

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Jacob Wiener
June 30, 1994
RG-50.030*0249**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Jacob Wiener, conducted by Randy Goldman on June 30, 1994 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.

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JACOB WIENER
June 30, 1994

Q: Now, if you will state your name, please, where you were born?

A: My name now is Jacob Gert (ph) Weiner. And I was born in Bremen, Germany, on March 25, 1917. At that time, my name was Copper Gert Sweenetski (ph).

Q: I think I would like to start by talking a little bit about pre-war life, your memories of your family and what life was like before Hitler came to power. So can you tell me a little bit what it was like growing up in Bremen?

A: I was born in Bremen, which was the second biggest port in Germany. And we lived in the southern part of the city called Neustadt. And my parents had a business. My father had a bicycle business, repair shop, selling motorcycles and automobiles and bicycles, mostly. And we had a very nice life. My mother came from Hamburg. And my parents got married in 1916. And I'm the oldest of four children. I have two brothers -- I had two brothers and one sister.

Q: Did you -- was your community a mostly Jewish community, or were you part of a larger community in Bremen?

A: In the Neustadt where we lived, there were not many Jews living. And the synagogue, the community center was in the _____, that means on the northern part of the _____. And we had to walk there to the synagogue, which was about 35 to 40 minutes walk.

Q: Were most of your friends Jewish, or did you have a lot of Gentile friends as well?

A: We were very friendly with our neighbors, most of whom were not Jewish, and we played together with them. And the schools I went to were mostly non-Jewish people, non-Jewish teachers, non-Jewish friends.

Q: So you went to public schools?

A: To a public school first, and afterwards to a kind of gymnasium which is called an oberealschule (ph).

Q: So you were very comfortable in the general community. That was your world?

A: We felt very comfortable. We were not one of the richest, but we made a living. And my father was respected as a very good mechanic. People came to him with repairs and bought bicycles from us. And my mother was, so to say, the bookkeeper and taking care of the things. And she had the very good handwriting. At that time we hadn't typewriters,

and people came from far and wide and had her write letters.

Q: Were you involved in cultural activities or community activities?

A: To a certain extent, with the synagogue. We went to the synagogue, and I had religious lessons there in the afternoon, because we did not have a day school, a Jewish day school. So I went in the afternoon. And besides this, I was very friendly with some people, some youngsters who lived a little further out in Bremen, a suburb called Hammerlichen (ph). And those Jewish people whom I saw there, it was a two hours walk, but I went on the weekends several times. They were mostly from Poland, and they had settled there. There was a difference in the Jewish community between what they call the ost stuent (ph) and the west stuent (ph). And I felt very comfortable with the ost stuent (ph), too.

Q: Did -- were you involved in any political organizations?

A: Not really, but I remember that sometime before Hitler came to power, 1932, I remember, I was associated of going with the Zionist organization. And in the Zionist organization, it was more leftist. And I did not like this, because they are very close to Communism, and I did not like it, and I left. And some 30 or 40 other youngsters left with me, and we joined a different organization.

Q: This was also a political organization?

A: No. It was not really a political organization. It was more or less a religious organization, a _____ of Israel.

Q: What did you do in that organization?

A: We tried to teach people something about Judaism. And we also tried them how to behave in the Nazi -- during the -- in the Nazi time. And, but we were not political in that sense. We did not want to join any political movement.

Q: Judaism was quite important to you?

A: Yes. It was very important to me, because despite the fact that my father was not very religious and my mother came from a religious family. But I felt more religious. And especially through teachers whom I had there in the Jewish religious school.

Q: And at this time, prior to 1933, there were never any obstacles to you expressing your Judaism?

A: No, not to me. However, to my parents. And I remember that already in 1928 when we went for a trip to the park near Bremen, the Nazis were very influential, and they just had

received 107 people, I think, 107 members in the parliament. And they came into the car where we were riding, into the street car where we were riding, and my mother was very much afraid that Jewish life in Germany would become different, which it did. And I saw many times that -- that the Nazis had in mind to exterminate all the Jews, especially in the non-Jewish school where I went, they sometimes ridiculed me and they said to me, "Go back to Jordan, go back to Palestine. You don't belong here."

Q: These were other students?

A: Students, yeah, from the non-Jewish school.

Q: And this was all prior to --

A: This was even prior to Hitler.

Q: So you were -- you were fairly aware of Naziism before Hitler came to power, then?

A: Yes. But we never thought that he would get power, because the largest party in Germany were the social democrats.

Q: So how did all of this start escalating when Hitler came to power?

A: When Hitler came to power in January 1933, we listened to the radio, and we thought that it would only last a little while. Because we had non-Jewish friends living near us, and they told us, "Don't worry, it will only last a little while, and it cannot go on this way. It will stop." However, by that time, many youngsters and many other people had joined the party. Some of them joined the party even though they were not 100 percent convinced about Hitler and had no -- much belief in him.

Q: Why did they join the party?

A: They knew things would change. And there were different reasons, because of the political speeches which Hitler made, because of blaming the Jews for having mishandled and brought Germany into such a mishap, like the _____ S.I. and all kinds of things, you see. And they blamed the Jews on it, because that was one thing in order to get the -- to unite the party against Jews.

Q: So did you sense that the people in your town started to believe this and believe in all of this?

A: There were some people who did not believe it. In Bremen, even more than Hamburg. Hamburg was more Communistic at that time than Bremen. Bremen was still, when they had the elections in 1933, 64 percent social democrat. And many times, I saw Nazis coming to our store who told me, "I'm really a Communist. But I have to cover it up,

because if they ever found out, they would send me to the concentration camp," because they already had concentration camps in 1933.

Q: So you didn't feel that it was going to be this serious?

A: We felt -- we felt that every day had got more serious. Because in the very beginning, when they had the seven states -- seven days of celebration, when Hitler came to power, afterwards when they had the Reister (ph) fire, the burning of the ragster (ph) at the end of February. And then finally, when on April 1st, they had the first progrune, (ph) the day of solidarity, they called it, when -- which happened to be on the Sabbath. And Jews were not allowed to go out. Non-Jews could go out. So we really felt it was very bad. Also, they forbade right away Schreichter (ph), that means slaughtering according to Jewish custom. So we felt it was getting bad.

Q: Now, how did the attitudes of your friends, your teachers, start changing?

A: In the beginning, they still came to our business. But as time went on, when Hitler made a law that all the parties were prohibited, except the Nazi national party, national socialist. And anyone who joins Jews, who talks to Jews, then they slowly kept away from Jews, from us. And it happened before, you see, that they tried to do something against it that we should not have business anymore, and take away the business from us. It happened.

Q: Can you -- do you have specific memories of situations with good friends of yours who were not Jewish, or your teachers, how they started changing toward you?

A: There were many changes. Let's talk about, if I may, so talk about our neighbor. We had a neighbor who had also -- who had been placed there by the Nazis and had also a bicycle and repair shop. And he didn't know very much about the business. He came to my father, and my father taught him and gave him business and so forth. One day, the Nazis told him to build a high wall near our house, so high that we could not look out anymore, completely close our windows, just in order to take away business from us, even though he came to us and he wanted to -- he needed it, because he didn't know too much about the mechanics. Regarding the youngsters, the children, more or less, they were forced to join the Hitler Youth. And as soon as they joined the Hitler Youth, they were not allowed to have any more contact with Jewish people, with me and others. But the teachers, if that's what you are asking me, were different. The teachers were a different generation, the generation before. And they felt that it was not right to do this. And quietly taking me apart, they told me about it. But not publicly.

Q: So for a while, you still were in the public schools, the teachers were kind to you?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Things didn't change too much initially?

A: No. In fact the teacher told me at that time in 1934, they made a law that Jewish children, especially orthodox Jewish children, were no longer allowed to go to school on Sabbath. They used to do this. And when they went to school on Sabbath, they would not write, would not take baggage along. Now they said, "If you come to school, you have to do everything." So I went to my teacher and I said to him, "I don't want to come any more on Sabbath." He said to me, "Why don't you want to come anymore?" So I said to him, "You know, when Hitler came to power, Hitler wanted Germans to know about their background as Germans, to give them a certain sense of identity, according to what he thinks is the identity. So I want to go a little bit back to my own identity to being Jewish. I want to be more Jewish now. You want to be more Nazi; I want to be more Jewish."

Q: This was brave in 1934.

A: Yes. And then the teacher told me, "What I will do to you is, whatever I teach on the Sabbath, I will tell the students to give you the notes. And besides this, on Sabbath, I will teach them Mein Kampf, Hitler's book, so you won't be there."

Q: Why do you think the teachers -- was this a risk for the teachers?

A: It was a certain risk. But they did not do it publicly. They put on the Nazi emblem, which was like a life saver, double ring, with a swastika in it. And the teacher told me I had to put this on. This is my life saver. "They are taking away my job," and many jobs from teachers were taken away. The principal of my school where I went, non-Jewish, was retired, and so forth. The teachers at that time were about between 50 and 60 years old.

Q: I'm trying to get a sense of how all this started changing. And my guess is that every year it certainly got worse in terms of your ability to spend time with your Gentile friends, or your teachers' relationships with you. How did life start changing? Do you remember any specific people or instances?

A: Yeah. We were good friends with people, neighbors. And there were some young people. We came together; we played together. There was a yard, what they call a playground like this, not far from us. And we played together with them. And everything was fine. I even went on bicycle tours with some of these people and everything was fine. I even have a picture at home where I am in this picture with the neighbors, the non-Jewish people who were with us. They were all very nice to us. However, it changed because everyone was forced -- two things. They were forced number one to join the Hitler Youths. And number two, they were forced to tell the Hitler Youths of what their parents thought about the Nazis at home. And so slowly it infiltrated to the parents and to others, you see. And they felt it was not safe anymore to talk to Jews.

Q: And they stopped talking to you?

A: Slowly, they stopped talking to us. Then later on, they started to avoid us by walking on the other side of the street, or by just not talking to us.

Q: Were they ever abusive or violent?

A: No, not in the beginning. But you could not complain, because there were still people there who were of the old type. And I remember that one day I went to the -- a fair, which they had in Bremen nor far from us, and they showed a puppet show. And in the puppet show, they showed how the one person went against the Jews, boop, boop, boop. So I asked a policeman there, which actually was stupid of me. But I asked the policeman, "Why do you show such shows?" You see, "Why do they show such shows here," you see. "The Jews are also people." He didn't answer, because the answer was simply, "Because this regime is against the Jews. That's why we have to infiltrate the public, and we have to make them aware that Jews are different. And they have to be done away with."

Q: As time went on, were you ever hurt or abused in any way?

A: Not directly. But I remember that one day, when I was in Wurzburg and I went home from the school to the dormitory, the boys came and they took away my hat. And they threw it up, and they tried to hurt and beat me. And, but I was lucky. Somehow I got this hat back.

Q: Were you ever afraid? Did your parents start getting fairly worried about the situation?

A: My mother was very much afraid of this situation. And my father, too. But, so we started quite early, 1934, '35, or even before that, to find relatives or people all over in the world, wherever we thought we had some people. Because some of my mother's relatives had gone to Israel. Some had gone to South America. And my father, Russia was out of the question. To find out if they would be able to help us getting out, because we want to get out. And the only way, especially after the Nuremberg laws, 1935, and then 1936, they made it like imperative to move out. We couldn't stay there anymore, because the business got worse.

Q: Was your father's business closed down?

A: Eventually, you see. They made very little -- they earned very little in that business. And they had something like what's called a community project whereby they collected food and so on. And we even had to use some of this food in order to live, you know.

Q: Now, you graduated from public school, yes?

A: Yeah, even later. I graduated from some kind of high school in 1936.

Q: And then you went -- then you went onto --

A: No. Then 1936 when I graduated from there, through the help of a teacher, a Jewish teacher in Bremen, I went to Frankfurt am Main. And I was in Frankfurt am Main for one year. We considered this, like, instead of military service, Jewish service, you see, because many people there prepared what they called Hashra (ph), which means preparation for moving out to Israel. At that time it was very difficult even to go to Israel because it was under British dominion, and the British didn't want anyone there.

Q: So you went to -- you went to this school?

A: In Frankfurt.

Q: Right. And things -- were things more difficult, less difficult there?

A: In Frankfurt, contrary to Bremen, we lived in a Jewish -- more of a Jewish environment. And at that time, we did not feel so much about what the outside world did. But we read, of course, the papers. But from Frankfurt after one year, I went to Wurzburg, which was a teacher's seminary. And this teacher's seminary was not far from the railroads. And there, I saw every day trains, freight trains, dozens of them, covered up with tarpaulin, with machine guns, moving to the front, to Czechoslovakia, to Poland, to all kinds of countries.

Q: What did you make of that?

A: So we thought -- of course, this was done secretly. But we knew or we thought that this was a preparation for war.

Q: Of course, now, you were thinking about war. You weren't necessarily thinking about concentration camps?

A: No. You see, at that time we knew there were concentration camps. Because already in 1933, '34, '33, when they had the Sachsenhausenbergerhomme (ph), we heard from friends of ours, Jewish friends, that they had received urns of ashes from concentration camps. And it said, "This person was killed while trying to flee," or, "This person committed suicide," or, "This person had been ill." And so we knew something was going on there, but we didn't really know what was going on there.

Q: Do you -- do you have memories of any of the book burnings or any of some of the more violent outbursts?

A: Yes. I remember the book burning was early in May 1933. And just because of curiosity, I wanted to go and see it. So I went out, it was in the evening, about 9:00, 10:00 o'clock, I

went out to this big place where they had all the books and they were burning the books. And I was standing from afar. And I saw all of the -- thrust all of the books into this bookcase, into this fire and burned them. So I saw the book burning.

Q: This was in Bremen?

A: In Bremen, yeah.

Q: What did you make of it?

A: I only thought, "They don't know what they are doing." Because these were some of the most intelligent people, you see, that burned the books. They probably don't know anything about these books, you see, just to burn it. I say, by burning books, you cannot really do much, because other countries have the book. And so the books wouldn't get lost.

Q: Was it frightening at all?

A: Yes. Europe was frightening.

Q: Do you have memories of shops closing down, or any other violent outbursts prior to Kristallnacht?

A: Prior to Kristallnacht, we had in Bremen what we called great big department stores. And there were two or three department stores in the main streets in Bremen. And they had actually built department stores which were new at that time, you see, were the newest kind. There was one department store by a Jewish person who had for the first time this escalators. They didn't have escalators before. And this went up to the fourth floor, the escalators. And people went there a lot, just because of the escalators, I think, Jewish department store. And they were closed and taken over by non-Jews. Or if they were not taken over directly by non-Jews, a non-Jew was made the chief manager of that department store. I think it was Bamberger's department store, if I remember, and certain others.

Q: Did -- I mean, did this make it more difficult to start getting things to have a normal life? Not just the store, but in general?

A: We tried to live a normal life as much as was possible. And we tried to get out of Germany as soon as possible and to find some way of living. You could not change, because since we had this business, and my father knew this business, and we were helping him in this business, that was a way, you see, we could make a living. You couldn't just change and do a different job. Because eventually he was thrown out of the _____, which means the trade union, and all kinds of things. And they even tried to -- to find something out against him, like they came in and they bought certain

things. And then they said, "These things were stolen." And they want to accuse him of having stolen these things. They came in and buying things at a different price, and just to say, "He oversells, he overprices," and things of this sort. But thank God, he was -- they couldn't put anything on him, you see. But they tried.

Q: How did you all combat this?

A: It was very hard, very hard. I was not then so much involved anymore in the business, because I was living away, outside, away from Bremen. And I was more in a Jewish environment. But my mother felt very bad about it. And my father, too. And they tried to handle the situation as best as could be. And with the little they had, they continued.

Q: Tell me a little bit about Kristallnacht.

A: Actually, Kristallnacht did not start at Kristallnacht. It started, I think, on the 28th of October, when a number of students from the school where I had been at that time were of Polish descent, and they were sent away. And that's where the story of Herschel Grynszpan comes in. They were sent away. First they were sent to a prison in Wurzburg. And we went there and we threw packages of food in there, and we tried to help them. And we tried to tell them so-and-so. Then when the Germans and the Poles concluded their contract, I mean, the negotiations, then suddenly it stopped. And the trains which had been sent to Poland was like this: A part of the train in Germany, they could go back to Germany. The part of the train in Poland, they could stay in Poland. Even the Polish were just as much anti-Semitic as the Germans, maybe more. And the people in the middle were in No Man's Land. And that's where Herschel Grynszpan came. But two weeks later on November 9th, the 10th, was the Kristallnacht. No one thought of this. What happened is this: On the day before Kristallnacht, we were studying in school for a test which should have been the next day. And I had already been a student and a teacher in this school at the same time, because I spoke a little bit of Spanish, so I gave a little bit Spanish classes in school from October to November. And then in the night it happened, I went home early on that evening, because I wanted to study some more. And besides this, I wanted to have a good night's sleep for the test the next day. You want to hear more about that? So we went to sleep. Then in the middle of the night, about 2:30 or 3:30, I don't remember anymore the time. I think it was -- it was the night that I remember, the middle of the night. We heard noise coming in, into the dormitory where I stayed, which was in this little side street. And I woke up my colleagues, and I said to them, "What shall we do? There is noise. Shall we go and find out where the noise comes from?" So we waited, and we heard -- the noise got louder. So I said to them, "Let's make sure we are safe." So the window, there was a window in the room on the top, barricaded so we couldn't even go through that window. Outside, there was a hallway. And outside the hallway, there was a yard. So I said to them, "The best thing is we get dressed now. And if anything should happen, we are ready to encounter whatever there is." And I said, "Let's get our bags ready, if anything should happen." And then I said, "Let's maybe hide under the -- under the bed, or in that corner." And then I decided, "No, we don't --

shouldn't hide. We should just meet it head-on." So there was a door, one door, with a little lock. First I tried to lock it, but then I said, "It's no use. If they come, they come." And they did come. They made a lot of noise. They came in, and they saw our suitcases there. And they said, "Take these suitcases and throw them against the window." They wouldn't fall outside the window anyhow, because the windows were barricaded. Then he said, and I said to them, "What shall we do?" "Stay here and wait until we give you orders. And you should know, we never even bent a hair of a Jew, and we won't do it this time. But eventually, you will all be exterminated," something like that. I don't know if they said the exact words. So we waited, then said, "What should we wait for? Let's go downstairs." That was on the second floor. We went through the hallway, and we saw in the big -- there was another dormitory place. We were on a small side room with lamps hanging down. They just took their swords, or whatever they had, and cut off the electric lamps that were hanging down. They cut the faucet so that the water was just coming out. And they said to us, "Go downstairs." There was a non-Jewish janitor. And he said to us, "You better get dressed and get ready, because we don't know what's going to happen," because they didn't tell anyone else. Then the caretaker of the house thought it would be good idea to go to the police and tell them what happened. But that was a joke, because going to the police, they just kept him there. He never came back, and probably afterwards was sent to concentration camp. Then the woman of the house downstairs said, "What I will do," it is 4:00 o'clock in the morning, 4:30, "I will make some coffee for you. I will give you something to eat." And she did.

Q: This was a non-Jewish woman?

A: Yes, it was a non-Jewish woman. There was also Jewish woman there, both. Then we said, "Let's wait and see what's going to happen." The people who had come into the house, 10, 20 people, left. And there was quiet. But the non-Jewish janitor said to us, "They will come back." And they did come back. About 6:00, 6:30, they came back. And they told --

Q: Excuse me, this is the same morning?

A: This is the same morning. On November 10th, it was a Thursday morning, they came back. And the Nazis who were not dressed in Nazi uniform, because they wanted the people to believe it's the foixvut (ph), the anger of the people. And this does not come from the party, but comes from the plain civilian people. They were in civilian clothes. They told us, "Get a little bit together." We thought we should pack all of this. "No, don't worry. You will come back." Of course, it wasn't true, you see. So we took a few things along, and they said, "All of you assemble in this corner." And so we assembled in that corner. And then about 7:30 or so, they said to us, "Now let's go and march." They marched about three or four, maybe even six in a line. We were about -- I don't even remember how many people there were. But there were 50, 60 people or more. And we walked, it's a narrow street, through this narrow street. And we walked toward the prison they led us. And while we were going through the street, the populace, the people were

standing at the side. I think they were all Nazis, because they spit at us, and they threw stones at us and all kinds of -- and they made noise and so forth. We went through the street and we passed by the synagogue. We saw the synagogue burning. And we went all the way, and Wurzburg is a city where there used to be a palace of the Bavarian king. We passed by there, and they led us to the prison. And they were -- the Germans were very methodical. When you came in, they took a picture of you, on the right side, from the left side, from the front. And they took all your money, or all kind of things which you had in your pocket. And they made a complete record of it. They were very meticulous. They were very orderly in that sense. And they gave it to us, and they said, "Sign here." Okay, we signed. Then they led us into cells, prison cells. And I was in prison cell number 99, I think. And there were about 15 boys in that prison cell. They put us in there, in the water cell. And there was, like, a toilet, a bowel. And there were windows on top, with iron bars. And there was -- I don't think anything else, maybe a few mattresses or so. And in the door was a little window. And through this window they gave us food about an hour later, like water with a few beans in it and things like that.

Q: How long were you in this prison?

A: From that Thursday until the next Thursday, eight days.

Q: It was fairly --

A: And we always thought we would all be sent away. Because every morning and every evening, they took us all out. Once a day, they led us around the prison yard to give us a prison walk for an hour. And then they led us all out, and they read a list of names to make sure everyone was still there. And every day, the number had come less. And we imagined, because no one told us, that they probably were sent to concentration camps. And then came the last day of the seven days. They called us a list. They called us a list, and they read all the names. Then they read seven names, and I was among the seven whom they read. And they said to them, "Stay at the side." We stayed at the side.

Q: What were you thinking?

A: I didn't know what they would do with us. I think they would send us to concentration camps. But what happened was, all the others were sent to concentration camps. And these seven, I among them, was stateless. And they said to us, "You are stateless, and we are going to send you away," not telling us where. So I thought maybe they send me to Russia, because my father came from Russia. And I said to myself, "It's better to be in Russia than to stay here," even though I didn't know that at that time it was just as bad. And I already made up my mind to go to Russia. "Within 24 hours I will be in Russia." That was at noon-time then. Then they came back in the evening, and they called us again, the seven people. And they said, "Go downstairs and report to the office, the prison office." I know now that all the others were sent to concentration camps because they wanted to empty the prison of all the Jews. All people under 15 and over 60 were

sent home. They only kept the people between 15 and 60, I think. So when we came downstairs, they told us, "You are free. Sign this." And they gave us back all the things which they had taken away from us. They were very meticulous. And they said, "Return within 24 hours to your home cities, and report to the Gestapo."

Q: Now, how did this feel? I mean, it must have been a fairly strange feeling that you were so close to being sent away.

A: I didn't -- I felt -- I said, "Whatever is going to happen to us, we cannot do much about it. We can maybe pray a little bit," and that's what we did while we were together in this cell. "But what can we do? We hope for the best, you see, and we know bad things -- bad things are going to happen. We hope that a miracle or something would happen, and things will change for us." Well, it was very bad, and nothing helped us.

Q: Now, while you must have had a certain immediate relief at not being sent away, what were you thinking about the other people you had spent time with?

A: We felt very bad about the other people that were sent away. And we hoped that maybe they wouldn't have to stay there such a long time. At that time, they had concentration camps, but they did not do the killings in such large measures as afterwards. They killed a few people, as I mentioned before. They sent the urns to those people about -- Jews and non-Jews. I even know non-Jews whose urns they had sent away, back to them, to family. So we thought -- and beside this, when we came out, we knew that Greppels (ph) had called off -- Gurling (ph) had called off the sending away the Jews on the day afterwards. It didn't make much difference. I only felt, I only thought that maybe I would come home and I would see what's going on there. But for eight days we didn't know what was going on in the world because we were completely separated from any news.

Q: I'm going to ask you, do you want a glass of water?

A: No, thank you.

Q: I want to talk to you about what happened when you got home. You were from the prison, and then went back to Bremen; is that correct?

A: Uh-huh. After I got out of the prison, I needed to go back to my home town. And I needed money for the train, and I had none. But as I say before, miracles happened. The miracle happened, I met the secretary of the school where I left. And I asked her, "Can I have some money?" And she gave me 20 marks. And I went back to the school to find out if any of my belongings were still there. And I went to the school, and I met another fellow, and -- but I couldn't find anything. It was all locked up. And so I went straight to the train station. And it was late at night, because we came out, it was in winter, November. It gets dark early. I came to the train station, and the train station was packed with Nazis and other people at that time. And I went to the counter, and I bought a ticket.

But during the train trip, I was afraid if they would find out that I'm a Jew, they would beat me up or throw me off the train. So while I was traveling on the train and the train would come to Bremen about 7:00 o'clock in the morning, I was walking always along the hallways in order to walk around and not sit at one place. Because I was afraid of that. And I was probably the only Jew there on the train. I don't know. So then I came back to Bremen. When I came to Bremen, it was a Friday morning. You can figure out, on the 10th, 17th, it was probably the 18th of November. And I came to the station, and I took a trolley car to where we were living. And I thought everything was okay. I tried to call my mother and my parents from the train station, but there was no answer. So I said, "Okay, I walk. I will go there myself." I went there. And I walked over. And when I came to our house, I saw the whole -- all the windows that barricaded with wood. And the side door had a note there, "Get the key from the police department." So before I went to the police department, I saw a neighbor of ours on the other side who had a furniture business. And he was really a good friend of ours, non-Jewish person. Because as I told you, we had mostly non-Jewish neighbors. And this man just went to me with a finger, "Come in, come in." He was afraid to say anything or stay outside. He did it from inside the window, and he took me in. And he took me in one of the rooms which was farthest away from the entrance. I think it was a safe -- he had a safe, I'm not so sure. And I don't know whether his wife was there or not, because we were also friends with his wife and his children. And he said to me, "I want to tell you what happened on the Kristallnacht." They didn't call it the Kristallnacht then. They called it the progrun (ph). "In the middle of the night, these people came," and he mentioned the name of these people. And they are mentioned in what I showed you, the Heid's (ph) Kristallnacht.

Q: What was the name?

A: Henreiz (ph) was one name, and I don't remember the other name. But it's in the -- in my records. And they came the night, and they were standing outside. And they were screaming, they were calling up, "Joe." My father's name was Joseph, they call him, Joe, "Open up." And when my father heard this, he fled. He ran over the roofs on the other side, and this man told me he went to the port, to the harbor, and he boarded a Swedish ship to go to Sweden. I don't know, probably that's what he told him. "And your brother, your younger brother, who was just barmitzvah in October 1939, '38, he went to call a doctor. But he never came back." And my sister, she was in Hamburg. She was like a house -- household help. And so then he came in. They broke in. They broke everything, because later on when I came to the house, I saw everything ripped up and pasted and broken down, all glass inside. And I had -- it was not easy to get up to the second floor. And they asked your mother, "Where is your husband?" And my mother did not want to tell them. So she said, "I don't know." When she did not tell them, they just shot. I don't know how many -- how many times they shot, but at least once, because afterwards I found the bullet there.

Q: That was it?

A: And then he said to me, "What happened afterwards, two ladies came, and they buried her in the Jewish cemetery." And he was afraid to tell me anything. That was all he told me. And then I went to the police station, which wasn't too far. And I asked them for the key. They gave me the key. And they told me, "Write down where you are going to be," and all kinds of things. And I said, "What do you need to know this for?" So they said to me, "We want to know where all the Jews are in all the world, because eventually we will come and we will conquer the world. And we will kill all the Jews in the whole world." So, "That's what you think." And I said to myself, "That's what they think, you see. But it's not always going this way." So I had the key, and I went in. And I saw everything was broken, and pictures were torn. And I looked there, and I found a little passbook picture of my mother. Probably she had taken it just before, because we had to send away to the other countries so they can get it. That picture I took later on, and I had it remade by some company in the United States and made a big picture. You saw the picture in the book. And they wrote a book about this later on. So that was it. And then --

Q: So your mother was already buried?

A: Yeah. She was not there, because this was already a week after the Kristallnacht when they came home.

Q: The house and the business were wrecked?

A: The house and the business were all torn and so forth. So what should I do? I said, "To stay here in Bremen is no use, because there is no one there." So I went to the station again, to the train station, and I went to see my sister in Hamburg. So I took a train to Hamburg. And again, I was afraid, you see, there were Nazis there, all kinds of people. So I came to Nazi -- to Hamburg, just about twilight in the afternoon. And I knew the people where my sister was staying with. And I went over to this place, and it was already getting dark. So I -- so I came there, and I knocked at the door. And they were all there, the whole family. And they had about five children. And my sister was there, too. And they were all standing. As you know, the Jewish custom, on Friday evening, they make Kadriche (ph), you see, for Sabbath. I came just at that moment. And I asked them where my father had been, and my brother. I found out that my father was with some other relatives. He was sitting shiver (ph) at that time. And my brother had been sent to an orphanage in Hamburg. And I went there, and I stayed there for the rest of the week. And other things happened.

Q: I did want to ask you, and I don't want to break up your train of thought here. But eventually, you went back to Bremen?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And you got involved as a representative from the Jewish community?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Intermediary, I guess you termed it. Can you tell me a little bit about how that came about, what your responsibilities were, why you were doing this?

A: After a while, after the Kristallnacht, after a while in December, some people came back. Some people were released from the concentration camp. Some came back. And they wanted again to make some kind of community, and the community took place at that time. They moved to a different house, not anymore in the synagogue, in the community house.

Q: This is in Bremen?

A: In Bremen. They moved to a house of a private family, Greenberg, which was on Kohlhage Strasse (ph), but you don't have to know that. Anyhow, it moved to a private house, these people who had already emigrated from Bremen, who had come to America. And they had donated this house to the Jewish community. And it was a house, and afterward 100 or more people were living in this house, because they made every little room into, like, a family place. So that's where we were living. And one of the people became, so to say, the president or the administrator of the community. And I was working with them, you see. I was working with them to prepare for emigration, misheighers (ph) is the translation. I even went to small places outside Bremen, Bremenhoffen (ph), and Weizamenda (ph) in certain places. And the Gestapo wanted to know everything that the congregation is doing. So I was appointed, I think. I don't know if I volunteered. Maybe I did volunteer. But I think I was appointed to go to them. So I went two, three times a week, and sometimes more. And then they wanted to know everything. The first time when I went there, they showed me a bunch of papers. And he said to me, "These are the things which we found in your parents' home." And I don't know if they ever gave it back to me. But they just showed it to me. They wanted to show they are honest people. They keep people's things and so forth. And then I asked him, I asked him, "Where is my brother?" I didn't know. So my brother was in Sachsenhausen. But somehow, through circumstances which I don't know, he was released from Sachsenhausen and sent to a Jewish hospital in Hamburg. And it was in Hamburg. So my father and I, we went back to Bremen. My sister was -- remained in Hamburg, and my other brother was in the orphan home, as I said. And we were living in the house all by ourselves. Everything was destroyed. But on the second floor, we were sleeping there. And many nights, there was a knock at the door. Especially one night, I remember a knock at the door. And I looked out of the window. I didn't say anything. And I saw people in civilian uniforms, standing on the other side. And they called again, "Open up." I said to them, I said to them, "Okay, I will open up." So I opened up. And they came in, and they were looking all around. So I said, "What are you looking for?" They said to me, "We are looking for your brother." And I said, "My brother is in Hamburg in the hospital." But they didn't believe me. They looked all over. They looked under the couch, and over the couch, and in all corners. So they came all within the middle of the night, as

if they didn't know it, you see.

Conclusion of Interview