear anywhere else, so I will speak them here. Uh the last name of these people was Kamerling (ph) and uh the man's first name was Dunio Kamerling (ph) and uh her name was Trude (ph). Uh the Kamerlings having been arrested uh in the very early stages of the war and sent to Westerbork were in the nature of trustees in that camp and had uh quarters other than the barracks in which most of the inmates lived. They were...had a small...I remember a small house or they had like two rooms rather than in in a large barrack, and they had special privileges. Uh at the time I I would not have understood and known but I know that Westerbork uh had as...it was a less secure place than con...than real...the German and Polish concentration camps, and there were deputations (ph) from Jewish committees that were allowed in and out of Westerbork and I believe even some of them, those deputations were put in the position of helping to determine who would be kept in Westerbork and who would be transported from there. I uh I mention this only because I think at...later on in in the story the fact that this was a less secure facility is, becomes material in uh in our story. Well, my father was sent uh to, after two weeks in Amersfoort, the prison uh detention camp, after two weeks there he was sent to Westerbork and there he made contact of course with this relative of ours, Dunio Kamerling and uh Mr. Kamerling uh used his best efforts to try to lighten my father's uh position in in Westerbork because my father was slated to be transported to Germany or Poland directly as a special prisoner meriting special punishment. Uh we had not heard from my father in those months that he was prisoner or in Amersfoort but uh immediately upon his entrance into Westerbork my father sent us a letter which was taken out to us uh and he sent in fact in the next three days four communications, all of which I have, to my mother uh from Westerbork through the underground or through members of the committee who were allowed in and out and uh he uh he mentions the fact that everything that happened to him was because of the betrayal and he was blamed for, from that for many other things by the Nazis, by the Germans and my mother tried everything she could. She knew officials and she went and she begged to have him remain in Westerbork because he he wrote that he was slated for transport and uh Dunio Kamerling tried everything he could but nothing helped and he was sent out. Uh he arrived in uh Westerbork on the 7th of November in 1942 and he was transported to Auschwitz on the 10th of November of 1942 and we had no other word about him and so we presume that he was exterminated.

- Q: You got a letter from your father much later that he had written on the way to Auschwitz. Can you tell us about that?
- A: Well, yeah. There were four communications so one every day and that last one which was written on the uh 10th of November in nineteen hundred forty-two is a very short little note

and it is in German and it says in effect uh, "Dearest Klara, my mother's name. Dearest Klara. I am writing this letter on the train uh while we're standing and we are going to go further. I feel alright. Uh the uh the things that you sent me uh I got. I'm taking them with me. There are a lot of things you sent. There were too many. I have too many things but I'm sure they'll be used. Uh stay well. All my love to you and the children." I will tell you that I have a a absolutely I remember that my mother, when she got the letter from my father, the first letter, was crying and I remember her packing a backpack full of things...soap and food and things and as I say, she had some connections to both the underground and to uh the Joodscher Raad and she got the package to him because that's what he referred to, that the things that she had sent to him he had received. And so uh Westerbork not, was not shut up tight. I mean if you had the right combination of money, I guess, and words or the right connections it was possible sometimes to do something still in the year 1942. Those things changed later. Uh Dunio Kamerling and Trude were both uh deported and after the war we found Trude Kamerling's name on the Theresienstadt deceased list and Dunio was sent to Belsen⁵ eventually where he died. And so uh even for people who had whatever privileges there were in that camp, time ran out for them too. At any rate, it is uh November of 1942 and my mother is now left in Amsterdam with uh two small children and uh quite besides herself and uh one of those four communications that my father sent to her from Westerbork said to her, asked her how she was managing all alone in the house and maybe she should take in someone else, a nice lady to live with her, maybe would be easier and uh so my mother interviewed some women and eventually picked a Jewish woman. My brother and I had to give up our bedroom. I remember crying about that. We shared a little bedroom in the flat and we didn't...anyway, we had to move out of the bedroom which was down at the end of the hall near the bathroom and we had to share my mother's bedroom which caused a big to-do because in my mother's and father's bedroom there was only room for one extra little bed, so one of us had to share her bed and one of us was going to be able to keep our own bed and I wanted both to keep my pretty little bed and to share my mother's bed. I I didn't want my brother to have that right, you see, so I remember crying a lot about that, but he got to share the bed with her while I had to stay in my own bed, so...anyway this lady came to uh this lady came to uh stay with us. ____ (ph) my mother was called down to the Joodscher Raad not to uh or to the underground not too much after she took this woman in because it turned out that this Jewish lady had a...she was single. She had a boyfriend and he was a Nazi and he was a spy and so after that things in the house had to become careful. Most particularly I will tell you that I remember very well our bay window, as I told you, and the bay window of the flat next to us, which both stuck out and my mother and the lady living in that flat used to talk all the time. It was a gentile Dutch lady and her husband who lived next door to us and they were very active in the underground on behalf of Jews and they were exterminated and uh who knows whether this woman whom we took in and her boyfriend didn't rat on them, because it would have been very hard to have uh hidden that. Uh we were small, my brother and I, and the woman I guess became fond of us and uh I remember one day that she hid my mother under the kitchen table and hid us under something else and

⁵ Bergen-Belsen.

and...answered the door to uh to the Gestapo and got rid of them for us somewhere along the line. But I don't know, as I say, whether she was instrumental in having our neighbors murdered or her boyfriend of whatever, but I remember my mother telling us not to talk loud and not to say things so much so because it was none of that woman's business, and I understand now why. At any rate uh the woman and her boyfriend took a trip to Paris in the year uh 1943 and uh they returned on the first evening of Rosh HaShanah at which time living in our house in our flat while she was gone was a family of four people...a man, his wife and the two children, and that was the man whom I had found with my mother the day when my father disappeared. That friend, he and his wife and his two children who had been picked up by the Gestapo and whom my mother had helped to liberate, somehow spring from their initial confinement and who had no place to go...one of the things that happened when the Gestapo took you was that they also came in and stripped the house and took all your effects and uh so they had no place to live and they came and stayed with us. After all the woman was not there and her boyfriend and I don't think anyone knew they were coming back and so...but they...it was right...I remember it was Rosh HaShanah evening and the woman and her boyfriend came back and they had been in Paris and they brought us a gifts and I remember the gift that my brother got was a little wind-up car that wouldn't fall off the edge of the table when it, you know, they're common now but we'd never seen anything like that, so anyway uh we went to bed that night. I don't know how my mother must have felt. The woman there and those four people in the apartment who weren't supposed to be there...the man, his wife and two children. They were sleeping in the main bedroom and my mother and I were sharing one of the little tiny office rooms that were part of our apartment and in the middle of the night uh the banging on the door came and I remember my mother got up and said to me, shhhh. Stay in. Stay absolutely quiet. And my mother and this woman went to the door and what happened was that the woman showed her identity to the Gestapo at the door and they asked how many people were in the house and the woman told them just the two of them, my mother and she, and this time however they took my mother and they took the woman. They had her come along, but they did not search the apartment at that very moment. So I remember my mother coming back into the room where we were sleeping and she just said, shhhh...be quiet and do whatever the man who was staying there tells you to do. And then she was gone and we were...we got up right away. It was the middle of the night. It was very black outside. Nobody was allowed to be on the street, but we we went out on the street and my brother Freddie and I were taken to, in the middle of the night, through the streets by somebody...I can't tell you anymore who, and we ended up in a in an apartment with a woman, a single woman. I didn't know that night where we were, but she was a gentile woman who was living on the second floor somewhere, and we lived with her for a few weeks and we had to stay in bed all day because being a single woman, the people who were below her knew that there was no one else living in the apartment and she went to work every day, so she continued to go to work everyday, I guess because she didn't want anyone to suspect that she was working with the underground, and Freddie and I had to stay in bed all day but I mean this was uh...I was seven. He was six and children of seven and six don't do very well staying in bed all day, so I remember we tried to stay in bed, but we used to tiptoe out and uh I remember us being there for St. Nicholas day, which in Holland St.

Nicholas day is not really like Christmas here. It's almost a national holiday. All children sort of take part in it and the woman was trying to make us interested in St. Nicholas and I didn't want to have any part of it. I I know I wanted very much to somehow get back to my mother and they said no, no, you can't. And then one day not long after that we were told that we couldn't stay there anymore and we were spirited away again with some people and we were brought to a little town in Holland...I can't tell you where it was. Uh somewhere in the outlying farm district where we were with two people whom I only remember by their first name. They were called Uncle Hank, Ome Hank and Aunt Jo, which amused us a lot because we could never figure out at the beginning whether it was Uncle Joe and Aunt Hank or visa versa. I remember a farm, a small community and a house, a large backyard and rabbits. And I remember playing a game, drawing with a stick in the dirt and making pathways and mazes and things. In retrospect I can imagine what an enormous chance people took to hide two Jewish children in a town out of outside of a main city where probably, you know, people just couldn't come up with two little children and pawn them off as something related to them if they'd never had them before. Uh so they must have taken an enormous chance in doing this. I I...we could never thank them. I could never...I never knew where I was because that chapter in our lives was cut short and uh in order to explain that I have to backtrack a little bit now. My mother had a uh sister who made it to America with her family and my mother also had a brother. Her brother uh had to leave Germany and escaped to Russia as early in in the 1920's and eventually came back to Germany and then had to flee from everywhere. He was, I gather he got involved in the Russian something or other as well and he had to flee and he fled...it was very early times. It was the end of the '20's and he fled to Palestine and he lived there and he married there. He married in fact a woman who was a Sabra even at that time. And he settled there and his name is Eliot Biberstein and he thank God is in this year 1990 still alive and well and he lives with his wife and uh their children and uh so her brother was living in Palestine and uh we're now back here in the early 1940's...he knew that we were in Holland and not too much was heard from us. My mother managed through the Red Cross to send a telegram to Palestine to say that we were still alive and this was...it must have been in like 1941 or beginning of '42⁶ which he got, and so my uncle in Palestine somehow heard of a an exchange that was planned between Palestinian nationals who had been caught by the war in German territory and German nationals who were caught by the advent of the war in British-mandated Palestine, and so an exchange was planned for these, among these people and my uncle contrived to try to get us on that list. Having received uh that cable from my mother he knew that my father was no longer with us. The telegram my mother sent said uh the children and I are fine. I haven't heard from Emile for a while, so he knew that, so he contrived to get the three of us put on that list, but we were not, of course, nor had ever we been Palestinian nationals and so uh he found the name of a woman who had been a Palestinian national who had gone to Germany who was deceased and I guess money changed hands and uh that woman's name was added to my mother's name and my mother's picture and my brother and my picture were eventually put on a certificate attesting to the fact that we were Palestinian

⁶ Date uncertain.

nationals and that we were slated for repatriation. At the time that this happened my mother was already, had already been taken away from us and she had been sent also to Westerbork, the transit camp to which my father had been sent for a few days. Uh and my brother and I were what is called onderverdoken (ph) which means we were uh hidden, uh ducked under is the literal translation. Jews who were hidden were called, that was called onderverdoken (ph), so we were onderverdoken (ph) and my mother was by herself in in Westerbork uh when word was gotten to her through uh the Joodscher Raad and to and I maybe even through the Red Cross that she had been put for repatriation on a list with her children and my mother...I mean if I think about what this must have done to the poor woman...she was notified that she was going to be liberated and sent to Palestine and her children were someplace that she was not even allowed to know about in case she was questioned. Hidden somewhere, somewhere and she must have been beside herself and half out of her mind at the concept of ending up in Palestine, free with her children somewhere maybe picked up by the Nazis and then hidden and then punished for having been onderverdoken (ph). So she deemed it absolutely necessary for us to to to join her so we could be sent out to Palestine with her. So through the Joodscher Raad and the underground my mother had to try to find us. And she did. She did locate us, and so I remember one day uh Ome Joe and Tante Hank or visa versa, they said to us that my mother had sent word that she wanted us to come and that we should...they didn't think we should go but they had to send us and so they were going to let us go but that we should tell my mother when we got there that we didn't want to stay, that we should definitely come back to them, and we were put on the back of an open truck, or something with canvas or something and it was evening and the...I had a dolly with me. I was carrying a doll and my brother Freddie was carrying a little truck. They didn't send us with any clothes or anything. I guess they must have really thought that we were going to come back and we traveled a long time, all night and then it was dawn and somehow or other we went through a gate and there was my mother, and my mother did it, did this by uh giving out that we had been sick and had been left behind because we were sick or something... anyway, we joined her. Uh my mother having been arrested on the first evening of Rosh HaShanah, must have been in October of 19 uh 43 and uh we joined her about eight weeks later. It was late winter. Uh we were not uh...Holland is pretty damp and cold and where Westerbork was on the borderline uh definitely cold and damp, and I remember going with her to a a closet or someplace where there was a woman behind the counter and there was a pile of clothes and my mother picking things through it and exchanging something for them, so she must have given away somethings that she had taken and I remember being in that little...those little quarters that Dunio and Trude Kamerling. I remember being in there, in their little house and I remember sleeping in a barrack but being in their little... that's why I remembered that they were under special circumstances. I mean that wasn't just here say. I I remember them. And it was...I remember it being very cold and I remember that this was the first time that Freddie and I learned some Hebrew songs and I know today that some of those were Haluts songs so that uh there must have been an active group of young Palestine, young Halutsim that uh were interested in in going to Palestine and making a homeland for the Jews and I remember learning some songs. I mean they're songs that everybody knows these days but I remember learning them at that time.

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Q: OK. At this point let's stop and pause and we're going to change tapes.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

TAPE #2

Q: Would you tell me what you remember about Westerbork?

A: About Westerbork?

Q: Uh hum.

A: Uh actually uh Westerbork I don't have a layout memory of, but I remember our barracks. Uh double-decker beds. Uh I remember that because later on when we got to Belsen there were triple-decker beds, so I remember that those were double-decker beds. Uh I just remember a large, a very large place and barracks and I remembered, I remember feeling special because we we had those relatives in Westerbork, so uh really my recollections are of of that place of where we had the exchange of clothing, depot or whatever it was, the barracks, uh the Kamerlings' little house, uh and really and and the Halutsim and really not not a whole lot of the physical plant of Westerbork.

Q: Uh how long were in Westerbork?

A: Well uh Freddie and I got there at the end of 1943, of December and in February we were sent out in a transport, all three of us, uh my mother, my brother and I, to Belsen. Ostensibly we were put on that transport and told that we were going to be exchanged as part of that exchange but of course we were never exchanged and I don't know whether the exchange never happened or whether someone else crossed somebody else's palms with silver more, but uh we were never exchanged and we were sent to Bergen-Belsen. I think we were kept with a group of people who were slated for some special stuff because uh the compound that we were in in Belsen...Bergen-Belsen was a very large place and it was divided into many different sections. The sections were divided from each other by barbed wire and within each section of course there were barracks and there were nationalities within each group, each section and I think that we were in a group of people who were still possibly slated for some special event because uh I think we were not in the same part of Belsen, for example, that Anne Frank who was of course Dutch also, was. I think she was in a different part of the compound.⁷ And I have uh in our possession some Red Cross cards or Red Cross communications that were, came in and were allowed out and I have recollections of some special people who were very well connected getting packages and I suspect that was not the possibility through out Belsen so I mean from these things I suppose that we were still kept together with a group of people who were possibly slated for some still special treatment and maybe that helped to save our lives.

Q: _____. I'd like to know about your experience. Can you tell us from the time you got on

⁷ Anne Frank died in the "Star Camp" (Sternenlager) of Bergen Belsen, probably the same compound.

the train to go to Belsen, what happened to you?

A: No. No. I I will I will I will tell you my experience, my experiences in in Belsen and not probably do it as carefully chronologically as you have just asked me to because I I can't do it. It's too mixed up, but given that we're now speaking about uh the very start of the year 1944, I was eight uh and my brother was uh seven, or not quite that. Uh I remember our first day or two in Bergen-Belsen. Uh this time definitely in a barrack, very crowded. Uh lots of noise and light. Uh lights out in the evening. I remember one evening the women in the barracks...the barracks were all wo...our barrack was all women and children. Uh they got up and performed for each other. I remember my mother singing a song and being very mortified. She was wearing some kind of a housecoat thing and and singing a song. I I can't I can't tell you why they why there was this think that the inmates did that evening in the barrack, but I remember it and I remember the song which is uh dealt...it was a German song and it dealt with a a woman who lost her husband and who was begging God to please spare her husband, so I remember that song. Uh and then uh we were moved into a different barrack because the woman...the barracks had where people who were put in charge of the barracks...I mean when the Nazis wanted to know something they came to the barrack head and so this...the woman who was the head of that barrack was a woman with whom we had lived for a short while, for a short while in Amsterdam. Not the one who lived by the skyscraper. The other one, and uh this woman's husband was in America and this woman, to the best of my knowledge, is still alive and her husband in America was very wealthy and she had special privileges. I can't tell you how that came about but I know that was so, and since my mother knew her, my mother contrived to get us into her barracks and we were in that barracks with her. Life in Belsen...oh, first and foremost I guess uh was barbed wire. Uh it was everywhere. I I have a hard time being around barbed wire now, but the barbed wire was every where. Uh our barracks was Dutch people. Uh again women and children. Uh very narrow beds, triple-deck. Uh two low to sit up in...you you couldn't sit upright on your bed and there were two people to a bed. The bed...the the uh bunks were made of wood. There were just sides and wooden slats and straw pallets and they were very narrow. I think they were narrower than what we think of as cots and there were two people to a bed, so that there would have been six people to a stack and several hundred people to a barrack and in the morning everyone had to get up very early and anybody over the age of fourteen or twelve or something had to go to work, and I guess we were lucky we were eight. Uh first there was a thing called appell, which was...everybody had to quickly get dressed and run out to the big courtyard and line up by barrack and by number in straight lines and then we were counted, including the children, and on some mornings the count didn't check and the Gestapo⁸, wearing those black boots and those jodhpurs and those those hats with the visors that you that they always wore, and always screaming, would keep us standing there until the count turned out the right way. And sometimes that was a very long time and then when the counting was over, then the grown-ups were marched out of the camp and they went to work in a shoe factory or something. I didn't understand then what it was. I I suspect now it must

⁸ SS.

have been shoes that were taken from other Jews in various parts of the world where the Germans were killing people, must have been re-stitched or refinished for...so I remember the grown-ups marching away and somehow uh my mother contrived to not have to take that kind of a job but to have a job in the infirmary. And she did that I guess so that she could be with Freddie and me in the course of the day, or at least in in the neighborhood because the grown-ups who were marched out to work, they left our compound. They were marched out of our barbed wire into the larger area of Bergen-Belsen to a place where there smoke stacks. Uh Belsen did not have a gas chamber but it did have crematoria and I couldn't tell you in retrospect whether the smoke stacks were crematoria or related to the factory, but I imagine it was the crematoria because uh not long after the grown-ups left the camp uh there were wagons...open wagons like like carts, like the back of a horse and cart, open wagons, that were dragged along without horses. There were people pulling them and uh they had uh corpses in them and the corpses were lying in all directions and uh heaped on top of each other and there were many people who died every night and they didn't make it out to appell but they were accounted for by being bodies and so after the grown-ups were marched out the uh there was a squadron of people that pulled this wagon around and uh came into the barracks and took the corpses and then they would, two of them would take the corpse...one at the feet and one at the hands and they would toss them up to the top of the heap and that uh happened every day. I still have trouble with that. And uh then for the day we children were left on our own. Uh again I I remember teen-aged children, older children taking some of us smaller children aside to secret places and teaching us uh songs of of Zion and teaching us other lessons, and they were young people, very young. I mean I was a child and people in their twenties seemed like old people to me, and these I remember were older children, so they must have been young teen-agers. Uh there are other specifics. Uh the bathroom facilities were a large, a large outhouse for everybody, quite far from the other barracks. You had to go there and you had to go there for quite a while. You had to walk there and they were composed of uh a wooden plank, a large wooden plank and...with a with a front return and holes cut into the top of the wooden plank and there was an excavation below it and so uh when everybody relieved themselves they they would just fall through the holes into...I remember it was a very bad smell and uh I remember feeling very lucky that I didn't have to worry about going to work because before work there were so many people who went running there and then everybody had to wait for each other, and that I could wait to do that until after everybody was gone. Most of our time during the day, Freddie's and mine, was spent uh talking about food because uh there was not very much to eat and we were hungry much of the time, almost all the time. I don't remember that about Westerbork. We must have uh had enough to eat there, but in Belsen the rations were uh the rations were three-quarters of a liter of watery soup made from uh a variety of turnips, uh and cooked in water. It was very watery. And three and a half centimeters of bread a day and and there was some kind of an Ersatz coffee because I remember there were some people who worked in the kitchen and they would come with those large uh...I don't know...like milk-can kind of things with a handle, one on each side, and I remember them carrying this heavy thing with both of them leaning sideways carrying that thing and we all had cups and things that you had to have your own, and they were also hidden in your bed. Everything was hidden in your bed.

Your clothes were hidden in your bed and your and your eating utensils and whatever you owned had to be in bed including some kind of a uh night pot so I...people had dysentery and you couldn't run out at night and go to those facilities so you had to have something, and all that was in the bed and the bed was shared with two people and in our case uh I guess my brother being a boy, my mother shared her bunk with him and since I was a girl I shared it with another woman. We slept foot...you know, heads at opposite ends and so I remember taking uh a bowl or something...once a day you you go there and stand on line and they would put in a ladle of that soup, Kohlrabi soup and uh in there and there was...and you had your little bit of bread and I remember my brother and I spending lots of time with our little piece of bread, cutting it for hours into the tiniest tiniest little, tiny squares that we could and then eating them...tiny tiny piece by tiny tiny piece so we could make it last as long as we could. Uh my mother worked in this uh infirmary and it was a good thing because uh somewhere along the way my brother got to be very sick. He had a kidney infection which in those years had to be...in order to get better you had to have a special diet, for some reason high in sugar. I I don't quite know why but I remember that and of course there was no such a thing except by special privileged characters and uh some of those privileged characters were a group of Greek people. I cannot tell you why that is, but the kapo, the head of our compound was a Greek. He was a Greek Jew I guess. He was he was kapo. He worked with the Nazis and he oversaw appell in the morning and he had other Greek people, friends, and they were in a barrack by themselves and they had special privileges. Uh they had milk that was delivered to them for their children every day and once in a while there was chocolate milk because I remember my brother being in the infirmary and the rest of us children in the camp used to line up when those Greek people got their special rations. We used to line up in case there was something left over or sometimes they used to give out the extra stuff to the rest of us children, and I remember lining up and getting some chocolate milk and bringing it to the infirmary, which I was not allowed to go into, but I stayed outside and kept yelling and yelling my mother's name till she heard it and I virtuously gave her this milk. I would like to tell you I was just being a good girl, but actually I used to hate milk and even under those circumstances I suspect that I I gave that up to my brother not so unhappily. Uh my mother, my mother uh happily then was working in the infirmary so she was able to be with Freddie a part of the day, or at least look in on him uh because he was laid up for four and a half months, and he was not allowed to eat the stuff that we were getting and the other stuff was not to be had, so there was...it was touch and go whether he would make it through. I remember being in the barracks one day...they used to make announcements all the time in the barracks. In the evening when the grown-ups came back, people used to go around and make announcements...they found something, they needed something and I remember being mortified one evening when I was standing in the barracks...somebody came around and started saying that there was a child in the infirmary who was gravely ill and who needed sugar and did anybody have anything sweet to save his life - his name was Freddie Kurz or Alfred Kurz. I was so mortified that it was my brother...I can't even tell you. So I guess people did do things for other people. I know in our compound besides the Greeks there was a group of Albanians. Albanians. We didn't think very much of those people. They were, they were not literate or something. I I don't know why, and we thought they were dirty and

in Bergen-Belsen, besides the amount of time we spent cutting our food small, we also spent, we children spent a lot of the day searching ourselves for lice. Uh this became an activity of uh glee. We all had lice and we used to comb our hair and try to catch the lice on the comb so that we could squash them with our thumbs, and since we were all covered with lice on our heads and fleas on our bodies...lice are horrible little grey things with a black spot in the middle and they lay little eggs in your hair. They have little white eggs and they stick on. You can't get it off, and they used to come around and uh shave our heads from time to time and I always tried to hide myself so my head wouldn't get to be shaved. I remember running to the infirmary once when...I knew I had lice and if they found lice on you they would shave your head...and hiding myself and crying and fleas...the fleas, they were red. I don't know...they were long like little worms and you could see them on your clothes. The fleas gave uh people a particular sickness. They are carriers of a disease called spotty typhus. Typhus. T - Y - P - H - U - S. And everybody came down with it. Uh I did. I came down with it. We we all came down with strange things. We...besides typhus we had uh yellow jaundice...uh turned yellow. Your eyes turn yellow. Your skin turned yellow. Uh you're very nauseous. You have fever. Everybody had that lots. We...I had it twice. My brother had it twice, and my mother had it a couple of times. Uh and uh I came down with typhus...not...typhus was on a different level from the yellow jaundice because many of those morning corpses were corpses not...some from starvation and and many many from typhus, so typhus was a disease that gave you very high fever and it had a crisis period and if you made it through the crisis you survived and if you didn't make it, you didn't survive, and I uh got typhus in uh March of 1944 and uh and on the day that I was able to walk again, afterward two weeks of lying with typhus...in those two week, in that two week period heading towards uh was heading towards the end of the war, we uh began to hear bombardments very close by. In general in the time that we were in Bergen-Belsen which was uh for a year and three months, uh the bombardments were coming more frequently and it was the English who were approaching and on the day that I was able to get out of bed and walk we were notified that we were going to be evacuated, and so uh we were rounded up together with whatever other people were still around...not just from our compound now but from all the other compounds in in Bergen-Belsen and we were marched to a a railway siding again and on that morning I remember a SS woman in boots and a skirt who was screaming at the top of my lung, her lungs and standing right by my mother and she suddenly was screaming to move along and she put her hand back and slapped my mother hard across the cheek. And uh then we were put on board a train, a cattle car sort of train and it had some seats and it had a ridged floor. It had ridges in it and it was a very long train. It had hundreds of cars and uh we know afterwards, from the after the war, that the uh English having come that close to us uh the idea was to bring us to to Theresienstadt, I think, and and gas us. But uh there was a locomotive pulling our train and every once in a while the train would stop and the locomotive would disappear for a couple of days and then it would come by pulling another train and it would leave that other train and pull us again. And we were on that train for sixteen days. There was no food and there was no water and everybody became aware that we were going around in circles because we were coming to spots that everybody remembered seeing before. Whenever the train stopped there were some people who got out

of the train and foraged in the area for grass or or potatoes or whatever they could scavage out of the ground in the surrounding area. We were obviously in the middle of Germany and there was not much possibility of really escaping uh and for water people went back and got water and brought it back to the train and everybody got sick. There there was no room to sit. Most people had to lie down and the lice were all over and whoever hadn't gotten typhus before, most people got it then. After sixteen days, half the people remained. We were liberated in what be, got to be East uh Germany by the Russians, after sixteen days, and I remember when we were liberated the Greek man, the kapo, was crying and carrying his little three year old son, son's body in his arms because the child had died on the train. My mother had gotten typhus about two or three days before we were liberated and she was delirious. At some point there were no more German soldiers around us and uh and everybody began to leave the train and the Russians were there and they told us to go into the town and so uh the people around whom the three of us had been sitting in the train, other women with children, took my my brother and me along and the Germans living in that town were thrown out by all of us on the train and we took over their houses and so there were several women and their children who took a house and took my brother and me along and I remember Freddie and I found a little, like a little flexible flyer wagon with a long handle and we went back to the train and we got my mother out and we put her in the little flexible flyer and we dragged her to the town and put her to bed. And it was a very contagious thing, uh typhus, so nobody wanted to uh come near her for some days or a week and she was delirious and she didn't recognize me but I had to take care of her cause there wasn't any one else to do it, and I remember what our first meal was. When we when we got to the house there was a sack of potatoes and the women took the potatoes and boiled the potatoes and our first meal...I remember sitting, all these people around that table just eating boiled potatoes with salt and I still remember how they tasted, and and it was April and they must have been new potatoes so they really must have been good, not just that they were the first real meal. We just ate and ate till we couldn't eat any more. I uh have a soft spot for boiled potatoes to this day. Everybody ate all that food and then my mother was still delirious and I, somebody said to me, this is the crisis if she gets through it. But I was a child and I knew my mother was going to make it through. I was afraid but I...it was not comprehensible to me that she would not survive it, and uh oh one...it was a house and it had a garden and there were fruit trees and there were berry bushes. I remember...there were berries and we picked them and ate them, and my brother was always mischievous and always adventurous and he went off by himself one day to the cellar which had a coal bin and if there was some way to get dirty, my brother found it, so he stood on the coal bin and was playing in the coal and pushing the coal aside and found in the coal bin like a potato sack and he came running upstairs and he got all the grown-up ladies and everybody ran downstairs and there they had hidden, in the coal bin, jars and jars of preserves, preserved fruits and everything, so I remember eating all that and uh it must have been one of the first days that my mother was back to her own self again, because I remember that she ate some of them and I remember saying, asking whether Freddie shouldn't get something extra cause he had, was the one who found it, because they divvied everything up into little parts. And then after some time there were Russian people there and they were at the beginning very

friendly and then I remember there was, they were less friendly and then at some point we were gathered up. I had found a doll, a doll that I had found in that house, and I had busied myself on those days making little outfits for the dolly from rags that I found and a crib and a thing, and one morning we were all gathered up together and we were put into groups for transport out and someone stole my doll. It disappeared. And we were put on a train and we were transported, eventually to Leip...to Leipzig. Somewhere, either on that trip or afterwards when we were out of Leipzig and back to Holland, but I think on the first part because it was not long after the end of the war, our train went through Berlin and everybody was cheering because all that you could see was bombed out in Berlin...just walls were standing. Most of those were being held up with poles and I remember all those Dutch people just cheering and and along the way, along the tracks, there would be German people looking up at our Red Cross train with their mouths open and the Dutch people would go there and say, Heil Hitler to them and laugh and laugh. And so we were in in Leipzig in a what must have been a military uh battalion headquarters. We were quartered in a battalion headquarters where Freddie one day found some machine with gears and stuck his finger in and cut off the top of his fingers. I remember. He's got bumpy tops on those fingers to this day, and a lot of blood. And we came...we were brought to a DP camp back to Holland uh in June of 1945 and my mother was still with us. She recovered from the typhus uh and we were we were in back to Maastricht. The DP camp was in Maastricht and there of course we had had a business and my mother knew people from the earlier days and even though the the conditions in the DP camp were very bad and we were treated more like prisoners, locked in and so on, nevertheless we had these connections and they came to see us and my mother was able immediately to notify our family in America and in Palestine of the fact that we were alive and to and to ask for their help, and the communications that I, that my mother wrote uh in those days and in the weeks following that she wrote to my family in America and in Palestine, those letters with all her recollections are in my possession and many of the documents that uh uh we have from from the times we were being returned after the war are in my possession, and uh the uh eventually uh the Dutch people took care of their of the Dutch citizens who were brought back to Holland. First allowed them to go back to their homes, which were given back to them, but we were not Dutch citizens, having been what was called stateless and uh so it took time for us to be allowed back. We were sent back to Amsterdam first to some other barrack type of thing because I remember lying in bed one day in that barrack and looking up and there was my my oldest friend, Naomi Moskowitz (ph) with whom I had been friends since nursery school. She stood there at the foot of my bed. They had she had survived the war too, and we were uh we were allowed to take, get our old get our old apartment back and uh just about at that time my mother, who was racked with pain all the time was no longer able to uh bear her pain and uh went to the doctor and was found to have uh bumps, lumps uh and she uh never really recovered. She had some operations. My family in the United States having been notified that we were alive was sending communications to us and the family whom my mother had hidden in our apartment the night that they came, and those friends of hers, that whole family survived the war, the two children having been hidden that night when Freddie and I were hidden...those two children were hidden too separately and the two adults were hidden separately and all

managed to survive the war...and at the end of the war uh we made contact with them again, my mother did, and when my mother became very sick we were sent to the country where they were living out in the country, and my mother, with much pain and some surgery and much help from America, died in uh March, the beginning of March of 1945⁹. Before she was incapacitated totally she made uh an attempt on her own to get in touch with the American Consulate or the American Embassy in Holland again to ask that...my father had made application to the American Consulate back in 1939 when we first entered Holland for a visa and I have much correspondence from that time, form letters from the American Consulate saying this by no means says that you're going to be allowed in and we make no representation, but you better supply us with such and such documents and then follow up things of the same sort, and uh after the war my mother uh made contact, uh wrote to the American Embassy and asked that we should be reinstated for visa uh but nothing came of it. I think the American Consul and even the American Embassy uh were not re-established in Holland after the war. Uh it became clear that my mother was not going to survive and one of my uncles uh, one of my father's brothers came over to Holland and my mother...and another brother of my father, a man by the name of Benjamin Kurz who died in 1957 and who was made guardian of my brother and me, then saw that he needed to get some permission to have the two children brought to America. Well, there were I guess millions of people trying to arrange to come to America after the war and the quotas were very tight but uh my Uncle Benjamin didn't let anything stop him. He went down to see President Truman. He wrote to President Truman and he went to see President Truman and he got to see President Truman's secretary and a special bill was introduced in the Congress to allow my brother and I to come in. Uh in the mean time it had been determined that the American Consulate was not going to be opened in Holland soon enough and when my mother died, my brother and I were brought to Sweden to establish residency there and possibly try to get in with my uncle's help and President Truman's through the American Consulate in Sweden and so we lived in Sweden over the summer and my Uncle Benjamin arranged, managed to get that bill there through the Congress and uh we were given a number and at the end of uh July of 1945^{10*} we were brought to Goteborg, Sweden from the from the boarding school that we'd been placed uh while we were in Sweden because we were alone, and we were put on board the ship alone and uh a lady was paid to make sure that we got to meals and so on, and so we two children sailed on the uh _____ in the Swedish-American Line at the end of July of 1945. Uh fourteen days later we uh arrived in the port of New York in the United States, having survived what nobody told us was a uh drill, an evacuation drill...they just blew those horns and told us to get to our life boats and I remember crying cause Freddie and I had been put into different life boats and I didn't know it wasn't the real thing and I thought the ship was sinking and uh so I remember that uh and then we arrived. When we arrived a group of men came running up to us on board the ship and wanted to take our picture and I realized of course in retrospect that it was the press and that they'd been given a list of people

⁹ Date uncertain.

¹⁰ Date uncertain.

who are arriving that might be of interest to their newspapers and we were one of the first children allowed in to the United States, especially on our own, and uh so they positioned us on the ship's railing, standing up and my Uncle Benjamin came on board to get us and saw all these men surrounding two children teetering on the ship's edge and started yelling at them and took us off and our pictures were taken looking through a small, a little life preserver. I had contracted uh a skin disease called impetigo, a very bad skin disease and extremely catching and uh I would not have been allowed into the United States without a stay at Ellis Island but uh I had, I got a series of...on board ship...I guess penicillin had just become available...this is 1946. I was given shots, four times a day and four times a night. Every three hours they came and gave me injections in my rear end of penicillin in an effort to cure it. It didn't cure it but I remember we, I had...Freddie and I slept in different state rooms. I was in one with three other women, double decker beds, four to a cabin and I remember them...they all...they came into the cabin and woke me up at night a few times and gave me a shot in my rear end. I was very sore. The impetigo didn't go away and the lady who had been paid to take care of us, I guess with the connivance of the ship's doctor, I don't know...put gloves on me. Particular one glove cause I had the impetigo very badly on one hand, so you can see when you look at the picture...there's this child wearing one glove and one not glove and we were smuggled through and I did not have to stay on Ellis Island and so Freddie and I came here and to grow up in the home of my Uncle Benjamin and his wife and his two daughters, my father's brother. And uh to this country had managed to come before the uh 1941 that Uncle Benjamin, my father's other brother Charles Kurz and his family who had fled and who had managed to arrive in the United States via a stay in the south of France in Nice and eventually they came here. Uh my father's sister who with her husband had been in Alexandria and in that branch...they managed to come to the United States. The brother who was in Belgrade, Yugoslavia and his family was never heard from again, and my father of course died. My mother's sister and her family uh came here by way of Belgium and my mother's brother had gone to Palestine. Uh I guess my mother must have doubts of surviving the war because uh from the earliest times on during the war she drilled into Freddie and me the address of both my uncle in Palestine and the address of my uncle in New York and uh we could have been awakened any time of day and night and could have could have recited those addresses because so many children were left alone in the concentration camps without parents, parents who died, and who...I guess my mother must have wanted to make sure that we would not just become displaced children, since we had family that we would know where to tell them to send us if we survived and so I know we uh we knew those addresses from a very very early age on.

Q: We need to move on so we have time for the photographs, but I wanted to ask you uh if you could very briefly, what was your adjustment to America like?

A: Uh, we arrived here on August 5th, 1946. Uh we had had, my family had arranged for us to have some private English lessons in uh Sweden and when we came here, there was one month to go before we were to enter school and uh we had some private English lessons so by the time school started in September uh we knew a few words of English and uh we were

entered in a public school. We...my uncle and aunt and their two children, one of whom was exactly my age, three months difference, and one of whom was two years older, lived in a two room apartment in in Brooklyn, in Brighton Beach, and suddenly there were four children and two adults in two rooms, and the man downstairs uh could tolerate the noise. I remember him coming up with a baseball bat, and we were put to school almost immediately in September. Uh I have the compositions I wrote in that first half year. Uh children learn languages extremely quickly and uh I we adjusted well like that. Uh I will tell you that uh we came through it pretty well. From my point of view uh I guess the best thing my parents ever did for me was to give me a brother. I felt in in certainly the first part of my life, I mean for the decade after we came here, I I'm not sure I would have made it through so well if I had not had him because uh I I suspect that the reason that my recollections are are very good through all this period is because they are connected, they are my only connection to my memories of my parents and to my memories of my own beginnings. And I must have determined at a very early age that I wasn't going to let go of those and so I guess I mean sometimes people have better memories and sometimes they have worse memories, so I guess I was gifted with a better memory, but besides that, I I felt I felt very close to my brother in all the years I was growing up and I I'm sure he felt that way about me because we had shared something which we never really could share with anybody else, and I think my adjustment was OK because of that. I would tell you that we went, we came here in August of 19 uh 46. In the summer of '47 we went to camp, a summer camp, for two months in Maine and all of a sudden that summer I became unable to eat. I was not able to swallow. Uh I...it took me about two years to be able to swallow again, and uh I can't tell you why that was but I'm sure it was as a result of my experiences. It was...in the forties one didn't send children to psychiatrist and all that. They seemed to be functioning OK and I was functioning alright in all other ways and of course we were lucky...we we had a family here and people who took us in as their own children and brought us up as their own children, and those people not only brought us up as their own children, but they were...they knew my parents and so we were able to maintain our own identity and still become part of their family, and so, you know, I was lucky that way. And uh I'm sure a whole lot of our personalities have been formed by those experiences. I I would say we are both exceedingly self-reliant people and uh I think that has something to do with it. I certainly didn't have a normal childhood. We didn't have a normal childhood and I had much more responsibility than...heaped on me...than most children have. My mother charged me with the care of my brother, if anything happened to her. Uh the time I had to take care of her when she was sick. I have letters that I wrote to my mother as a young child of six, seven, eight, in which I tried to comfort her and assure her that my father would be found after the war. They're not...they weren't things with which children are normally concerned. Childhood is a time of carefree uh selfishness and I don't think we had those opportunities and I'm sure those that had a bad effect on me and I'm sure it had some good effects on me. I found I'm uh more self-reliant and less willing to let other people do for me and I think that had something to do with it.

Q: Thank you...

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A: Thank you...

Q: ...very much.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION