

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Martin Strauss**  
**May 17, 1991**  
**RG-50.030\*0228**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Martin Strauss, conducted on May 17, 1991 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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.

## MARTIN STRAUSS

### May 17, 1991

A: My name is Martin Strauss.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Germany, Leipzig, on the 14th of July, 1923.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, when you were growing up.

A: My family were German as far as we can research it back into the 1800s in the even before 1800. We were all Germans. My mother came from a little town named Luthenbeck, which is on the River Main. Uh...I know that my grandfather dealt in collecting fat to make soap. We're going back into the 1800s. And my father, named Leopold...uh...was born near, which is a little town...uh...the area is called. And his father dealt in animals. He was a trader of animals. My father...uh...grew up and was sent into an apprenticeship... uh...at a merchant, and he became a merchant, eventually specializing in the sale of specialty oils. He had a very interesting patent as a matter of fact, a patent where he...he was the sole distributor of that particular oil, made it possible to wash out lubricating oils which would spill from the weaving looms from bearings where it should lubricate, on to the fabric. And that made secondhand fabric which the cloth manufacturers could not sell. And his oil was the only oil in all of Germany that could be washed out, a washable lubricant. And with it, he became extremely successful. Uh...My father at age 19 lost his right leg in World War I, and because of that he had received one of the early automobiles as a war veteran. There was no anti-Semitism. He was just a veteran and he very proudly all these years until the...1936-38 wore his...you know the iron cross on his lapel with great pride every day. He wouldn't go out without his decorations because he was very, very German. We were...like I am an American today with knowing what I have, we...our family, including myself, were very German. We routed for the German team to win in the Olympics except maybe I'm jumping the gun a little bit, but it's interesting because in 1936 when Jesse Owens, the American sprinter, won several races. I don't know exactly. At that time I was 13 years old. Uh...Germany said the black man is not a human being. They're more...or closer to animals and that's why he win and that's why he beat the Germans. That gave me an awful shock even though I knew what anti-Semitism was but...uh...but the fact that Hitler declared the black people animals, even as a young kid already, I smelled something that was very distasteful, and I stopped routing for the Germans and when I stopped routing for the Americans...Germans, and I started routing for the Americans. An interesting psychological thing that happened in 36. Well..uh...my

Q: Tell me...tell me.. tell me a little bit about your siblings.

A: Okay. Uh...I had a sister, Marion, which is 8 years younger than I am....uh...born in Leipzig also. We had a very comfortable income. My father was one of the highest tax

payers connected to you name it from the highest officials in the city down to...uh...being a...uh..executive...not executive director...on the executive board of the, which later came to haunt him because when he was arrested in 1939, he was arrested because his name was on this roster. Uh...My sister, Marion, and I went to school in the 30s. Went to public school until...I am not totally sure about the date, but I think 1933, 1934, all Jews were expelled from public schools. We felt fairly comfortable in the public schools except, and that is interesting that the Jewish kids automatically sat together. Don't ask me how we found each other. Now we were...we were 6, 7, 8, 10 year olds. The Jewish kids automatically felt they ought to protect themselves. They ought to sit together. We always sit together. And nobody told me who was Jewish and who was not. But until 33, 34, public school was fairly comfortable. My father and my mother, like all Jewish parents, tried to shield the kids from the reality. Uh...We knew that certain things were going on. I know that and I remember distinctly where there were shops and store where said, Juden. That means 'No Jews. Don't buy here.' And I know there were often signs on windows, bands on stores, 'Don't. You Jews cannot buy here'. There were discriminations, but our parents didn't want us kids to know or suffer from it. So we bought our clothes some other places. There were Jewish warehouses, and we went and bought there. But as times went on...until 1936, things were fairly under cover. I mean they happened, but I know that more from historical facts than from personal experience. But after the Olympics, and after Hitler put on a good show and because the world came to the Olympics in 36...after 36 things drastically changed. Whether that was or the Nuremberg laws or whatever that was...you couldn't go to a dentist or any other doctor any more, and...uh...Jewish professionals were prohibited from practicing and from occupying certain... uh...occupations, certain...uh...trades. We felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult.

Q: How...how do you...how did the Nuremberg laws affect you personally?

A: Uh...Me personally, directly, they only affected us because...I'm not sure whether it was the Nuremberg law or not, but we had to call ourselves...the boys...Martin Israel Strauss, add the name Israel and my sister and my mother Sarah. I remember one incident probably about 1938 or 1939 where I was on my bicycle and I made a wrong turn of some kind and a policeman came and said, "Who are you?" And I said, "Martin Strauss." And he said, "Martin Israel Strauss." And I said, "Yes, Sir." The identification by saying Israel (coughing...excuse me please) was...uh...it didn't say Israel, it said Jew Strauss. Martin Jew Strauss. That's what Israel said. And of course I was guilty and I got a...a...a fine payable at the police station and...uh...I'm sure everybody else would have gotten away with it, but the minute it was Martin Israel Strauss, you were guilty no matter what. Uh...And of course, then in 38...let's go back to 36...I'm sorry. Uh...Schools no longer admitted us, or we were thrown out of schools. So the Jewish community created Jewish schools, Jewish teachers, Jewish learning. And we found that very comfortable, us kids, simply because we were not harassed. We were not exposed to the...to the gentiles. We played football with them and me being a good football at one time created a Hell of a fight. Because one party wanted me as a good football player, and the other party said, "We're not playing with any Jews." So a big fight erupted between the two football teams because the Jew Strauss was going to be on that team and they didn't want him on that

team. Uh...These things as kids...13, 14, 15 years...leave an impression, but they don't bother you. It was more important to play football, than it was the racial incident. And that's how we slowly became accustomed to being...let's say...inferior people but living with it. It's a system. But then many of my father's friends, Thank God, lost their occupation and couldn't practice any more and that gave them an impetus to leave Germany, thusly saving their lives. But my father and many others was quite wealthy, very wealthy indeed, and he said, "Hitler is going to go away. We're going to wait. Even if I cannot sell...sell my oil to many people who would not buy from me, there is still some big concerns who want to buy from me because I have something very special." And he said, "We will overcome and we will last longer than this nut, Hitler, will." And thusly we stayed. My father being the patriot of the family....he had 8 brothers and sisters, followed his example even though they were not that well off, but they were in the country and they were farmers and they were animal...uh...breeders. They had enough to eat, and they were living off the farm, and they didn't need much. They said, "If Leopold Strauss doesn't leave, I don't have to leave either." And I am ashamed and with great sorrow, I must say that my father to his dying day had nightmares of guilt of not having sent his 8 brothers and sisters, their families and their children out of the country. Meaning they all perished. There are 24, maybe 26. We are not totally sure. But 24 confirmed people who died in the Holocaust because they could not leave after it was too late, meaning 1939. Uh...We have confirmation of various concentration camps where they perished. They were 8 brothers and sisters, their respective spouses, and their children amounting to a minimum of 24 people. They are all confirmed. That's on my father's side. On my mother's side, many of them escaped because they were smart enough to leave. From 36 to 39, which is a...uh...period of strengthening, growing anti-Semitism, growing laws, growing persecution...uh...they took away automobiles. You could not own a car anymore even though I will admit my father was the only one in Leipzig who had permission to have an automobile because (a) he had lost his leg in World War I. He was a decorated veteran. He had connections to city hall, and he was permitted to keep an automobile, the only one in a city of large proportions. Everybody else had to take the street car, provided he stands up. You could not sit down in a street car. Of course, that leads to little shoving matches, shouting matches...uh...but we got used to it. It's a condition that...that's so unbelievable where the human dignity has been taken away from each individual. A little chip at a time until the time came that you had to walk on the side walk and you couldn't walk on the...on the...you had to walk in the gutter because you couldn't walk on the side...sidewalk. And...uh...a little chip at a time until you're just totally dehumanized and become nothing. But it happens step by step. It isn't a process that happens over night, and if I may inject a little bit of personal thoughts on this, the German people also were conditioned toward the anti-Semitism, toward hitting the people, and they weren't all anti-Semites at the beginning. They were taught to be anti-Semites. There were newspapers, the Sturmer, which is...I am sure we still have records of these, that had propaganda that even we, as children, laughed about. But many grownups took it as...as the truth. And I...I still remember about Passover where they accused Jews of slaughtering little Gentiles...kids...excuse me a second please. You can edit it out. Uh...Where the the Sturmer, the newspaper showed Jews killing kids for Pass...for Passover. We laughed about it. But I am sure that many other people took it serious and accepted it. So life was tolerable because we had enough funds, and lucky

we...those that didn't have any funds tried to get out. All ended up in concentration camps. And we're getting...I'm sure there...there are many other periods in between, but right now I go to Kristallnacht which...uh...I want to retrench then for a second. Uh...We had our Jewish schools and we felt very comfortable because we were together and nobody harassed us when we went to school, and we had a lot of Jewish teachers and we studied religion where we could, but we also had a lot of Polish Jewish teachers. And there came a day...I don't know the exact date...where suddenly all Polish Jews were rounded up by Hitler and his associates, put on trains or on trucks and shoved back into Poland. That day I remember quite clearly. We lost many of our teachers. One thing we lost our English teacher. I remember we lost our Math teacher, the two primary...uh...sources of knowledge, and I remember distinctly the day when it happened. The teachers were rounded up, put on trucks and shoved out. My teacher...uh...asked me to please go to her house and fetch a little suitcase. We were very close to the teacher. She was often at our house, which is the custom you know. The teacher is the honored person in a...was the honored person, was always taken in Friday night dinners and so forth. Any how...uh...I ran to the teacher's house and got a little suitcase and threw it over a fence to her prior to her getting on to a truck. And I was school yard. I fetched her little valise with some stuff that she told me to bring, threw it over the fence, and she had it. Whatever it meant. It was totally meaningless, but one of those acts of desperation and...uh...she went off to Poland. Somehow, it is interesting to note she escaped...uh...out of Poland, went to England, became teacher in England, and now lives in Israel. It was a miracle happened. How she got out I...I don't remember. In any event, we lost a great deal of our teaching staff, and the school after that was not any more because there were substitute teachers. They were lay...lay teachers. The school didn't function like it should. Uh...Things got worse and...and harassment was...were on the increase, but our parents shielded us.

Q: You mentioned that before...you told me...why don't you tell me a little bit about your Bar Mitzvah, and your Jewish education.

A: Okay. Uh...Of course, like most German Jews (coughing) Forgive me...uh...we came from a fairly orthodox house. Uh...When Hitler decreed in 1934 or thereabouts...the date may not be accurate...that no more kosher slaughtering was allowed, my mother had to make a choice. Either we eat non-kosher food or we don't eat meat, and of course, the decision was made 'no more meat in the house.' And my mother would keep it absolutely. Nothing doing. No meat. So we became vegetarians. Again one of those conditions steps. It's not difficult to...to forego meat when it is not available, but you have enough to eat. It was just one more of those steps that...but with the proper resolve, my mother insisted that we do not break the laws of kosher. And the reason I remember this...because of my Bar Mitzvah in 1936...uh...we invited a number of friends. My father was still well known in the city, and one of the biggest events of that Bar Mitzvah was that the menu included kosher meat. Where do you get kosher meat? You fly...not fly it, you truck it. I guess they...they didn't fly it...from Poland where there was kosher slaughtering, and they trucked the meat for the Bar Mitzvah at tremendous cost because of freezing refrigeration was almost not heard of in those days. That means it had to be slaughtered today, trucked tomorrow, to Leipzig to the Bar Mitzvah and a big...I'm not sure that the kosher meat

wasn't more of an attraction than my Bar Mitzvah, but it was one of those memorable affairs where we had one up on the...uh...on the...let's day...Nazis who would not allow us to have kosher meat. And the Bar Mitzvah, of course, was well attended by all the Jewish people. Many of our Gentile friends in the upper echelon would not attend, but would send gifts. Again, one of those conditioning affairs. We understand you cannot attend for political reasons, but we accept that. Uh...Going back to 1939, school was very difficult and one day, the school is burning. I go to school in the morning. The school is burning, and I didn't understand it because there were no fire engines and people were standing around. No explanation. My father is looking for me, and my mother is looking for me and when I walked into the house, they are delighted that I'm okay. What I didn't know is that Kristallnacht was about to happen. It didn't happen yet. Uh...During Kristallnacht, of course, we are aware that all the synagogues, including ours, the Reform Synagogue and the Orthodox Synagogue, were burned. Some people who went in to save some of the scrolls were killed. Uh...Furniture came flying...during the night came flying out windows, that the word Kristallnacht. Uh..People, not in uniform, but in civilian clothes...I remember that distinctly because normally the SR, SS were proud to wear the uniforms...but when when it came to looting stores and when it came to throwing furniture out and robbing households and beating up people, most of these...as a matter of fact, I don't remember any incident where they were in...they were in uniform. They were all in civilian clothes. And...uh...we went home and closed ourselves in, meaning we wouldn't open the door for anybody. We would just wait it out sort of. Well, at...at night around midnight, maybe 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, a knock on the door. Solid knock on the door. And three people, civilian clothes again, pressed pass my mother into the apartment, and said, "Where is Mr. Strauss?" "Mr. Strauss was in bed." And we then knew that all Hell had broken loose because for one reason or another...and we, to this day, don't know, somebody called us on the telephone and shouted into the telephone,. That means 'Run Away.' So some nut called us. We didn't know how real this was, but we know something was up. Uh...They go to my father and say, "You're coming with us." My father said, "Give me some time. I have to put on my artificial leg." So they were standing around while my father strapped on his artificial leg, and my mother took me out of my little bedroom on the other side of the house and said, "Up, under the rafters you go." She had enough presence of mind to hide me. I was 16 years old then. And I immediately went up to the roof under the rafters, kept very quiet. Uh...They took my father, left my mother, left my sister. And he went to the city jail. For 3 days we didn't know what was happening, what was going on. We knew the city was burning. We knew the synagogues were burning...synagogues were burning. Fire engines standing by doing nothing. We then knew that this was an official sanctioned, government. It wasn't something that happened by coincident on a local level. We knew then that it was a national scheme. I have to go back now a little bit and tell you about my father's business where we had something like 10 Gentile employees. Of course, most of these, if not everyone of them were members of the SR...uh...of the party, and some SS which was the...like God. Uh...They were all members of the Nazi party. Nevertheless, since my father was a good employer, paid tremendous wages...when I reflect upon the size of his operation, he had his own railroad...uh...uh...approach. You know where...where the tank cars would come to his yard where the oil was pumped into his tanks directly from railroad cars. He had a substan...very substantial business, and he paid employees

extremely well. Being an amputee, of course, he had a driver, and the driver...uh...also being a party member, liked my father, was beholden to him. Uh...He was a party man, but not a Jew hater because he had experienced a Jew who was decent to him, who paid him better than average wages. And that was the salvation and maybe the reason we are still alive and we are here to talk about it. After 3 days, which is the time that they assembled Jews either in the city jail or down a river bank because there was so many Jews that they couldn't have them all in...in city jails. They drove them down into a river bank where they could control that you couldn't run away. One side was water. The other side was two bridges, and they...they were hemmed in there prior to transportation to concentration camps. Back to the chauffeur, the driver of my father's, he went to the city jail and said, "I need to extract the Jew Strauss." I don't know whether you know German mentality...uh...but in my opinion, there is a superior and there is a follower, and there is nothing in between. And if a superior, an officer, says, "I want the Jew Strauss," and what was the life of a Jew. "I want him," and he took him out. He was able to extract my father from jail and bring him home, and I will never...never ever, as long as I live, forget my father's face after he came out of 3...only 3 days of jail. We're talking about people who have been in jail for years and years. My father after 3 days had become a skeleton. His face...he was unshaven, of course, and that added to...to the impression. Well, the chauffeur took him, brought him to our house, and he said, "Mr. Strauss, it's time to get out. You have a few days. Try and get out. I'll take you to the train and we'll see what we can do." Because the chauffeur had our car, and he kept the car. So for a number of days, we...the kids...my daughter...my sister and myself, were home. And my mother and my father went out, looked for visas to get out. That's very interesting because the Jews were hunting for visas, and the Nazis were hunting for Jews, so unless they were recognized as Jews, they could travel on a street car or go to the Consulate and stand in line and look for visas. And we said, "We will go anywhere in the world. Just let us get out." There was, of course, no way to find out what brothers and sisters were doing. Telephones were disrupted, disconnected, were listened too. We couldn't make any calls that amounted to anything. And we decided we will go anywhere where we can get a visa. But no visas were to be had. Who wanted us? The Swiss didn't want us. Europeans didn't want us. America...and I bow my head in shame...history will show that America had 8,000 visas for Germany in 1939, but not one single, extra visa was ever issued to accommodate any Jews. And I don't have to go into the history of ships arriving to the States and were turned back where most of the people lost their lives after they were turned away from the American shores. No visas for America. No visas anywhere. The only opportunities were either Shanghai, which you could buy. For marks, you could buy visas for Shanghai and many people went to Shanghai. History will show you. Then there was Israel. A limited amount of visas on the British mandate were available. And then there was England, and we were waiting for either one of Shanghai, Israel, or England visas to give us permission to leave. And the Israel visa came first. Two days later, the England visa came, but fate wanted us to go to Israel or Palestine at that time. Uh...the chauffeur took us to the railroad, dumped us into a car, got us to Italy where, at the border line, the Germans knowing we had the passports, knowing that we were immigrating took us apart. But taking us apart, I mean literally. They took my father's wooden leg off and searched it for money, contraband. But we knew better than that, because by that time we already had learned our lesson. Uh...They took and stripped my mother, totally naked,



and checked in places you wouldn't dream of checking, and they took my little sister who at that time was an 8 year old kid, and stripped her. I don't know exactly how much they checked her, but I know my mother told me that she was totally and utterly checked. And then they put us back together again, our luggage and so forth, and we got to Italy. From Italy, we got to then Palestine. And, of course,...uh...that shaped my life and my attitude and my...my total thinking. We did not know what happened to our relatives. The fact that they perished we only found out after the war. My father and I went to concentration camps, Buchenwald, Dachau. We looked up records and so forth. Uh...I don't know whether the following is relevant, but it is interesting because I had changed in my total attitude in life, and in Israel I became so aware of the fact...we're talking about 1940, 41, 42...there were hundreds and thousands of refugees trying to get out of Europe, trying to leave concentration camps. Old people that had been...had escaped, especially after the war ended in 44. There were thousands of Jews trying to leave Europe and get to Israel. The British mandate blocked Israel and I became a volunteer, a social worker, a photographer, a radio operator...you name it, trying to help in bringing in illegal immigrants in addition to the fabulous training and schooling that I got in Haifa. And in 1947, I got caught by the British again, and for 3 months I went into a British camp called, and...uh...I stayed there because I was a trouble maker, and they told me, "We will either take you to Cyprus or you can go back to Germany or you can go anywhere you want, but we will not let you back into Palestine." So...uh...as fate would have it, I had an uncle on my mother's side in New York who gave us a visa, and the German quota was totally unused. And here I end again as a refugee in New York, welcomed with open arms, immediately found a job, and again I became not only a...a fairly successful businessman. In other words, I earned a lot more than I ever thought and hoped I would earn. And I become again a social worker and...uh...I am amongst other things, Chairman of the Russian Resettlement Committee of the Jewish Social Services agency here in Washington, and I have been active there for 25 years. And it's a privilege to be in the United States because I am...and this is what I, I am a better American or as good as an America as my parents. May they rest in peace. We're Germans because we had the opportunity to flourish. We had the opportunity to become citizens. And this is what happened to me in this country, and I appreciate what this country's done for and I appreciate the freedom and the freedom of the press which was really the...the most devastating vehicle with which Hitler was able to brainwash the German population. You see it in print, you believe it. It's...it's...uh...hard to define, hard to understand, but I think it was propaganda machine was the vehicle to convince the Germans to do what they did.

Q: Did your family come to the United States with you?

A: No. My...my family. This is another... Can I interrupt for a second here. An interesting of the entire story was the fact that my father found it very difficult temperature heat-wise, mentality-wise to make it in Israel and he became very, very poor. We had...we literally sold some of the belongings from my father to buy a ticket back to Germany. And he went in 1950 back to Germany. He said, "I have a lot...lot that this country owes me." And he had documentation like any...uh...good businessman, he had certain records and...uh...I have for instance the penalty...the photograph of the penalties that were imposed when Rath was killed by Grynzspan...uh...and there was a substantial penalty

imposed on the Jewish people in all of Germany. Everybody had to pay 20 percent of whatever he owned. House, cars...uh...not only cash, but 20 percent of what you own as payable as a penalty to the German government because the Ambassador in France was killed by Grynzspan. He had those papers and he went back and he said, "Not only do you people owe me the pension that you promised me when I lost...and I gave my leg for the Fatherland...uh..., I think I'm entitled to my pensions and...uh...we had a house, etcetera, etcetera. And I believe and a little more research has to be done, that the law of restitution was created after my father went back and demanded and had a lawyer pursue the restitution. Uh...He went back to Germany. He passed away in Germany, and my mother passed away in Germany. My mother followed my father. Uh...My sister stayed in Israel for a long time. Then she joined me in the United States because I didn't want to live alone. And she came to the United States. And I'm blessed with two lovely kids and grandsons, and it's been a very good country to me.

Q: Let me just ask a couple more questions. Back...uh...back in Germany, when you were growing up and becoming...you were still in the school, a regular public school, did you have non-Jewish friends?

A: Very few. Very few. An interesting thing happened during that time. Uh...In class, there was a class given by some German educator who was teaching the kids how to recognize Jewish features. Of course, that was all a bunch of garbage, but somehow or other darker hair and...and bigger nose and stuff like this. Anyhow, this is...I remember this vividly...uh...I was in a German class and he called me up and says, "Strauss, Come up front." He did not know I was Jewish. Okay? And I came up front and he said, "This man even though he is not Jewish has very Jewish features." And he pointed to my nose and my chin and my...etcetera, etcetera. I turned around to him. I said, "I'm sorry to contradict you Sir, but your diagnosis of me being a Jew is correct. I am a Jew." And he was terribly embarrassed in front of the class. I was taken out of the class immediately because a Jew wasn't supposed to attend that class in the first place. But that was another one of those little steps that...uh...for a 14, 15 year old kid, it's embarrassing, but it doesn't really tell you that...uh...some day I'm out to kill you. So in the German schools until, I would say, 1933, 1934, we were fairly well tolerated,...uh...but as I said before, some how or other, the Jewish kids always sat together. And...uh...I think I had one Gentile friend. The rest were all Jewish. All the time. Maybe it's a defense mechanism. Maybe it's distinctively some how...uh...and we always helped each other.

Q: After school, were you involved in...in the afternoons, were you involved in scouting or Jewish youth groups or summer camps, those kinds of things.

A: Yes. Yes. We went to summer camps. We went to Hebrew school. We had sports...uh...which was...I... I don't think we ever tried even into any Gentile environment. It was the sheltered environment that our parents built for us. Uh...We had a summer camp. We had the sports camp. We had...uh...Hebrew classes. We were a...a small entity always well protected. The Jewish community efforts were always tremendous. And, of course, efforts were made...uh...to...to give us strength to overcome the insults because as kids we only had two mechanisms to defend ourselves. Run or fight. And I think we were better

at running than fighting, which leads me to another story that...uh...might be interesting. In 19...the Nuremberg laws I think came out in 1936. Uh...They decreed that every Jew has to turn in every weapon in his or her possession. There was a law. And...uh...of course, many people had from World War I weapons that they brought home, souvenirs, sabers, a long saber they carried these tremendous sabers, and some had guns and many had knives and a law was passed, "No Jew is allowed to have any weapons, any knife over a certain length, etcetera, etcetera. Turn them in." The regulation was if you don't turn it in, you can be punished by death. And if my memories serves me right...I have to be very careful whether it is memory or whether it's written documentation that I read...some people were punished. Not only the person that didn't turn in the weapon, but also the rest of the...of his family. When that happened, we all turned in knives and guns, what few guns the Jews had, including my father. That, of course, led to a...led to a another disaster many years later. When people asked many years later and people says, "Why didn't Jews defend himself...didn't defend themselves." I say, "With what?" We turned in everything we had, and...and besides the fact that we were brought up as peaceful people, the arguments today with the National Rifle Association vis-à-vis the right to be armed is...has much more depth to it than meets the eye. This is what happened in Germany. And a free press and laws passed by a ruler rather than by democratic government, all this step by step, led to the deterioration and eventual downfall and eventual murder of 6 million Jews and others.

Q: When you were in Israel...uh...at the height of the Holocaust, how much...how aware were you of what was going on and what...since there wasn't a lot of immigration at that time, what kind of...what were you doing, if anything, that did concern the Holocaust.

A: Well, the only thing we knew in 44 really, during the war years Israel did not know...or I did not know...I don't know whether the powers to be in Israel knew very much, but we were very concerned in Israel about our own survival. Don't forget. Rommel was within 400 miles of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Uh...We saw the flashes of the fighting on the horizon. Literally at night we saw the guns blazing. Uh...We were very much concerned with where do we go from here? We were much concerned with the Arab problems. The Arabs were pursuing the Jews and we were running around with the Haganah and the Underground and...uh...defense mechanisms and trying to build things and...uh...and we had the air attacks some air attacks of German and Italian aircraft...uh...uh...on Israel. The Haifa refinery was set ablaze and we were living 5 miles from or 10 miles from tanks that burned so bright that you could read the newspapers...uh... refineries were ablaze. Uh...We were concerned with...with Arabs whether they were friendly or not. Uh...We had to...uh...I remember when I helped but screens on so the stones wouldn't go through the windows, we...uh...we were very much concerned with our own survival in Israel fighting both the Arabs who had declared loyalty to...to Germany...uh...being concerned about the invasion from the West...uh...and maybe the news didn't filter up. But in 44, we knew immigrants were at the shores and in 44 we knew people coming...practically swimming across the Mediterranean on...on boats that I wouldn't cross the Potomac with. Uh...They were boats that were loaded so they were practically capsized. Uh...I remember one ship, the Patria, which was a French liner, with three or four smoke stacks that was loaded with immigrants that the British had captured at the...in the

Mediterranean open sea and had...uh...brought to Haifa, and they wanted to deport the ship...the passengers to Cyprus. And the ship was scuttled in Haifa Harbor. Unfortunately, it wasn't a very good job because the ship instead of sinking and going down slowly...uh...tipped over on its side. It turned turtle, and when it fell over to the sides, we had many immigrants they drowned. Others came out over the side, and they slid down over the hull of the ship, which was encrusted with barnacles, and the barnacles cut their flesh open while they were going into the water. At that time, I was a student at the...uh...Naval Academy in Haifa and we had passes to get to the Harbor. And we went into the Harbor, and we tried to rescue some of the people that had gone overboard and into the water. And if you don't think that leaves any...uh...specks in your mind or any...uh...memories that change your life, that affect my attitude toward people...my relationship with the rest of the world...uh...believe me, it does change you. But the...the early indications are indeed that we did not know during 42, 3 and...42, 43, we did not know what happened to the people. 44 we were keenly aware. The news came across.

Q: Now, from what you said before, I understand that you mentioned that you...you helped...uh...when...when the ship's illegal immigrants came ashore, you helped the people. Can you describe one of those events.

A: Uh...Well, I will describe one of the events. Uh...Ships came and...uh...tried to...if they managed to pass the British ship blockade, they tried to come ashore at night, simply by beaching the ship. And then everybody helped. Ropes, little boats. The infirmed, the elderly, the kids had to be carried ashore through the water, and...uh...one of the last occasions was a ship that landed not far from Tel Aviv, and the people crawled ashore and you just have to help. There isn't...there isn't any question of do I or do I not do it. In addition to that, I was a photographer. I wanted to document these events, and I took some pictures and then suddenly out of nowhere, the British showed up from both sides and captured all of those who were involved in the landing, including me and my camera and on a truck we went and off we went to...and they took us...at that time...now it's the West Bank. At that time, it was the. It was called, which was a British camp. In the middle of the desert, all it had was some tents. It didn't have any fence around it because you couldn't escape. It was all desert and the only way to escape was along the railroad line so anybody that tried to escape would wonder around the railroad line. In the morning, the British would take a little Piper Cub, fly around the railroad line, and find out whoever was trying to escape and run them back. Uh...So nobody ever escaped. And many people did not know where we were. My parents didn't...uh...for a period of 8 weeks, I think, had no idea where the Hell I was cause the British didn't publish...publish anything. And then Jewish Agency got a hold of all the prisoners list. We were better than 300 at one time, and my mother read in the paper where her son was in the British prison camp, and she went to my father and said, "Now, we know where our son is." So...uh...

Q: Were you a member of the Haganah at the time?

A: Uh...No, I was not a member of the Haganah. I was a helper. Whether you...uh...In those days, let me explain to you. Even if you are a member of the Haganah, you not necessary know who or where you...you just try to do the right thing, and I was not...I was neither leader nor...nor...uh...officer. I was the guy that was helping. And, of course, it was a organized help. It wasn't...uh...but...uh...we tried to do the right thing. I was never Underground. I was never or anything of that kind. I was a humanitarian that needed to help because I knew my relatives could be on that boat. Unfortunately, it wasn't so.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: Yeah. As soon as we finish, I'll probably think of something.

Q: Linda had...had a couple of questions. She wanted you to talk a little bit about...uh...what it was like for you when you first come to the United States and your...

A: Okay. Good question. (clearing throat) Uh...You know the things that...that shape you for life are your experiences obviously. I came to the United States. I had a small box of tools and 46 cents. I arrived in New York, and my aunt on a very rainy day picked me up and...uh...took me in. I slept on the living room floor, but I was welcome. I was home. I was safe. Two days later, I had a job at Columbia University Medical at night and a daytime job downtown in the photographic industry. I built photographic equipment, both for the medical center as well as in New York for the...uh...at that time Time-Life, Time and Life magazine, New York Times, did all the camera repairs, etcetera, etcetera. But the opportunity to come to a country...and there's one of the things I will never forget. There was this little immigrant coming off the boat, has to go through customs and immigration, and the immigration officer said...after he opened my passport I had a which is not a passport, but is a piece of paper that means, "Let him pass," translated. Uh...It's a travel document. And the immigration officer opening the travel document read my name and he said, "Welcome to America, Mr. Strauss." Those were actually the first words I heard in the United States from a... It made such a profound impression. It is now...this was in 1947, so that is 40...

Q: 44 years.

A: 44 years ago, but I can still see the man's face, just as much as I can see the faces of these Nazi officers that came to get my father. I remember this officer who said, "Welcome, Mr. Strauss." Used my name and said, "Welcome to America, Mr. Strauss." Fantastic. And quite frankly, it's been going up ever since. And...and therefore I have become an American who... who is politically involved to a certain extent. Uh...Let us say, I am not politically involved. I am involved with humanitarian efforts. An immigrant...you know, this is an interesting thing. A Russian Jew and a German Jew, we're so far apart because the German Jews were...were very prejudice, solid, integrated people. They were more German than they were Jews. And Russian Jews were second...second-class citizens, which was, of course, all craziness. But today if I can find a Russian Jew that I can take by the hand and give him part of my America and return him to self-sufficiency as a way

of life, that justifies all the efforts and all the hours because it gives you love in return. It gives you...uh...dignity. You give away dignity to others. The dignity that Hitler robbed us, the dignity that we didn't have extended to us by the British. And here welcome to America. This is the country where we...we simply we have to do everything we can to defend this democracy to make it a better democracy. Surely, many things that are wrong.

Q: No. No. That's fine. I think we're out of tape.

A: Good. We're through.

Q: I think they're going to put another tape if there's anything else that you want to say.

A: Don't you want to show some of the pictures that I have.

Q: Yeah.

A: How does that work?

Q: You described how these three men burst into your house and ordered your father to fix up...uh...his leg. You know we know your father had his leg on and your mother was hiding you up in the rafters. Can you describe if you can what your...what your feelings were at that time and what was going through your head?

A: Okay. Uh...When they burst through the door, it's like a burglar coming into your house. Your house is violated. Everybody is terribly, terribly scared, and I must admit my mother had more wits about her. They were not taking any women that particular... On Kristallnacht, they were hunting men. Men and young men. Uh...And while my father put on his leg which was a big procedure. It was a wooden leg with straps around the shoulders and so forth, my mother left the bedroom. The three people were watching my father, but didn't care about my mother. Whether they knew about my existence or whether they were not paying attention in the confusion, one doesn't know. Uh...My mother immediately took me to the roof rafters and said, "You stay there. Don't do anything. Be very quiet." Whether they ever asked my mother for me, I doubt it because my mother would have told me. They probably did not ask her. But the feeling inside of me being hunted like an animal is a fear that settles in your stomach and a fear for your father. We knew then that all these little steps that were taken...the Jews...to discriminate, the Jews are bad; the Jews are murderers, had come to a...to an explosion. It finally erupted. We knew that, and...uh...the...the feeling in your stomach almost to a point of throwing up the...the being scared feeling is one that you will never forget. You forget...I...I have a feeling that you may forget pain. Pain is something that goes away, but mental...being afraid doesn't go away. It stays and I...I still remember that. And of course my mother was fairly cool and composed and I...she told me the following story amongst other things. Uh...In order to determine whether we had played with any funds and taken any money illegally out of the country, they interrogated my father in one room and took my mother into another room and asked them, "What money do you spend for household budget every week?" And, of course, my parents had all these years tried to

save money and get it Switzerland and get it out. That was my mother's insistence. So my father when asked in his mind doubled the amount in order to account for missing money which was a good presence of mind. And in order to find out whether he spoke the truth these SS officers took my mother into another room and asked her the same questions. And I don't know whether God guided her or something. She also doubled the amount. The two answers, which was not prepared, never spoken before...in the interrogation, the two answers absolutely agreed.

Q: Had your parents succeeded in getting money out?

A: Yes, my parents had gotten money to Switzerland in...in...from 33 to 39, they were able to get at great losses...there were couriers that took money to Switzerland. Many of the couriers vanished and never showed up again. But it was a amount of money that my father being quite wealthy was able to get out and it really helped us to live on it for quite awhile. But then it eventually all vanished and blew up with the devaluation and etcetera, etcetera. But he became from a very rich man, he became a very poor man and part of...let me...let me sing praise of my mother's...uh...was an extraordinary woman. We had in Germany in the "good old days" we had servants. I don't mean one. We had a number of servants. And we had a chauffeur and we had a car, we had houseman. We had a housemaid, etcetera, etcetera, and my mother went to Palestine and within 1 week from Germany she scrubbed floors in Palestine and she never complained. And she never had any compunction about...uh...saying she's unhappy. We were alive. We had escaped. We were grateful for what we had. We were satisfied. And...uh..it so happens that Israel was able to give me a first class education at the in Haifi and I was very privileged and this is why, again, I support Israel with everything that I have. Another story that may interest you is...uh...when in 1948 Israel was declared a state and the war broke out with the Arabs, there was a Legation in New York. Israel didn't have a embassy then, and I told them I am willing to go back to Israel and fight for Israel because I had just arrived in the United States. And he said, "Well, we don't have any planes...any place on a...on a plane to take you back. You're not important right now. But as soon as we have space, we will notify you." I'm still waiting for them to notify me. (laughing) I'm still here. So this is really how it happened, and I met a lovely young lady in Washington, got married, etcetera, etcetera.

Q: Just a couple more questions. When you were at Kristallnacht and your father came home and you were able to get the visas, you mentioned...you described the search at the border. Can you describe the...what you remember from the train ride from Leipzig to the border and then also what happened in Italy and...and your feelings about running away from Germany and going to Palestine.

A: Uh...When my father got out of jail, he again was a free man to a certain extent. Business was finished. He called up...it's an interesting sideline...he called up some of the...uh...big factories which were really German Aryan factories that, "I have oil...I have a tank car full of this and that. I'm willing to give it to you at half price." And a number of these big factories says...said to my father, "Mr. Strauss, we do not want to take advantage of your misfortune." The misfortune of being Jew and having to leave. "We will pay you the

going rate." And it so happens that they bought an awful lot of oil which they didn't need and they put it in tanks and it turned out that during the war, they couldn't get any oil and they were the lucky...they had helped the Jew, but they were the lucky ones, because they had oil for many years to come. So that's one of those...uh...quirky fates that happen in life. Uh...I lost my tread.

Q: The leaving...the trying to leave home.

A: Yeah. The departure itself was very dramatic because when we got to the train and the train moved, my father had never cried. I had never seen my father cry in his life. My father cried because...because we knew that it was the end of a total existence. A man who...who was an officer who was a leading citizen, a man who was respected left with a suitcase even though we had some money in Switzerland. We wasn't in immediate danger of...of starving. There wasn't. Uh...but we knew it was the end of an era and my father and my mother held each other and cried, but they're very lucky because they got away. Many others never had a chance to cry. Many others were separated and had to wave to each other, including...we have some reports...there was one uncle who picked berries in Germany in the woods to feed himself and allegedly either was shot there or went to a concentration camp and was killed there for picking berries. Any excuse will do. So my family, particular family, was extremely lucky to have had the means. Now you will ask how come you had the means? And I will tell you many did not have the means to escape and pay and buy their way out. My father had a big apartment house which he had to sell under duress, but that apartment house was paid for and that gave us after he paid Hitler his 20 percent of everything he had, gave us still enough money to buy a ticket to get out. Many people perished because they could not afford the train fare to get out. And once we were in Italy...uh...we were able to pay for our hotel room. We got on a ship...on the ship legally. The ship called the S.S. Jerusalem which was an Italian ship, took us to Haifa Harbor where we were welcomed by an uncle who took us in, who had rented from an Arab an apartment for us. True, we did not have any lights and electricity and it was very bare. I wired the house. It was one of those little miracles that a 17, 16...17 year old was able to wire the whole house with electricity, and when the inspector came, he said, "That's not done by a professional. We were absolutely worried he would cut us down. He said, "It's too neat." So we survived the electrical inspection. Uh...But the...the shaping of a man's dignity, of a man's humanitarian attitude toward his fellow man is what the Holocaust is all about. If you...if we don't learn and pass on to our children what we have learned, what I have learned and...because I am very lucky. I'm here to talk about it. Those that have learned the bitterest lesson of them all are not here to talk about it. We have to take what we can and convey and...and make sure that the next generation really understands...uh...what inhumanity to man by man can be.

Q: One last...uh...one last question. You mentioned...uh...you mentioned the chauffeur who...uh...who helped your father and got your father out of...out of the jail and

A: Right.

Q: And then helped get them...take the train station. Do you remember his name?



A: Yes.

Q: What is it?

A: The chauffeurs name was Berma, and...uh...he was a professional driver who from what we hear became a tank or some other driver in the German army. He perished on the Russian front. We know that from other fellow employees that we later on spoke in Germany to. As a matter of fact, I will be going to Germany in July, and I expect to visit my German nanny who is now in her 90s. She is still alive. I am still keeping touch with her. I expect to see her in July to visit her for a couple of hours. Of course, they were under Russian occupation for many, many years, but we kept touch, and we kept greeting each other.

Q: So this is the first time you've seen here.

A: First time I going back to my house which is still...still there. Uh...The house to the left is bombed out. The house to the left...to the right is bombed out. Our house is still standing, and from photographs I have seen there, this is interesting. There's a carved door, with lion heads, wooden carved door. Tremendous door, and I remember it as a kid because of I was afraid of these lions' heads on the door. Would you believe they're still there? The same doors 60 years later? They're still there, and I'm going to see them in July. But...uh...I...I want to say to you Germany was poisoned and Germans are guilty (coughing) and Germans are guilty, but not all of them. There are human beings out there that still have retained their righteousness. And thank God for these. Otherwise, the world would just not have any hope. So we kept in touch with most of the employees or many of the employees. Most of them are dead by now anyway.

Q: Okay, I think...I think that will wrap it up. Thank you. They're now going to bring the bulletin board out.

A: This is a photograph of my father, Leopold Strauss. The interesting thing is (coughing) the picture hasn't been taken in...roughly 1933. You will see the iron cross wearing in his lapel. He would never leave the house, never go anywhere unless he would show with pride the iron cross he had received in World War I, where he also had lost his leg for the Fatherland.

Conclusion of Interview